



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Imprisoned Tibetan nuns tell their own stories in new book

Read online: <https://savetibet.org/imprisoned-tibetan-nuns-tell-their-own-stories-in-new-book>

February 24, 2021

Nine Tibetan nuns who bravely resisted China's oppression through nonviolent protests and patriotic songs, even as they endured horrific abuse in prison, share their stories in a new book from the International Campaign for Tibet.

"Tibet in Chains: The Stories of Nine Tibetan Nuns" is available to download now from Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Apple Books and other online retailers.

ICT will celebrate the book's launch with a special edition of its Tibet Talks live conversation series on Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021 at 1 pm EST/10 am PST. The talk will stream live on ICT's website and Facebook page. Afterward, it will be available to view on YouTube and download as a podcast.

In the book, each nun tells her own tale in her own words. All nine of them now live in free countries around the world, having left Tibet at various times and under various circumstances.

Eight of them—Gyaltzen Dolker, Yeshe Dolma (who goes by the ordained name of Ngawang Rigdol), Ngawang Sangdrol, Rinzin Choekyi, Rinzin Chonyi, Phuntsog Nyidron, Sonam Choedon and Thinley Choezom—are now former nuns. Only Palden Choedon remains a nun, studying in a nunnery in India.

Imprisoned for protest

In the 1990s, all nine of them were part of the "Drapchi 14," also known as the "Singing Nuns." This group earned praise from around the globe for its courage and solidarity in China's notorious Drapchi prison in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa.

In "Tibet in Chains," the nine women describe their families and early lives in Tibet—which China has brutally occupied for more than 60 years—as well as their dedication to their Tibetan Buddhist nunneries. Most of them were part of Garu nunnery near Lhasa.

As China's crackdowns on religious freedom and human rights made life ever more difficult for Tibetans, the young nuns—some of them just teenagers—decided to raise their voices against the Chinese government.

After they took part in peaceful demonstrations, each nun was arrested and eventually sent to Drapchi.

Abuse and resistance

Drapchi, which remains a site of gruesome torture and abuse for Tibetan political prisoners, was a place of horror for the nuns. In "Tibet in Chains," they describe beatings with bamboo sticks, torture with electric cattle prods and a long list of shocking, inhumane conditions.

The nuns titled their chapters in the book “Unimaginable Physical and Mental Torture,” “Torturous Memory of Twelve Years in Prison,” “The Path to Hell on Earth” and other grim titles.

But even as they faced abuse, the nuns continued to resist. They went on hunger strikes, refused to show respect for prison officials and refused to follow orders.

In 1993, the members of the Drapchi 14 secretly used tape recorders to record songs calling for Tibet’s independence and praising their spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. The lyrics included:

*In prison while undergoing unbearable suffering
We have always protected day and night
The flame of freedom
While in the dark lawless prison*

Once the tape was smuggled out of prison and shared with the outside world, the nuns all received additional prison sentences.

Release and exile

In 2001, Ngawang Lochoe, one of the Drapchi 14, died in prison. The other 13 eventually got their release but continued to face surveillance and harassment from Chinese authorities, including a ban on rejoining their nunneries.

The nine nuns in “Tibet in Chains” all left Tibet and are now resettled in freedom in different countries. Some escaped their homeland by fleeing across dangerous terrain, and some got out with the help of lobbying by foreign officials and human rights groups, including ICT.

Even in freedom, the nuns suffer from the toll of their years in prison. Several of them lost parents and family members during their sentences and can no longer see the loved ones they had to leave behind in Tibet.

They also deal with the pain of witnessing China’s ongoing, escalating repression in Tibet.

“I will always remember my former prison mates who suffer ill health,” one of the nuns, Sonam Choedon, says in the book. “I always support and participate in movements for the cause of Tibet and the Tibetan people ... Because the cause of Tibet is deeply embedded in our hearts, and until this long-felt aspiration is fulfilled, my spirit will never die.”

Book launch event

ICT’s book launch for “Tibet in Chains” will feature appearances by two of the nuns, Ngawang Sangdrol—who helped coordinate the writing of the book—and Phuntsog Nyidron.

The special Tibet Talk will also feature commentary by Steven Marshall, former senior advisor and prisoner database program director of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China from 2002-17.

In addition, there will be readings from the book by three graduates of ICT’s Tibetan Youth Leadership Program, Chonyi Gyatso, Rinzin Lhamo and Tenzin Moenkyi.

“By giving these former political prisoners a platform to tell their own stories in their own words, our new book reminds us of the sacrifices of Tibetan political prisoners and the atrocities they face from the Chinese government simply for speaking up for their basic rights and freedoms,” ICT Interim Vice President Tencho Gyatso said.

“ICT thanks these nuns for sharing their personal narratives with us, the Italian Buddhist Union for providing an essential grant for the book and the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives for publishing the Tibetan-language edition. We look forward to launching ‘Tibet in Chains’ at our Tibet Talk on Feb. 25, and we remain dedicated to achieving justice for all political prisoners in Tibet.”



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@save-tibet.eu