



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Tibetan monk Choekyi dies after years of prison, torture

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A Tibetan monk and former political prisoner died late in the afternoon of May 7 after enduring years of torture and ill treatment in prison for wearing a t-shirt celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday.

Choekyi died in the eastern Tibetan village of Shosang, Nyitod (Chinese: Niduo) township in Serthar (Ch: Seda) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. He was a monk of Phugu (Chinese: Puyu), in Nyitod.

The 43-year-old monk was known to be suffering from serious health complications at the time of his early release from prison, according to a report the International Campaign for Tibet received in January 2019. Chinese prison authorities in Tibet are known to release political prisoners in near-death conditions in order to shun responsibility for their death in custody.

Choekyi was arrested in 2015 and sentenced to four years on charges of conducting "separatist activities," for wearing a shirt with the Tibetan text "kue-gya-ton-su," which roughly translates as "celebrating the Dalai Lama's 80th Birthday". He was released late at night on Jan. 18, 2019 under tight security. Due to his poor health, he was let out of prison five months before the end of a four-year sentence, which may indicate that prison authorities did not want him to die while still in jail.

Earlier this month, another Tibetan former political prisoner writing under the pseudonym Gyitsang Takmik updated the sad condition of his friend Choekyi, according to Tibetan language media. Takmik wrote that during his meeting with Choekyi on April 28, he found him to be in extremely poor health and struggling to speak.

Upon his release from prison in January 2019, Choekyi was kept under surveillance and continued to be harassed by the authorities. Authorities denied him access to medical help when Choekyi applied for permission to go to a hospital in Lhasa to seek treatment for his illness.

Choekyi was suffering from a kidney ailment and other health issues prior to his detention, and torture and ill-treatment in Mianyang Prison, near the Sichuan provincial capital of Chengdu, made his condition worse. He was confined to a solitary cell and forced to carry out hard labor, including digging rocks, possibly for road construction, and cleaning the prison.

In January 2018, the European Parliament passed an emergency resolution raising Choekyi's case when he was known to be suffering serious ill-health in prison. The resolution urged "the Chinese Government to allow his relatives and the lawyers of his choice to visit him and, in particular, to provide him with adequate medical care." Not only was he denied healthcare in custody; he was also not allowed to seek medical treatment even after his release.

Choekyi was one of hundreds of Tibetan political prisoners who had their freedom taken away for simply expressing their cultural identity or exercising their basic human rights.



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