



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### China's enforced disappearance and sentencing of Venerable Dhargye

<https://savetibet.org/chinas-enforced-disappearance-sentencing-of-venerable-dhargye>

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The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) spotlights the enforced disappearance and secret sentencing of Venerable Dhargye, a 63-year-old Tibetan monk, as a stark illustration of China's escalating campaign of religious repression and judicial secrecy in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and neighboring Tibetan prefectures. After more than four years of incommunicado detention, Dhargye has, according to credible reports made to ICT, been sentenced to seven years in prison. His case highlights Chinese authorities' systematic criminalization of peaceful Buddhist religious practices and their routine violation of fundamental due process rights.

#### Arrest and enforced disappearance

Dhargye's ordeal began on August 5, 2021, when he was arrested by Chinese police in Lhasa. He was detained alongside a relative named Tsering and a nun named Choekyi. While Tsering and Choekyi were released after several months, Dhargye remained in custody and was subsequently subjected to an enforced disappearance until traces of information began emerging in autumn 2025.

For over four years, Dhargye's family was kept in the dark about his whereabouts. As soon as he was arrested in 2021, family members began regularly contacting Chinese authorities in Lhasa but they were given false assurances that Dhargye was well and would be released shortly. These false claims gave his family false hope for a speedy return and led them to avoid raising his detention with the international community.

#### Charges and sentencing

Information about Dhargye's sentencing emerged in late January 2026. ICT believes he was charged with making traditional Tibetan Buddhist monetary offerings (*Kyab-ten* ལྷག་མཚན་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ and *Ngo-ten* ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་) to the Dalai Lama. Authorities also reportedly accused him of assisting Tibetan monks attempting to escape from Tibet.

The legal proceedings were conducted in complete secrecy. Dhargye's family did not receive official notification of his charges, the date of his trial, the court that would deliver the verdict or the location of his detention. He has been denied all visits, and his current health status remains unknown, causing deep concern among his relatives given his advanced age.

In August 2022, nearly a year after Venerable Dhargye's arrest, Chinese authorities detained his brother Tsedu along with four other Tibetans in a separate case. The five men were arrested for conducting traditional religious activities including smoke offerings to mountain deities and prayer ceremonies. While one of the five Tibetans died due to severe beatings, the other four were sentenced to two years imprisonment.

#### Contravention of legal standards

ICT's analysis clearly shows that Chinese authorities handling of Dhargye's case clearly violated China's Criminal Procedure Law (CPL) and international human rights law. Article 85 requires authorities to notify a family of the reasons for arrest and the place of custody within 24 hours. Principle 16 of the UN Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment (adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988), Rule 58 of the Nelson Mandela Rules, and Articles 17 and 18 of the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance require states to provide families with basic information about the fate and whereabouts of a disappeared person without delay. Only narrow and time-limited exceptions

are permitted. By holding Dhargye incommunicado for five years, which far exceeds any permissible limits, China is in violation of its own legal frameworks and international law.

Furthermore, the criminalization of traditional Buddhist monetary offerings strikes at the core of Tibetan Buddhist belief. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, offerings are an essential expression of devotion to religious teachers. *Kyabten* is an offering made for “taking refuge” dedicated to a religious teacher and *Ngoten* is a dedicatory offering typically made in the name of deceased persons or those who are seriously ill to generate positive karma for them. Under China’s “stability maintenance” policy, however, such expressions of devotion to exiled spiritual leaders are equated with “inciting separatism” or “subverting state power”.

The non-transparent sentencing of Venerable Dhargye exemplifies Chinese authorities’ egregious violations of religious freedom in Tibet. Through pervasive surveillance and the strategic use of enforced disappearances, the Chinese Communist Party continues to suppress religious freedom and sever the spiritual connections between Tibetans and their exiled leaders. The lack of transparency in the judicial system ensures that many such cases of repression against Tibetans never surface.

Born in 1962 in Serta in Golog, Wulshul (Amdo region), Dhargye is the son of Choephel and Choelha. He is a monk of the Serta Sera Monastery, an institution founded in 1736 that is noted for preserving both old and new Buddhist traditions. Prior to his arrest, he resided in Lhasa, where he was frequently sought by local Tibetan devotees to perform consecration rituals for sacred objects, scriptures and stupas.



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