



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Dalai Lama meets Tibetan ex-political prisoner

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A Tibetan former political prisoner had an audience with the Dalai Lama this past weekend 15 years after he was arrested and tortured for making a documentary about China's brutal occupation of Tibet.

Dhondup Wangchen, alongside his wife Lhamo Tso and other family members, met the Tibetan Buddhist leader on July 1 in the Dalai Lama's exile home in Dharamsala, India.

Photos shared by the Dalai Lama's office show him posing with the family and blessing the head of Dhondup Wangchen, who was making his first visit to India since arriving in the United States in 2017.

[Voice of America](#) reported that: "During this momentous meeting, Wangchen presented a collection of video messages he had gathered from Tibetans living within Tibet. These messages carried the heartfelt longing and hope of the Tibetan people to see the return of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to their homeland, Tibet."

International Campaign for Tibet President Tencho Gyatso said: "*We are so happy that Dhondup Wangchen was able to finally visit Dharamsala with his loved ones.*"

"Dhondup Wangchen has suffered enormously for his courageous activism in support of the Tibetan people. After all he has endured, it is wonderful to see him get the audience of a lifetime with His Holiness the Dalai Lama."

'Leaving Fear Behind'

In August 2008, Dhondup Wangchen's documentary, "Leaving Fear Behind," premiered in secret before a group of foreign journalists in Beijing just days before that year's Summer Olympics in the Chinese capital began.

The film provided a rare glimpse into [life in Tibet under China's brutal occupation](#), showing Tibetans describing in their own words the reality of Chinese rule, as well as their feelings about the Dalai Lama and the Olympic Games.

Appearing onscreen toward the end of the 25-minute documentary, Dhondup Wangchen says his goal was "not to make a famous or particularly entertaining film. This film is about the plight of the Tibetan people—helpless and frustrated."

[Watch "Leaving Fear Behind."](#)

About five months before the movie premiered, Chinese authorities arrested Dhondup Wangchen. As he later [testified to a US government commission](#), the "torture started as soon as I was detained."

He spent six years in prison, but even after his release in 2014, he was subject to harassment and surveillance.

In 2017, Dhondup Wangchen fled Tibet. [On Christmas Day that year, he arrived in San Francisco](#), reuniting with his wife and family.

Golok Jigme, a Tibetan monk who made “Leaving Fear Behind” with Dhondup Wangchen, was also arrested and tortured. He escaped to India in 2014 and [met with then-US Vice President Mike Pence](#) four years later.

Trip to Dharamsala

Over the years, Dhondup Wangchen has received numerous awards for his activism, including the International Press Freedom Award of the Committee to Protect Journalists and the Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent. In 2022, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Dhondup Wangchen has also continued his advocacy for the Tibetan people. Last year, he [met with lawmakers across Europe](#) in the run-up to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

During this trip to Dharamsala, Dhondup Wangchen has already [met with the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile](#). He is expected to stay in India until the end of this month.



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