



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Activist Tibetan monk dies after illness, imprisonment

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March 19, 2020

A Tibetan monk sentenced to prison alongside the revered activist Tenzin Delek Rinpoche died this week in Tibet after a lengthy illness, three of his close aides now living in exile told the International Campaign for Tibet.

Ven. Tashi Phuntsok, died on March 16 (though some sources say it was on March 17), aides said. On account of the information blackout the Chinese government has placed on Tibet, a country China brutally annexed in 1959 and continues to rule over with an iron fist,—the aides were not able to give details about Tashi Phuntsok’s death except that he passed away while being taken to the hospital for treatment. Speaking to ICT, the aides said his health had been poor ever since his [release](#) from Yakra Phuk Prison near Dartsedo (Chinese: Kangding) in Sichuan Province in 2003.

On April 17, 2002, Tashi Phuntsok was detained from his Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery in Nyachukha (Ch: Yajiang), in eastern Tibet, and falsely accused of colluding with Tenzin Delek Rinpoche in a series of bomb explosions in the city of Chengdu. After a sham trial, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was sentenced to death with two years reprieve and Ven. Tashi Phuntsok to seven years imprisonment. There was an [international outcry](#) over absence of a fair trial for them and other Tibetans who were also sentenced to [varying prison terms](#).

Local Tibetans believe the Chinese authorities framed Tenzin Delek Rinpoche on account of his social activism and huge following. Tashi Phuntsok also had been in the forefront of activism since 1993, protesting against the Chinese government’s deforestation drive in his region.

At the time of his arrest, he had pulmonary conditions that deteriorated sharply in the course of his imprisonment. Therefore, he was released prematurely after less than two years in prison as the Chinese authorities feared he might die under their watch. Chinese authorities are known to release political prisoners in near death or critical health conditions to avoid responsibility for them dying in custody.

According to ICT sources, at the time of his release from prison in 2003 Tashi Phuntsok had shrunk in size and was nothing more than “skin over skeleton”.

After recuperating at his home for about a year, he went wandering in different places, the sources said. But they were not able to say what he was doing during those many years before he was known to have returned to his hometown around 2018. At that time, the monks of the Kham Nalanda monastery hosted a reception to celebrate his return, and he was then seen to be frail in health.

Ven. Phuntsok was 60 years old at the time of his death. At his monastery, he undertook responsibilities as a manager (Tibetan: Cha-zoed) for ten years before assuming a role as a disciplinarian.



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