



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Young Tibetan monk dies in Chinese custody amid repression of monks who celebrated Dalai Lama's 90th birthday

<https://savetibet.org/young-tibetan-monk-dies-in-chinese-custody>

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The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has learned of the death in police custody of Samten, a 25-year-old monk from Ditsa Geden Tashi Choedingling Monastery in Amdo in present-day Qinghai Province. On December 18, 2025, local police in Shongshan Tibetan Township, in Palung (Hualong) Hui Autonomous County, Tsoshar (Haidong), Qinghai Province, returned Samten's body to the monastery, claiming he "suddenly fell ill" and died during an unsuccessful emergency transfer to an unspecified hospital. However, local sources suspect that Samten was beaten to death during interrogation by Chinese officials. News of his death began circulating in March 2026.

Upon returning his remains in 2025, Chinese authorities ordered the monks not to disclose any information regarding Samten's death. The current situation of Samten's family remains unknown. Owing to Chinese authorities' severe restrictions on access to information, when and for what reasons Samten was taken into police custody are currently unknown.

Under surveillance for sharing election information

ICT believes that Samten had been under constant police surveillance since 2021. That year, he was detained for sharing photographs on the Chinese social media platform WeChat related to the democratic elections of the Central Tibetan Administration, the government-in-exile of the Tibetan people.

ICT connects Samten's detention with a broader crackdown on monastic institutions in Palung County. In October 2021, authorities intensified surveillance at Ditsa Monastery and expelled approximately 80 monks under the age of 18 from [Ditsa and Jakyung monasteries](#) (50 monks from Ditsa and an additional 30 minor monks from the nearby Jakyung Monastery).

Dalai Lama's 90th birthday crackdown

Ditsa Monastery, founded in 1903, has historically been a vital center for Tibetan-language education and preservation in the region. Because of this cultural significance, it has become a target of China's "Sinicization" campaign. Samten's death comes in the aftermath of an intensified campaign of oppression leading up to the 14th Dalai Lama's 90th birthday in July 2025. Chinese authorities raided monasteries to confiscate images of the Dalai Lama, conducted mandatory "political education" sessions, harassed and intimidated monks and monastic leaders and detained Tibetans in widespread crackdowns. As ICT reported previously, Chinese authorities' repression drove 52-year-old [Shersang Gyatso](#) of Tsang Monastery to commit suicide in August 2025

Zega Gyatso's non-release release

Chinese authorities arrested 48-year-old [Zega Gyatso](#) around the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday and released him in January 2026. Zega, a monk of Tsang Monastery in Malho (Ch: Huangnan) County, was detained in Xining, where he had gone for medical treatment. After six months' detention on the accusation of maintaining contact and remitting money to India, Zega reached his home only to be taken back to Xining three days later to sign documents pledging not to engage in activities in violation of official directives. He returned to Tsang Monastery around mid-February 2026 but his movements have been strictly controlled by Chinese authorities and he cannot meet freely with anyone. This follows a widespread and systematic pattern of Chinese authorities releasing Tibetans from detention centers or prisons while keeping them under stifling restrictions on their freedom of movement and ability to communicate with others.



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