



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Prominent former Tibetan political prisoner dies

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Jigme Gyatso, a prominent former political prisoner, has died on July 2, 2022. He had been unrecoverably ill since his release in October 2016 after serving five years in prison on a conviction for “inciting separatism.” Facing further health complications, he was hospitalized in Xiling (Chinese: Xining) in May this year and passed away on July 2.

Owing to torture and other cruel and inhumane treatment during his detentions, his health conditions had become unrecoverably complicated after his release from prison in October 2016. He was suffering from diabetes, hypertension, and heart, liver and eyes diseases. Low-quality health care provided to him by prison medical personnel during his incarceration, after his appeal for medical parole was rejected, and his inability to access professional private care after release based on his identity being blacklisted made Jigme’s health deteriorate steadily over the years.

Jigme Gyatso’s death is part of a pattern of torture and mistreatment in Tibet. In May 2020, the Tibetan monk Choekyi [died](#) after torture in custody. In August 2020, a 36-year-old mother of three named Lhamo [died in custody](#) after apparent beatings. In 2015, the International Campaign for Tibet documented the cases of [29 Tibetans who suffered torture and mistreatment while in custody](#), many of who died as a result of their ordeals. As in the [case of Tenzin Nyima](#), the authorities had chosen to release severely tortured detainees who then passed away days or weeks later. In 2015, the Committee Against Torture [concluded](#) in its review of China that “the practice of torture and ill-treatment is still deeply entrenched in the criminal justice system.”

Multiple detentions

The 56-year-old Jigme Gyatso, aka Jigme Guri, faced multiple detentions in the past for his protests against the [Chinese government’s oppression in Tibet](#). He had openly expressed his thoughts on oppression in Tibet and his personal experience of Chinese security forces torturing him and other Tibetan detainees. In a remarkable [handwritten note](#) dated Nov. 26, 2016, a month after his release from prison, Jigme wrote that “my love for my country, my hopes for my kinfolk stand as firm as a mountain, unshakable, to endure all hardship for the peace of the world, the growth of the nation, mindful wellbeing and so on is the pledge of my truth-affirmed life.”

Jigme is known for his defiant [video testimony](#) in 2008 that was shot in Tibet, providing an authoritative account exposing the Chinese government’s oppression in Tibet. In the video, he identifies himself and gives a detailed account of the cruel methods Chinese security forces use to oppress the Tibetans who exercise their freedom of expression, torture methods used on him and

other Tibetans and conditions in detention centers. He also offers his thoughts on [racial inequality](#), the teachings of the [Dalai Lama](#) and [China-Tibet conflict resolution](#).

Although he had not taken part in the March 14 and 15 mass protests in 2008 in the town of Labrang, he was dragged into a white van by four security personnel while he was waiting on the street near his monastery for his shoes to be repaired. Soon after his release from detention, he made his video testimony to give a firsthand account of the Chinese government's oppression in Tibet.

Jigme was first detained in April 2006 upon his return to Tibet from attending teachings by the Dalai Lama in India. He was released after 40 days in detention and returned to Labrang Monastery.

After his video testimony on torture during his previous detention was made public, he was detained for the [third time](#) by 70 armed police from his room at Labrang Monastery on Nov. 4, 2008. He was released on May 3, 2009 under conditional bail of "obtaining a guarantor while pending trial," secured by two Chinese lawyers, Li Fangping and Jiang Tianyong. His release was in fact non-custodial detention and a form of probation.

On Aug. 20, 2011, he was detained for the [fourth time](#) while he was in Tsoe (Hezuo) City, Kanlho (Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu province. The following day, around 30 armed police and public security bureau officials raided his room at Labrang Monastery and confiscated his computer, books and documents. Kanlho Intermediate People's Court tried him in 2012 on an unspecified date and Kansu (Gansu) High People's Court [upheld](#) the lower court's guilty verdict and five-year sentence on September 5, 2014.

Video testimony and English translation transcript

Watch Jigme's 22-minute video testimony, broadcasted by Voice of America Tibetan service:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ac-V82xAaUg>

Read an English translation of Jigme's testimony:

This year, on the 15th day of the second Tibetan month (March 22, 2008), after the assembly was over at the monastery, I went to the market. There I sat at the side of a taxi-stand and got a shoe repaired. As I was returning to the monastery, I received a call on my mobile phone. I looked at the phone, but there was no number visible. Suddenly a white vehicle appeared and stopped in front of me. Four soldiers arrested me and dragged me into the vehicle. When I looked back, I saw a nun. I shouted 'Ani! Ani!' [nun! nun!] several times and made sure she saw me getting arrested. Once in the vehicle, they covered my head with a black cloth and handcuffed me. Then with guns pointed to my head, and my body pressed down, they took me to the armed police guesthouse.

The guesthouse is at the back of the local police station. There they removed the cloth covering my head but kept the handcuffs on. Afterwards, they searched my body and took my phone, wallet and everything. I was put on a chair with my hands tied at the back. A young soldier pointed an automatic rifle at me and said in Chinese, 'This is made to kill you, Ahlos [derogatory term used for Tibetans by some Chinese]. You make one move, and I will definitely shoot and kill you with this gun. I will throw your corpse in the trash and nobody will ever know.' When I heard this, I was not terrified by the gun pointed at my head, but thinking that this man is not only a soldier or security personnel, but also a law

enforcement officer; however, here he is pointing a gun at an ordinary citizen and uttering such words...made me very sad...as if my heart was shattered into two pieces.

This is the case of a powerful nationality harassing and oppressing a small nationality, a big nation making weapons to kill a small nation; if they are doing such things at the lower levels, there is no need to say that they are doing worse things to us at higher levels. The way they oppress and murder Tibetans, and can utter such words while pointing with guns, stunned me. By telling us that Tibetans could be killed and our dead bodies dumped in the trash and that nobody would know – we are not even treated like dogs and pigs. If other people's dogs and pigs are killed, there will be somebody to claim them. Then why won't Tibetans be claimed after death? We are ordered not to claim our fellow Tibetan's body even after death. At that time, I realized that there is no racial equality.

During the detention they asked me many questions, such as: 'Did the Dalai Lama instigate you? Did the Dalai Lama ask you to carry out this looting, burning and destruction?' 'How do you view the Dalai Lama?' As for me, I am a follower of Buddhism. The Dalai Lama is like my life, heart and soul. In that, I am not alone. For all 6 million Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is their spiritual refuge in this life as well as the next. The Dalai Lama is widely respected for his tremendous efforts made towards world peace. He is the champion of world peace. He has established a path of non-violence. I totally reject their accusation that the Dalai Lama has master-minded acts of looting, burning and destruction. The Dalai Lama can never do such things. Even an ordinary monk like myself cannot urge anybody to burn, loot and destroy.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is like the soul of the 6 million Tibetans. There is no way we can be parted from Him. As a Tibetan monk, historically, we have a teacher-disciple relationship. We must maintain this relationship. We have unwavering faith in the Dalai Lama. This was what I answered to the question of how I view the Dalai Lama.

After keeping us at the detention center for a few days, they took us to the jail. At the prison, the soldiers commanding us in Chinese 'one, two, three', as some of us could not understand Chinese, they scolded us – they would call us 'animals', 'fools', and beat us with batons. When we asked why they are beating us, they replied that it was because we could not understand the Chinese language and then they would mock us. My question is: In the Charter and Constitution of the People's Republic of China, it is enshrined that, in the regional areas of different nationalities, the language of that particular nationality is to be used and that the regional nationality must be given the right to govern. Then why is that in the Tibetan areas, instead of using Tibetan language, Tibetans are not only verbally abused as 'animals' and 'fools' but are physically beaten just because we do not understand the Chinese language?

There is no differentiation on the basis of one's actions or age. For instance, monks as young as 14 and 15 and as old as 60 or 70 were arrested. No difference is made, whether they were involved in protests or not. We had no clothes on our backs nor shoes on our feet. Two monks would be tied together and put in the vehicle to be driven away. They were thrown in the vehicle like you would throw logs of wood. Even if some of them had their heads injured, and for some, their hands broken, they were all taken to the prison. Relatives or friends were not allowed to bring food, clothing or bedding. We had to huddle together to bear the cold. The reason why we were so severely beaten was solely because we are Tibetans. For that, we feel extremely sad.

We were taken to a prison in Kachu (Chinese: Linxia, Gansu province). All the prisoners there were Chinese and Muslim Chinese. We were the only Tibetan prisoners. Everyday, we had to remove urine

and excrement barefooted, and wash the floors. At the prison, [I was] forced to take off my monks' robes and put on layperson's clothes. I am a Buddhist monk and it is humiliating to disrobe and put on a layman's clothes, and to be handcuffed and taken away barefoot in a vehicle. In the prison, the condition was very poor – There was not enough to eat or drink and nothing to wear. There wasn't even a towel to clean your face.

I was kept there for one month, during which time I was handcuffed in one position for many days and nights. During interrogations, I was accused of having contacts outside: with the Dalai Lama, Samdhong Rinpoche [the Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile], and Ajia Rinpoche [former abbot of Kumbum monastery in Qinghai who defected to the USA], and that I had to acknowledge that I have these outside contacts. Likewise, I was told that I have contacts inside with scholars and teachers. 'You have been involved in activities and have led organizations. You have made calls to many outside provinces. What have you achieved from those? Where did you print the Tibetan flags? How many flags did you print? How many members are there in your group?', and 'you have no choice but to accept these crimes'. They would hang me up for several hours with my hands tied to a rope...hanging from the ceiling with my feet off the ground. Then they would beat me on my face, chest, and back, with the full force of their fists. Finally, on one occasion, I had lost consciousness and was taken to a hospital. After I regained consciousness at the hospital, I was once again taken back to prison where they continued the practice of hanging me from the ceiling and beating me. As a result, I again lost conscious and then taken to the hospital a second time. Once I was beaten continuously for two days with nothing to eat nor a drop of water to drink. I suffered from pains on my abdomen and chest. The second time I was beaten unconscious, I was in the hospital for six days, unable to open my eyes or speak a word.

In the end, when I was on the verge of dying, they handed me over to my family. At my release, my captors lied to the provincial authorities by telling them that that they had not beaten me. Also, they lied to my family members by telling them that they had not beaten me; they also made me put down my thumbprint (as a signature) on a document that said that I was not tortured. I had to stay for about twenty days at a hospital and spent 20,000 Chinese yuan [US \$2,922] to get treatment.

On my return to the monastery, friends told me that 180 monks had been arrested. The monks had done nothing wrong. Our senior monk and the official lama (teacher) too were arrested. They were made to stand on the tips of their toes at night, and were beaten on their backs with the butts of guns. The Chinese took pictures with their mobile phones as they were beating the monks on their necks.

I also found out that when the police and soldiers raided the monastery, they stole religious statues, money, personal belongings and even foodstuff from the monastery and monks' private residences. It is apparent that the real looters and murderers are these soldiers of Chinese Communist Party. They engage in illegal acts, but we are the ones who are arrested, beaten, tortured and killed.

Also, we are accused of aligning with the 'Dalai clique' and instigating riots among the public. If there is real racial equality, freedom of expression and freedom of religion, then why are we not allowed to respect the figure for whom we have faith in our heart of hearts? Right in front of our eyes, they stomp on the picture of the Precious One [the Dalai Lama], break the picture frames with the butts of guns, shred the pictures into pieces and burn them in the fire. Being Tibetans and Buddhists, when we see the picture of our object of refuge being trodden upon and torn into pieces, we view these as irreparable acts. When Tibetans break a few windowpanes, they say that such acts caused hundreds of millions of yuan worth of damage. How do you measure the damage caused to our hearts by seeing our most revered One's picture trampled under foot? The Chinese leadership says that the goal is to

achieve a harmonious society, but at the same time continue to vilify the Dalai Lama, a figure that all Tibetans respect and honor as their spiritual leader...how can we begin to feel harmony when our values are denigrated and trodden on?

Monks were regularly beaten during this period. Not only that, monks who spoke to some reporters were beaten with batons and had their legs broken; on some, they used electric batons on their heads and in their mouths – the electric baton affected their brains and some have become disabled...driven to a type of insanity. We endured such torture. Now our main hope is that the international media and the United Nations' investigators come to Tibet and check on the real situation and then report on it after they assess their findings. This is our main hope.

The Chinese are telling us that Tibetans have done illegal things and are arresting and beating us, and even killing many people. Many people have fled to the mountains and dare not return to their homes and families. It will help if the world media sees these things and reports about them.

The Dalai Lama did not incite us into do anything. His Holiness did not tell us to fight for independence. His Holiness never said anything of this sort. Many of us support the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach and the process of solving Tibet's issue through peaceful dialogue. But we are sad about being extremely oppressed today. Today, I, as a witness to truth, am telling the media the story of those Tibetans who were killed, those who underwent torture in prisons, and the countless others who have been forced to flee to the mountains and are too afraid to return to their homes, so that the media can truthfully report on these situations. This is my hope.

Officers from the security office and secret service as well as task teams have visited my room in the monastery, and are keeping close watch on me. Even here now, there is one man purposely watching me. I am not allowed to go out, nor am I allowed to make phone calls. I have been given a thick copy of the Chinese constitution to study; I am ordered to write a confession. I am not physically in a prison, but have no freedom whatsoever.

These days there are actions taken against us, not just in Labrang, not just in Amdo, but in Kham and central Tibet, too. Many Tibetans are being killed, many oppressed and arrested. We heard that more than 200 Tibetans were killed and several thousand arrested. Still the beatings and arrests have not stopped. For us, access to news is blocked; we are not allowed to watch news or put up a satellite dish nor are we allowed to listen or watch news from the United States and other foreign countries. We are ordered to watch and listen to domestic broadcasts. We are told not to listen to foreigners or to talk to them. Where is the freedom of expression? Where is the freedom of religion?

Tibetan people are undergoing all kinds of suffering. For me personally, I am a Buddhist monk at Labrang monastery. I was one of those arrested this year. I to the face of my captors: 'If you kill me, then that will be the end of it. But if am able to go outside and get the opportunity, I will talk about the torture I went through; I will tell the people of the world, as a truthful witness, about the sufferings undergone by friends and report these to the media.'

Even when I was released, I was told not to tell anyone that I was beaten; I was warned not to contact any outsiders. But I cannot just keep shut about the torture I went through, or the suffering borne by friends. This is also my reason for telling you this today. Still, there is a harsh crackdown taking place in Tibetan areas and restrictions on the movement of Tibetans.

These days, the authorities tell us to support the Olympic Games, but Tibetans around here are not even allowed to travel to Lanzhou, let alone go to Beijing to watch and support the games. We are not even allowed to go outside our own areas. Because of the Olympics, all traditional festivals, celebrations and religious rituals have been banned.

There is a military presence everywhere. In the barn belonging to our monastery, they have made effigies out of straw and dressed them in Tibetan robes. The Chinese soldiers use them for doing bayonet practice. It seems that the Tibetan people and the robe-wearing monks are their enemy. Not all arrested Tibetans were involved in protests, so why are they stabbing their bayonets on the effigies with Tibetan dress as their military exercise? It is not just monks who are suffering as a result of the Chinese viewing Tibetans as their enemy...even Tibetan staff members, students and the ordinary Tibetans...all are suffering. This big government, big country, and big nationality are using weapons, tanks and cannons on the small, humble Tibetan people. Thousands of soldiers are surrounding us. 'Kill the Tibetans who are disobedient', they ordered.

In this 21st century, the people of the world are walking on the path to world peace. The peace-loving people and the supporters of truth should expose China for blocking the media and restricting reporters from seeing what is going on inside Tibet. I would like the international press, the United Nations and human rights organizations to pay attention and find a solution to the current dire situation for the Tibetan people. You can pressure China to conduct meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama's representatives for a mutually beneficial solution to the Tibet-China issue. It is the hope and wish of the Tibetans inside Tibet to invite the Dalai Lama to Tibet. The Chinese Communist Party has stated that stability and unity are important goals for the nation. Now, if both the Dalai Lama and the CCP work together through dialogue to solve the Tibet-China issue for the mutual benefit of both the Chinese and Tibetan peoples, there is no reason why genuine and long lasting peace, stability and unity cannot be achieved.

Commitment to truth after release from prison

A month after his release from prison from his five-year term, Jigme in a [handwritten note](#) dated Nov. 26, 2016 wrote of his commitment to pursue truth through the powers of reasoning or innermost commitment. Below is a translation of his handwritten note.

Coming back to life again after facing death

If my courage and determination wane, my affection and loyalty to my people, my hope and vitality, that is grist for their mill. The means they use to crush us are many, fear and misleading, lies and deception, but in short, anything from stern wrath to deceptive smiles, and in using them, see how expert they have become! Going down this road, apart from just deceiving the public, they frame us with the greatest and heaviest crimes, and under trial they coax or even force us to admit to many things we never did, an ongoing process of rendering us lifeless as a corpse, if not wiping us out altogether. You can say: "They can do nothing to change my powers of reasoning or my innermost commitment", but rather, for the sake of sincere adherence to the truth, I found strength, capacity, courage and endurance I didn't know I had before, which I firmly believe to be the force of truth and reason.

While the altruistic devotion that binds me to my people, my love for my country, my hopes for my kinfolk stand as firm as a mountain, unshakeable, to endure all hardship for the peace of the world, the growth of the nation, mindful wellbeing and so on is the pledge of my truth-affirmed life. The candle of life may be blown out, the flagpole of life-force cut down, but my dying testament and the living breath of my innermost counsel is this.

Labrang Jigme
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