



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China imposes draconian restrictions on 5th anniversary of revered lama's death

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Five years after the renowned monk Tenzin Delek Rinpoche died in a Chinese prison, new restrictions have been imposed on Tibetans in his hometown of Lithang to prevent them from noting the occasion.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche died on July 12, 2015, while serving a life sentence handed down in an unjust trial. Calls for his release came from inside Tibet, where 40,000 people signed a petition demanding a re-trial, and abroad, where Tibet supporters around the world advocated on his behalf.

Sources who wished to remain anonymous informed ICT that Tibetans in Lithang were ordered not to participate in any public events on July 12, including burning incense, propitiating the deities, going around without any reason, gathering in public, or sending photos on WeChat. There were warnings of unspecified "consequences" for anyone who violated the restrictions.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was recognized by the Dalai Lama and became well-known in Tibet for his social work, including building medical, educational and religious institutions.

After his death, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's niece, Nyima Lhamo, escaped into exile, leaving her young daughter behind in the care of her family in order to make the dangerous crossing out of Chinese-ruled Tibet. Since then, she has advocated for her uncle's case and for human rights and religious freedom in Tibet, including in person with President Trump.

In a video message to ICT on Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's fifth death anniversary, Nyima Lhao said he had to suffer for 13 years in prison while continuing to maintain that he had done nothing that violated Chinese laws. She urged the international community to seek justice on his behalf.

In 2002, Chinese authorities falsely accused Rinpoche of bombing a park, then sentenced him to death—later reduced to life in prison—after an unfair trial where he was denied independent legal counsel. Lobsang Dhondup, who was convicted of the same crime, was executed in 2003, despite the Chinese government's promise to conduct an investigation first.

In 2015, Chinese officials said Rinpoche had died in prison from a heart attack. Nyima Lhamo and her relatives protested against being denied the right to see his body, with Nyima Lhamo even attempting suicide before they were finally briefly granted permission.

Rinpoche's corpse was cremated without an autopsy, and his family was not able to hold a proper funeral.

"It's because of this that the Chinese government was fearful of him, and therefore they detained Rinpoche and his assistant Lobsang Dhondup," Nyima Lhamo said at the 2019 Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom.

“The inhumanity of the Chinese government can be seen by the fact that even we, his relatives, were not given the opportunity to do the final rites for him according to Tibetan Buddhist tradition,” Nyima Lhamo added.



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