

# TIBET BRIEF

APRIL 2021

A REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

## NEW ICT REPORT SHOWS GROWING CCP CONTROL OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM

A NEW REPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET SHOWS HOW CHINA'S NEW MEASURES OF SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL OF THE TIBETAN MONASTIC COMMUNITY THREATEN THE SURVIVAL OF AN AUTHENTIC TIBETAN BUDDHISM - THE BEDROCK OF TIBETAN CULTURE.



PARTY ABOVE BUDDHISM

CHINA'S SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL OF  
TIBETAN MONASTERIES AND NUNNERIES

A report by the International Campaign for Tibet  
Washington, DC | Amsterdam | Berlin | Brussels  
www.savetibet.org

Today, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) views Tibetan Buddhism as a threat to its rule, and as leaders of Tibetans' nonviolent resistance movement, monks and nuns are the most targeted group for repression.

The report *"Party Above Buddhism: China's Surveillance and Control of Tibetan Monasteries and Nunneries"* — released on 10 March, the anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day — reveals policy and institutional changes that force monks and nuns to serve the interests of the Communist Party.

It cites shocking examples of China's growing control over Tibetan Buddhism, including:

- giving a Communist Party agency direct oversight of monasteries and nunneries;
- stationing police and party cadres inside religious institutions;
- sinicizing Tibetan Buddhism, meaning requiring that Tibetan Buddhist institutions, canon and clergy be subservient to the Communist Party and its core values, rather than to the principles of Buddhism;
- holding "reeducation" programs for monks and nuns that pressure them to be loyal followers of the CCP and to serve as its propagandists;
- pressuring monks and nuns to denounce the Dalai Lama and claiming authority over its reincarnation.

The report also documents how these measures are causing a slow and steady decay of monasteries and nunneries as centers of Tibetan Buddhist learning — and the vital role they have played for centuries as Tibetan culture flourished.

Read the report *"Party Above Buddhism: China's Surveillance and Control of Tibetan Monasteries and Nunneries"* [online](#), or [download it here](#).



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INTERNATIONAL  
CAMPAIGN  
FOR TIBET

#### ICT EUROPE

Funenpark 1D  
1018 AK Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands  
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265  
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266  
[icteurope@savetibet.nl](mailto:icteurope@savetibet.nl)

#### ICT BRUSSELS

15, rue de la linière  
1060 Brussels  
Belgium  
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10  
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32  
[info@savetibet.eu](mailto:info@savetibet.eu)

#### ICT GERMANY

Schonhauser Allee 163  
10435 Berlin  
Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0)30 27879086  
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087  
[info@savetibet.de](mailto:info@savetibet.de)

#### ICT

1825 Jefferson Place, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
United States of America  
Phone: +1 (1) 202-785-1515  
Fax: (202) 785-434  
[info@savetibet.org](mailto:info@savetibet.org)

## EU SANCTIONS CHINA OVER HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST UYGHURS

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE 1989 TIANANMEN SQUARE CRACKDOWN, THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS IMPOSED SANCTIONS ON CHINA FOR ITS GRAVE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS, PROVOKING BEIJING'S IRE.



EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell at the press conference following the EU's Foreign Affairs Council of 22 March when the EU sanctions were adopted. (Photo: European Union)

On 22 March, the Council of the European Union [agreed](#) to sanction four Chinese officials and one entity with asset freezes and travel bans for their involvement in serious human rights violations in East Turkestan. The sanctions, adopted under recently adopted EU Global Human Rights Sanction Regime, were followed by similar sanctions by the UK, Canada and the US.

Beijing immediately [struck back with counter-sanctions](#) on a number of European officials, parliamentarians and academics,

including the European Council's Political and Security Committee, the European Parliament's Human Rights Subcommittee, Xinjiang expert Adrian Zenz, and the chair of the European Parliament's Delegation for relations with China Reinhardt Bütikofer.

Parliamentarians and governments across Europe reacted with outrage to these sanctions, with a number of countries [summoning their Chinese ambassadors](#) in protest. "When China sanctions free, critical European politicians, institutions and dissidents, merely for having been critical against China, it is a clear attack on citizens' freedom of expression in Europe and Denmark," Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs Jeppe Kofod commented. "Europe is not a punching bag," European Parliament's President David Sassoli also said. "We are an area of freedom ... and there is no intimidation we can accept."

These tensions could threaten the EU-China investment agreement, concluded in principle in December, as three of the four biggest groups in the European Parliament – which is due to vote on the deal in early 2022 – said they will not support it until the Chinese sanctions are lifted.

ICT welcomed the EU sanctions and urged the EU and its Member States to extend them to individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses in Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Hong Kong.

## FINAL ROUND OF THE TIBETAN ELECTIONS IN EXILE HELD

ON 11 APRIL, TIBETANS IN EXILE PARTICIPATED IN THE FINAL ROUND OF THE ELECTIONS TO SELECT THEIR POLITICAL LEADER AND 45 MEMBERS OF THEIR PARLIAMENT.

The candidates for the position of Sikyong - also known as president of the Central Tibetan Administration - were Penpa Tsering, who served as a speaker of the parliament in exile, and Kaydor Aukatsang, a former advisor to the Sikyong. The 45 new members of the parliament will consist of 10 members for each of the three traditional Tibetan provinces of U-Tsang, Kham and Amdo; two members each from the

four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bon religion; two members each representing Tibetans in Europe and the Americas respectively; and one member representing Australasia and other regions of Asia.

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The campaign this time was comparatively low-key, partly due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. However, both the Sikyong candidates and many of the parliamentary candidates were active with online campaigning. An online platform called “Smartvote Tibet” was for example created to invite candidates and voters to answer a range of questions and then rank the candidates that best matched voter responses.

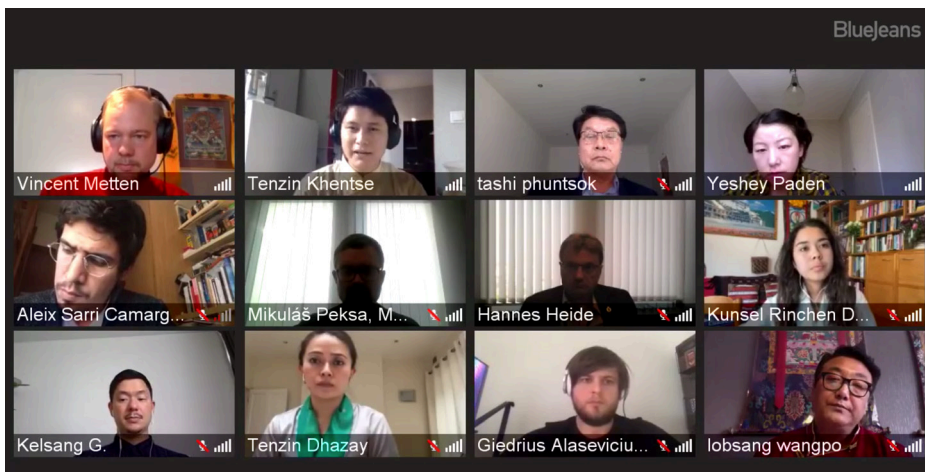
While the official results of the elections will be announced on 14 May, it appears from the count of votes by regional election commissions that the winner will likely be Penpa Tsering.



The two candidates for the position of Sikyong: Penpa Tsering (left) and Kelsang Dorjee Aukatsang (right).

## VIRTUAL TIBET LOBBY DAY URGES EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FOR ACTION ON TIBET

AT A VIRTUAL TIBET LOBBY DAY CO-ORGANIZED BY THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT’S TIBET INTEREST GROUP, SIX YOUNG TIBETANS FROM SIX EU COUNTRIES SUGGESTED CONCRETE WAYS IN WHICH THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT COULD FURTHER INCREASE ITS SUPPORT FOR TIBETAN PEOPLE.



A screenshot from the online discussion between participants and MEPs. The lobbyists were six Tibetans living in six European countries: Ms. Kunsel Rinchen Dorjee from the Netherlands, Ms. Tenzin Dhazay from Ireland, Ms. Yeshey Paden from Sweden, Mr. Tenzin Khentse from Poland, Mr. Kelsang Gonnot from France and Mr. Lobsang Wangpo from Belgium.

The 19 April event started with a morning briefing session during which participants received updates on the human rights situation in Tibet, EU-China relations and the state of Tibetan advocacy and activism. They also agreed on the main topics and messages they wanted to share with

European parliamentarians.

Participants then reconvened late afternoon for a special online meeting of the European Parliament’s Tibet Interest Group, hosted by its chair MEP Mikuláš Peksa (Czech Republic, Greens/EFA). MEPs Hannes Heide (Austria,

S&D), Aušra Maldeikienė (Lithuania, EPP), and Carles Puigdemont, Clara Ponsati and Antoni Comin (Catalonia, NA) also took part or were represented.

After briefly introducing themselves, the six young lobbyists each gave a brief overview on a specific Tibet-related issue – namely freedom of religion and the succession of the Dalai Lama, access to Tibet, education and language, environmental issues, self-immolations and Chinese influence in Europe. They also suggested concrete ways in which the European Parliament could further increase its support for the Tibetan people.

MEPs welcomed the opportunity to exchange directly with Tibetans and also reacted positively to the ideas raised, including the suggestion that the Parliament adopt a resolution condemning Chinese interferences in the Dalai Lama’s succession.

[Click here to watch the recording of the online meeting between Tibet Lobby Day participants and Members of the European Parliament.](#)



## TIBETAN UPRISING DAY BRINGS PROTESTS, STATEMENTS AND SOLIDARITY

THE 62<sup>ND</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE TIBETAN UPRISING DAY ON 10 MARCH FEATURED COMMEMORATIVE EVENTS AS WELL AS STATEMENTS OF SOLIDARITY FROM OTHER PERSECUTED GROUPS AND MESSAGES FROM ELECTED OFFICIALS ACROSS THE GLOBE.



In Brussels, the Tibetan community organized two protests with the support of ICT Brussels - one at Schuman Roundabout and the other in front of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China. (Photo: ICT)

As every year on this important day for Tibetans - which recalls 10 March 1959, when thousands of Tibetans died during a massive uprising against Chinese oppression - the International Campaign for Tibet participated in several demonstrations in Europe and the United States.

Politicians around the world marked the occasion with a show of support for Tibet. These included US House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#), and Member of the European Parliament Mikulas Peksa, who told the rally in Brussels: "Europe cannot stay idle while the tragedy in Tibet continues to unfold." Other lawmakers also tweeted pictures of themselves wearing a Tibetan flag designed facemask, such as Member of the European Parliament's [Ausra Maldeikienė](#) and [Francisco Guerreiro](#). Other groups oppressed by Beijing also expressed solidarity with Tibetans, like Chinese democracy activist [Yang Jianli](#) and the World Uyghur Congress, who noted that Tibetans and Uyghurs "share a similar history and struggle."

Like every year around this politically sensitive period, Chinese authorities [tightened the restrictions in Tibet](#), monitoring online news sharing and stopping Tibetans in the streets to check mobile phones for forbidden content.

## TIBET RAISED AT LATEST UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL'S SESSION

THE 46<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL, HELD VIRTUALLY BETWEEN 22 FEBRUARY AND 23 MARCH, PROVED RATHER ENCOURAGING FOR TIBET, AS IT SAW A SLIGHT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES RAISING CONCERNS ABOUT THE SITUATION THERE.

A total of nine countries - Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, the US as well as Slovenia on behalf of 26 EU Member States - explicitly mentioned Tibet during the general debate on Item 4: "Human rights situations that require the Council's attention". This is a clear increase from previous recent sessions and shows that awareness and concern about Tibet is broadening despite the Chinese governments efforts to silence criticism of its repression.

ICT also delivered two oral statements on behalf of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights at this session: one about the [pattern of deaths of Tibetans after torture and mistreatment in detention](#) and another concerning [the coercive labor program in Tibet](#).



## SWITZERLAND RAISES CONCERNS ABOUT TIBETANS IN FIRST CHINA STRATEGY

ON 19 MARCH 2021, THE SWISS FEDERAL COUNCIL **ADOPTED** ITS FIRST PUBLIC STRATEGY FOR CHINA – A DOCUMENT THAT SETS OUT OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES FOR SWISS POLICY TOWARDS CHINA FOR THE 2021-24 PERIOD.

Among four focus areas – peace and security, prosperity, sustainability, and digitalization - the document shows that Switzerland is fully aware of Chinese attempts to reshape the multilateral system – and in particular the international human rights system – in its favor. It also notes the degrading human rights situation in China, including the "stronger pressure" exerted on the rights of Tibetans & Uyghurs.

The Swiss China Strategy is available in [French](#), [German](#) and [Italian](#).

## NEW COUNTER-ESPIONAGE REGULATIONS FORCE TIBETANS TO SPY ON OTHER TIBETANS

THE TIBET AUTONOMOUS REGION RECENTLY ISSUED REGULATIONS ENCOURAGING TIBETANS TO SPY ON EACH OTHER AND ON FOREIGNERS IN THE NAME OF CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY.

The "Regulations on counter-espionage Security of the Tibet Autonomous Region", which came into force at the start of this year, are further proof that the Chinese Communist Party has given up on co-opting Tibetans and is now focused on coercing and silencing them to maintain political control. Although China has forced Tibetans to spy on each other for decades, the regulations openly acknowledge and approve of the practice.

Many of the 32 provisions in the regulations reaffirm provisions in the national "counter-espionage law", but certain measures stand out for their connection to Beijing's biased policies for Tibetans. For example, "counter-

espionage" in the TAR includes activities such as "ethnic secession," "ethnic dispute," and "using religion to endanger national security".

With these regulations, *"it is more likely than before that a person will be charged of conducting espionage or other crimes of endangering national security if he or she collects local information about human rights abuses and passes the information to organizations outside of China,"* Chinese legal activist Wang Tiancheng said. He added foreign visitors will also be more at risk of being charged of conducting espionage if they collect information about the human rights situation.

## CALLS TO SEE PANCHEN LAMA ON HIS 32<sup>ND</sup> BIRTHDAY

AS THE 11<sup>TH</sup> PANCHEN LAMA SPENT ANOTHER BIRTHDAY MISSING FROM HIS PEOPLE, GOVERNMENTS, ELECTED LEADERS AND TIBET SUPPORTERS AROUND THE WORLD KEPT HIS CASE ALIVE BY DEMANDING THE RIGHT TO SEE HIM.



Participants to the protest in front of the Chinese Embassy in Brussels lit candles in solidarity with the Panchen Lama. (Photo: ICT)

The 11<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, the highest Tibetan spiritual leader after the Dalai Lama, turned 32 on 25 April. Born Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, he became the world's youngest political prisoner at 6, when the Chinese government kidnapped him and his family in 1995 just days after the Dalai Lama recognized him as the reincarnation of the previous 10th Panchen Lama. No one has seen him in public since, and China has denied repeated calls for his release.

The US government as well as several parliamentarians, the Central Tibetan Administration, human rights groups and other victims of Chinese oppression worldwide expressed support on the occasion of his birthday and called on China to disclose his whereabouts. ICT also led a campaign that saw thousands of Tibetans and Tibet supporters light candles for the Panchen Lama's birthday and share the images on social media with the hashtag #LightForPanchenLama, to bring awareness about his enforced disappearance. In The Hague and in Brussels, protests also took place in front of the Chinese Embassies, where participants called on China to release the Panchen Lama immediately and unconditionally.

[Read ICT's statement on the Panchen Lama's 32nd birthday.](#)

[Read a blog post by ICT's Bhuchung Tsering on the missing Panchen Lama.](#)

## POLITICAL PRISONER FOCUS

### TASHI GYAL

FOR SIMPLY SHARING A PICTURE OF THE DALAI LAMA ON SOCIAL MEDIA BACK IN 2015, A TIBETAN NOMAD NAMED TASHI GYAL WAS SENTENCED LAST YEAR TO 12 MONTHS IN JAIL FOR “INCITING SEPARATISM”.



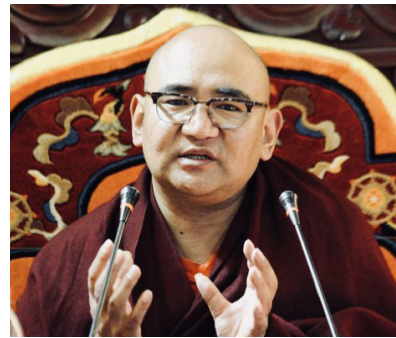
According to a report by NGO Rights Defender, Tashi Gyal was arrested on 30 May 2020 for sharing information about Tibet, including the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) on WeChat in 2015. He had previously posted pictures of the Tibetan

spiritual leader, the President of the CTA, and of the Tibetan national flag, and also called for Tibet's independence on social media.

Local authorities detained and interrogated him for 15 days. He was then subsequently officially arrested, before being sentenced on 13 October 2020 by the Golog Prefecture Intermediate Court (in Tibet's Amdo province) to a year in prison on charges of “inciting separatism” and “endangering national security”. The trial was reportedly held behind closed door and without knowledge of his relatives and news of his sentence was therefore revealed only recently.

### GO SHERAB GYATSO

CHINESE AUTHORITIES HAVE DETAINED THE PROMINENT TIBETAN BUDDHIST SCHOLAR AND WRITER GO SHERAB GYATSO, ACCORDING TO NEW INFORMATION.



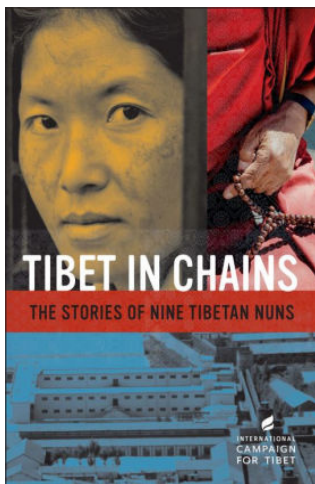
The 45-year-old monk - who has already been imprisoned in the past for his advocacy of academic freedom in monastic education - was detained in Chengdu on 26 October 2020 by officials from the Tibet Autonomous Region, according to a Tibetan

in exile. This information has only come to light now because Gyatso's acquaintances hoped his release could be achieved without any public attention.

No information about the circumstances of his detention or his current whereabouts is available. It is therefore still unclear for the reason why TAR security personnel detained Gyatso when he is from Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province.

## READING SUGGESTION

### TIBET IN CHAINS: THE STORIES OF NINE TIBETAN NUNS, BY THE INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET



In the early 1990s, Lhasa's jails held hundreds of political prisoners who protested against China's misrule in Tibet. Among them were a group of 14 nuns, mostly from Garu nunnery near Lhasa, who were detained in the dreaded Drapchi Prison and became known as the “Drapchi 14” after recording songs in praise of the Dalai Lama and fellow imprisoned Tibetans. This book tells the story of nine of those nuns and provides a better understanding of the role played by Tibetan nuns in the Tibetan freedom movement. Through their personal stories, we are able to have a sense of their life in Tibet, of their motivation to speak up

against oppression - despite the certainty that they would be severely punished - and of the importance of Tibetan religion, culture and identity, and why the world should not forsake the Tibetan people.

Click [here](#) to download the book.

On 25 February, ICT's office in Washington D.C. organized a special episode of Tibet Talks at which two of the nuns, Ngawang Sangdrol and Phuntsog Nyidron, shared excerpts from their stories. Watch the recording of this emotional event [here](#).



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APRIL 2021

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

• 21 JUNE-9 JULY: 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council

## TIBET TALKS

### 'BREAK THE SILENCE: TIBET WAS NEVER PART OF CHINA'



The graphic features the 'TIBET TALKS EUROPE' logo in the top left, with 'TIBET' in orange and 'TALKS EUROPE' in white. Below the logo are two circular headshots: Michael van Walt van Praag on the left and a woman on the right. To the right of the headshots, a white circle contains the text '2 March' and '17:00 PM'. At the bottom, the title 'Break the silence: Tibet was never part of China' is written in white, followed by the subtitle 'in conversation with Michael van Walt van Praag' in a smaller font.

According to the Chinese government, Tibet has always been part of China. But for Michael van Walt van Praag, an International Law and International Relations expert who specializes in intrastate conflicts, and recently co-authored a research study on this issue ([Tibet Brief 20/20](#)), it's a claim without any legal basis. This episode of Tibet Talks Europe explored the implications of this new research for China as well as other states and discussed how it can help to achieve a negotiated solution for the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

[Click here to watch Tibet Talks Europe #11 - Break the silence: Tibet was never part of China.](#)