

Tibet Brief

A report of the International Campaign for Tibet



November 2012

Tibetan self-immolations continue and concentrate in Rebkong area



In November 2012, the number of Tibetans who resorted to self-immolations spiked to 84, with 69 people who are known to have died. Self-immolations are a dramatic and visible counter to the claims of the Chinese Communist Party to be improving Tibetans' lives and they are a direct challenge to the Party's legitimacy in Tibet.

There have been three self-immolations in the two days of 22 and 23 November 2012. Tamdrin Kyab, age 23 and a former Tibetan Buddhist monk, set fire to himself and died on 23 November in Luchu township, Gansu province. Tamdrin Dorjee, age 29, set fire to himself in the evening of 23 November in front of a government building in Dokarmo in the Tsekhog area of Rebkong, Qinghai province. He was heard shouting for the long life of the Dalai Lama, with his hands together as if in prayer. On 22 November, Lubhum Gyal, age 18, died after setting himself

ablaze in the main street of Dowa township, Rebkong.

Before, 24-year old Tibetan, Sangdag Tsering, set fire to himself and died on 17 November in a township in Tsekhog in Rebkong (Chinese: Tongren), Qinghai, where there have been eight self-immolations since 4 November (see: <http://tinyurl.com/cmjgufur>). He was the second Tibetan to self-immolate on 17 November, following the death of mother of two Chagmo Kyi, who set fire to herself in Dolma Square, Rebkong (see: <http://tinyurl.com/c4d3aw3>).

Officials in the Rebkong area have warned people that they cannot go to the homes of those who self-immolated and express their condolences. They also said that if monks go to pray for self-immolators, monasteries will be closed down, and that the families of self-immolators will be punished.

However, hundreds, sometimes thousands, of Tibetans have attended cremations for Tibetans who have self-immolated in Rebkong over the past weeks.

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Candle-light vigil at Qinghai Nationalities University

Local lay Tibetans and monks gathered to mark Chagmo Kyi's death on 17 November despite an intense military build-up. According to Tibetan sources, hundreds of Tibetans attending her cremation were surrounded by troops.

Furthermore, thousands of Tibetans gathered in Dowa township in Rebkong to say prayers for Nyangchag Bum,

one of two Tibetans who self-immolated and died on 12 November. The second Tibetan to self-immolate in Rebkong on 12 November, Nyangkar Tashi, left a note expressing in part his hope that "six million Tibetans study Tibetan, wear Tibetan clothes and be united." On 10 November, Gonpo Tsering, a young Tibetan known as one of the brightest students at his school died after self-immolating in front of a monastery in Tsoe. The death was quickly confirmed by the Chinese state media. On 9 November, amidst a tense security situation, thousands of Tibetan students in Rebkong gathered at the cremation of a Tibetan nomad and former monk, Jinpa Gyatso, who self-immolated and died the day before in front of Rongpo monastery. Images received from Tibet show children in the demonstration holding hands amid crowds of thousands.

Tibetan students at the Qinghai Nationalities University held a candle-light vigil and said mantras for Tibetans who had self-immolated. This action and the protests by students and teachers in Rebkong show different sectors of society coming together in solidarity and making reasonable, non-violent appeals to the authorities for change.



Peaceful protest in Rebkong.

Tibetans across Rebkong have responded to the self-immolations by gathering en masse to offer prayers. So far, they have been allowed some space to do this, but it appears that a military build-up and communications cut-off has now been put in place. Such oppressive measures will likely increase tensions and the potential for volatility. Instead, the authorities should be guided by what the self-immolators have said and address the legitimate grievances of the Tibetan people. ■

Students injured in massive peaceful protests in Tibet



A student injured during peaceful protest in Chabcha

According to reports coming from Tibet, many Tibetan students were severely injured following a police crackdown on peaceful protesters in the morning of 26 November 2012 in Chabcha (Ch: Gonghe), Qinghai province.

Thousands of students of Sorig Lobling (Medical School) took to the streets at Chabcha around 6:00am and called slogans demanding equality, freedom and leadership change. Those injured were taken to the local hospital. The parents could not contact their children as the security forces had sealed off the school. ■

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U.N. Human Rights Chief, EP's Human Rights Committee Chairlady and German Human Rights Commissioner make strong statements on Tibet.



UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay

On 2 November 2012 UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released a statement urging the Chinese government to immediately address the long-standing Tibetan grievances that have led to an escalation of self-immolations.

The International Campaign for Tibet has stepped up its advocacy at the UN in Geneva this year, lobbying the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as submitting information and recommendations to human rights experts of the UN Human Rights Council and Treaty Bodies. ICT has briefed country representatives in Geneva on cultural genocide in Tibet and on the self-immolations and Chinese policies.

In the statement, Navi Pillay, who recently began her second term in the role of UN HCHR, said: *"Social stability in Tibet will never be achieved through heavy security measures and suppression of human rights. Deep underlying issues need to be addressed, and I call on the Government to seriously consider the recommendations made to it by various international human rights bodies, as well as to avail itself of the expert advice being offered by the UN's independent experts on human rights."*

Similarly, the Chairlady of the European Parliament's Sub-Committee on Human Rights (DROI), Barbara Lochbihler, criticized the Chinese government over the human rights situation in Tibet in an interview with the German News Agency DPA on 3 November (see: <http://tinyurl.com/c9sglu9>).

Ms Lochbihler urged Beijing to resume dialogue with His Holiness the Dalai Lama towards finding a lasting solution to the issue of Tibet. Moreover, she said there should be a systematic change in the annual EU-China Human Rights Dialogue to make it more result-oriented. Again on 8 November 2012 Ms Lochbihler spoke about the situation in Tibet in an interview with the German Catholic News Agency KNA (see: <http://tinyurl.com/boaae2m>). She argued that respect for freedom of religion is a major problem in the People's Republic of China. She said that China must respect the rights of religious minorities and allow them to practice their values and traditions.

On the occasion of the top leadership change within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Germany's Human Rights Commissioner Markus Löning stated that the new leadership must also be judged by its respect for human rights. This includes progress in dealing with dissidents and human rights defenders as well as minorities.

Commissioner Löning recalled UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights' statement of 2 November 2012 and added that China must allow international observers into Tibet and endorse a policy aimed at reducing tensions with the Tibetan population and based on the acknowledgement of Tibetans' underlying grievances.

Likely, in the context of the "Press Freedom Award" awarded to detained Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen, the Speaker for Human Rights and Humanitarian Assistance of the Free Democratic Party at the German Federal Parliament, Marina Schuster, congratulated Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen for receiving the Press Freedom Award of the "Committee to Protect Journalists". The Free Democratic Party urged China to immediately release Dhondup



UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay

Wangchen from detention. The award acknowledges Wangchen's courage and tenacity to risk his life and freedom to disclose human rights violations. In 2007 and 2008, Wangchen

interviewed more than 100 Tibetans in Tibet on their views on the Olympic Games and the Chinese policies in Tibet and produced the film "Leaving Fear Behind". He was detained in March 2008 and sentenced to a six year prison term for "subversion of state power" after a questionable trial. The Group of the Free Democratic Party in the German Federal parliament is concerned about reports of Wangchen subjected to torture and suffering from Hepatitis B while in detention. The original statement can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/bwx747w> ■

See also:

- ▶ High-Commissioner's Full Statement: <http://tinyurl.com/d4938vp>
- ▶ Commissioner's original statement: <http://tinyurl.com/bmnhxt>

Special International TSG Meeting concludes in Dharamsala

At the end of November 2012, worldwide Tibet Support Groups (TSG) met in Dharamsala, India, to boost advocacy



actions and strategies on Tibet worldwide. The gathering was made more intense by the anguish of the continuing high frequency of self-immolations and China's leadership change. However, the urgency of the situation and the high calibre participation in the meeting resulted in a tightly focused and strategic Action Plan to be implemented in the next years. ■

US Ambassador Locke visits Tibetan self-immolations areas

In September, US Ambassador to the People's Republic of China Gary F. Locke visited Tibetan areas in Western China. He was able to visit two monasteries in the Aba prefecture, Sichuan province, a region where many self-immolations have taken place, though self-immolations have not occurred in those monasteries. State Department's spokeswoman, Ms Nuland, explained during the State Department's daily brief on 16 October that the trip was acknowledged by Chinese authorities and was part of a broader trip to Chongqing and Sichuan Province. When in Aba, Ambassador Locke met with a number of local residents, including ethnic Tibetans.

Moreover, on 30 October, Ambassador Locke, responding to a question as part of a "China Town Hall" with citizens in 60 cities across the US, said that the United States implored the Chinese to really meet with the representatives of the Tibetan people to address and re-examine some of the policies that have led to some of the restrictions and the violence, and the self-immolations. The United States has repeatedly urged China to address Tibetan grievances but it is very rare for foreign officials to visit Tibetan areas. ■

China's new leadership and Tibet

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) announced its new 'Fifth Generation' leadership on 15 November, with Xi Jinping appointed as Party Secretary and head of the CCP Central Military Commission in a once-in-a-decade leadership transition. Members of the new seven-member Standing Committee of the Politburo headed by Xi are older, conservative, and associated with harsh policies in Tibet. The new top leadership, which excluded two senior Party members known for their emphasis on political reform, may seek to assert their authority on Tibet at an early stage following protests by thousands of Tibetans and an escalation in self-immolations during the week-long Party Congress, which ended on 15 November in Beijing.

There are no indicators of future policy change on Tibet or other 'ethnic minority' issues given the new configuration of the 25-member Politburo Central Committee, which ranks below the seven-member Standing Committee. Even so, the careers of two prominent Politburo members, Hu Chunhua, who speaks Tibetan, and Guo Jinlong, a former Party Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), were built in Tibet. Liu Yandong, another Politburo member, had a prominent and direct role in dialogue with the Dalai Lama's envoys during her tenure at the United Front Work Department (UFWD).

There has been a decrease in the number of Tibetans in the Central Committee of the Party, which are lower-ranking than the Politburo. For the past few Party Congresses, there were at least two Tibetans in the 200-plus members of the Committee, but this time only one is included, Pema Thinley, the current head of the TAR government. There are, however, four Tibetans as Alternate Members, which is the largest number to date.

Ahead of the Party Congress on 5 October, a petition was submitted to the United Front Work Department and the Nationalities Committee of the National People's Congress by staff and students of the Minzu University of China, Northwest University for Nationalities, Qinghai Nationalities University, Qinghai University, Hainan Teachers College, as also staff and students from some Tibetan Middle and High schools, and monks from different monasteries (only available in Chinese language: <http://www.vot.org/?p=18484>). The petition lists 8 points for a viable solution to the Tibetan issue. They call on the Chinese government to end political suppression and economic marginalization; give Tibetan language an equal status as the Chinese language in the various Tibetan autonomous regions, counties and prefectures; consult Tibetans in the planning of developing projects in Tibet; stop ethnic marginalization; uphold Tibetans' right to freedom of religion or belief; stop strengthening the Party's ideological management of Tibetan monasteries; put an halt to the mass migration of Han Chinese into Tibet; and, seriously implement laws on regional ethnic autonomy and stop the enforced resettlement of nomads. ■

See also:

- ▶ ICT's Report: <http://tinyurl.com/bvlkm4g>
- ▶ Bhuchung K.Tsering's Blog: <http://tinyurl.com/d4ztvux>



ABC broadcast on Tibet

Australian broadcasters filmed inside Tibet for a news documentary featuring Tibetans speaking about the self-immolations as Chinese officials blamed the Dalai Lama. The broadcast and transcript by ABC can be viewed at: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2012/s3607238.htm>

A Tibetan woman, whose identity is disguised, tells the journalists: *"People self-immolating - yes, I've heard of it. They forced those people to die. There is something wrong with the Communist Party and this country. [...] The reason they committed suicide is that the monasteries have lots of difficulties in this country. We don't have any rights, even the right of speech. They tell us exactly what we have to say. If we speak the truth, they will arrest us and beat us to death."*

Chinese officials are also filmed by the journalists following them in Labrang (Xiahe) and other areas. ■

ICT and Australia Tibet Council partner for effective global advocacy

In October 2012, the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) and the Australia Tibet Council (ATC) announced their formal partnership. The decision was taken by the leadership of the two organizations in recognition of Australia's key role in the region and the shared ICT/ATC commitment to multilateralism to press China to cease its gross and systematic violations of human rights in Tibet.

Watch the video announcing ICT/ATC partnership: <http://tinyurl.com/cbby8wz> ■

Political prisoners focus

Lobsang Tenzin

According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) based in Dharamsala, India, Lobsang Tenzin, a Tibetan political prisoner who has spent 24 years in prison, is expected to be released in 2013, if the prison's authorities conclude that he has exhibited 'good behavior' during his imprisonment.

Lobsang Tenzin is the longest-serving known political prisoner in Tibet. He is detained at Chushur (Chinese: Qushui) Prison, located in the Northern part of Lhasa. Lobsang Tenzin was arrested on 5 March 1988 during a protest against Chinese rule in Lhasa. At that time, he was 24-year old and a student of Tibet University in Lhasa. In a controversial verdict, he was sentenced to death with two-year reprieve for causing the death of a police officer who had died after falling from a window. In 1991, after spending three years in Drapchi prison in Lhasa, Lobsang's death sentence was reduced to life imprisonment following strong and sustained pressure from the international community. ■

This number's reading suggestion

"TIBET: Histoires du Toit du Monde"

Journalist, lawyer and photographer Sabine Verhest works for the Belgian newspaper La Libre Belgique. Her passion for Asian culture and mountains inspired her to undertake a trip of several months along the Himalayan range, from Tibet to the Arunachal Pradesh in India.

TIBET: Histoire du Toit du Monde is a collection of photographs and texts from her trip. It is a mosaic of pictures and stories of people she met on the Tibetan plateau. ■

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Upcoming Events

► 29 November and 3-4 December 2012:

Meeting of the EU Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM)

► 6 December 2012:

Hearing on China, Sub-Committee on Human Rights, European Parliament

► 12 December 2012:

International Conference on 'Chinese and European Perspectives on the Rule of Law and International Law', University Foundation, Brussels