



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **Tibetan political prisoner Tashi Wangchuk released after five-year sentence**

Read online: <https://savetibet.org/tashi-wangchuk>

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The International Campaign for Tibet welcomes the release of Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk, who just completed a five-year prison sentence for speaking to Western media about the importance of protecting the Tibetan language.

Although he has been released, his lawyers have not had any opportunity for direct contact with him. One of his lawyers, Liang Xiaojun, tweeted today in Chinese: “Report: Today, staffers from the Justice Bureau of Trindu (Chenduo) county, Qinghai, took Tashi Wangchuk back to Yulshul. He has now returned to his sister's home, and his family members say he's in good health. Because I wasn't able to get a photo of him, and can't directly contact his family in Yulshul, I don't know whether or not he's fully free.”

The International Campaign for Tibet said: “The case of Tashi Wangchuk has been one of the most blatant examples of how China represses the Tibetan people, denies them their legal rights and abuses them whenever they try to exercise basic freedoms.

“While we are pleased that Tashi can finally return home to his family after five years, no one should view his release as a victory. The Chinese government falsely charged Tashi with breaking the law, held him for years despite an international call for his release, subjected him to a sham prosecution and caused him unimaginable physical and psychological damage, all while refusing to address his legitimate concerns about Tibetans’ language rights. Although Tashi Wangchuk has now been released, the international community must hold China accountable for its torture and mistreatment of Tibetan political prisoners and must pressure China to respect Tibetans’ human rights.”

Last year, Human Rights Watch published a report exposing how China is replacing Tibetan with Chinese as the language of instruction in Tibetan schools.

Tashi, who is about 35 years old, served his sentence in Dongchuan Prison in Xining City, Qinghai Province.

### **Advocating for language rights**

According to media reports, Tashi was dismayed by the absence of facilities for Tibetans to learn their ancestral language.

When Tashi discovered his teenage nieces could no longer learn Tibetan after Chinese officials forced an informal school led by monks to stop teaching the language to laypeople, he decided to take action.

He made efforts to get more than 10 law firms and a Chinese state-run TV station to highlight the issue and he attempted to file a lawsuit against officials in his home region of Jyekundo (Chinese: Jiegu), noting that China’s constitution guarantees ethnic groups the right to use their own spoken and written languages.

Tashi told his story to The New York Times, which produced a video in November 2015 chronicling his journey to Beijing, where Tashi tried to speak with lawyers and reporters.

“I want to try to use the People’s Republic of China’s laws to solve the problem,” Tashi says in the Times’ video.

## **Arrested, tortured, imprisoned**

Even though Tashi was invoking his legal rights, police arrested him in January 2016 and charged him with “separatism,” despite the fact that he had not advocated for Tibet’s independence from China.

That began a terrifying five-year ordeal for Tashi and his family in violation of international legal standards:

- According to Tashi’s lawyers, during his first week in detention, authorities subjected him to torture, holding him for a lengthy period in a “tiger chair” while they interrogated and repeatedly beat him. The interrogators also threatened to harm his family.
- Tashi did not stand trial until nearly two years after his imprisonment began. Once the trial started in January 2018, prosecutors used the Times’ video as a key piece of evidence against Tashi, marking the first known instance of an international news story serving in a criminal prosecution against a Tibetan.
- On May 22, 2018, the court sentenced Tashi to five years in prison.
- On Aug. 23, 2018, one of Tashi’s lawyers said on social media that the Qinghai Higher People’s Court had rejected Tashi’s appeal.
- After the appeal failed, the International Campaign for Tibet translated a court document addressing Tashi’s claims of torture. The document did not deny that the torture occurred.
- On Jan. 15, 2019, officials at Dongchuan Prison would not allow one of Tashi’s lawyers, Lin Qilei, to see him, claiming that Tashi’s case was “sensitive.”

China committed all of these abuses against Tashi despite efforts by governments and lawmakers around the globe—including France, Germany, Latvia, the European Parliament, the European External Action Service and the United States—to speak out against his prosecution and imprisonment. His case was also raised by some EU Member States, as well as by the EU, during several UN Human Rights Council Sessions in Geneva.

## **Continuing concerns**

Although Tashi has now been released, the International Campaign for Tibet remains worried about his long-term health and safety.

Just recently, a 19-year-old Tibetan monk named Tenzin Nyima died a few months after his release from prison as a result of the beatings he received as an inmate. ICT has called for an investigation into his death and the underlying pattern of torture in Tibet.

Former Tibetan political prisoners also commonly face surveillance, harassment and eventual re-arrest by Chinese authorities after their release.

ICT also continues to worry about the long-term survival of the Tibetan language in Tibet. Despite the Chinese constitution's guarantee of language rights, Chinese officials have recently argued that requirements to teach ethnic languages violates the Chinese constitution.



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