

Tibetan film-maker and former political prisoner Dhondup Wangchen finds freedom in exile

Famous Tibetan film-maker and former political prisoner Dhondup Wangchen has been able to leave his homeland and reunite with his family in the United States.



Dhondup Wangchen in San Francisco with his wife, Lhamo Tso, and their four children. (Photo: Filming For Tibet)

The good news was announced on 27 December, 2017, by the Swiss-based organisation Filming for Tibet, which campaigned for his release for many years: "Dhondup Wangchen arrived to safety in San Francisco on the afternoon of 25 December, after an arduous and risky escape from Tibet and the People's Republic of China."

The [statement](#) also quoted Dhondup as saying: "After many years, this is the first

time I'm enjoying the feeling of safety and freedom. I would like to thank everyone who made it possible for me to hold my wife and children in my arms again. However, I also feel the pain of having left behind my country, Tibet."

Dhondup Wangchen was arrested by the Chinese government in March, 2008, after he and his friend Golog

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Jigme filmed [Leaving Fear Behind](#), a documentary that interviewed ordinary Tibetan people about the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government before the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He was then convicted to six years in jail in 2009 for 'inciting subversion' and subsequently released in July, 2014, after completing his sentence. However, his freedom of movement was still limited and he

yearned to be reunited with his family. *Leaving Fear Behind* premiered with a secret screening for journalists on 6 August, 2008, in Beijing, a few days before the Olympics started. It was subsequently screened in 30 different countries, including at the European Parliament.

Dondhup Wangchen was one of the most

prominent Tibetan political prisoners of recent years. His courageous and non-violent work has played a major role in raising the awareness of the international community about the feelings and opinions of the Tibetan people. The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) is delighted that he is finally reunited with his family after nearly a decade. ■

European Parliament adopts urgency resolution on Tashi Wangchuk and Choekyi

On 18 January, the European Parliament adopted a new urgency resolution on China, expressing deep concern about two Tibetan political prisoners, language advocate Tashi Wangchuk and the monk Choekyi.



The [resolution](#) which also covers the cases of Chinese human rights activists Wu Gan, Xie Yang and Lee Ming-che "expresses its deep concern at the arrest and continued detention of Tashi Wangchuk, as well as his limited right to counsel, the lack of evidence against him and the irregularities in the criminal investigation; calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Tashi Wangchuk."

"The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) welcomes the adoption of this resolution, which underscores once again the critical role of the European Parliament in standing up for

victims of human rights abuses in China and Tibet" said ICT's EU Policy Director Vincent Metten. "We hope that this strong-worded resolution, along with the expressions of concerns by a number of European governments and EU institutions in the last few months, will have an impact on the outcome of Tashi Wangchuk's trial and on Choekyi's condition. We also applaud the call for the resumption of the dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Dalai Lama and his representatives, the condemnation of anti-Buddhism campaigns and the adoption of the Counterterrorism Law, which could lead to the penalisation of peaceful expression of Tibetan culture and religion."

Tashi Wangchuk, a 32-year-old Tibetan shopkeeper, was detained on 27 January, 2016, following his appearance two months earlier in [A Tibetan's Journey to Justice](#), a video made by The New York Times, which documented his advocacy for Tibetan language education. Wangchuk was [tried](#) in January on charges of "inciting separatism". The verdict is still pending, but the offence can carry up to 15 years imprisonment. Tashi Wangchuk remains at high risk of torture and ill-treatment.

The resolution of the European Parliament joins a number of other European officials condemning Tashi Wangchuk's detention. The European Union, for instance, has already taken a firm stand: in a statement on the [2016 International Human Rights Day](#); a [statement](#) at the UN Human Rights

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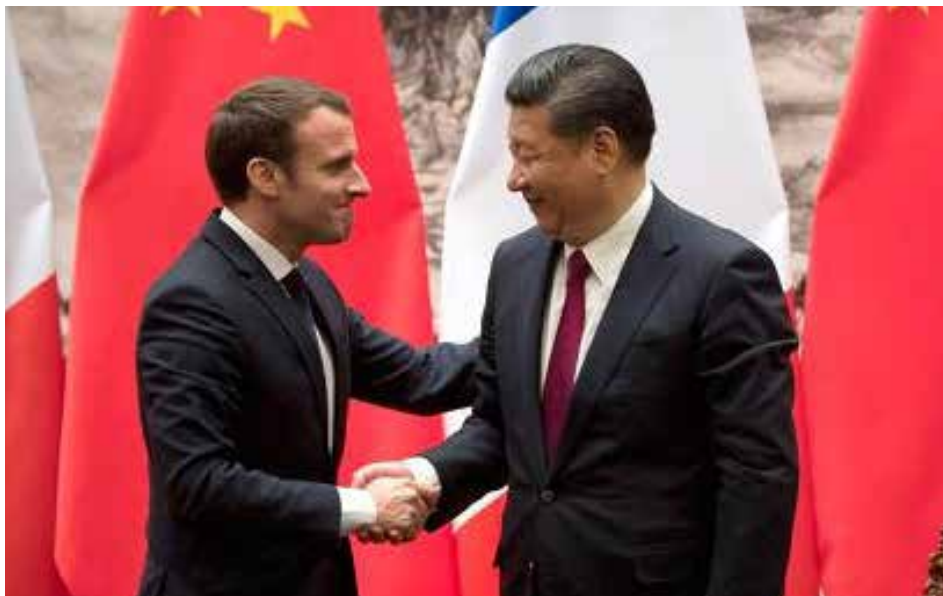
Council in March 2017, and in [a statement by the EEAS](#) after the 35th EU-China Dialogue on Human Rights in June, 2017. The most recent statement came [via its delegation in Beijing](#) on International Human Rights Day. Germany has raised Tashi Wangchuk's case on several occasions, including at the 35th and 36th sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. In February 2017, a [joint communication](#) on his case was issued by five U.N. Special Rapporteurs and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Additionally, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights referred to his case in his [opening statement](#) at the 36th session of the Human Rights Council. Furthermore, the U.S., Germany, Britain and Canada, as well as the European Union have sent diplomats

to Yushu to attend Tashi Wangchuk's trial on 4 January but were not permitted to observe the proceedings of the trial.

The resolution saw Members of the European Parliament call on the Chinese authorities to *"release the Tibetan monk Choekyi immediately and unconditionally"* and urge *"the Chinese Government to allow his relatives and the lawyers of his choice to visit him and, in particular, to provide him with adequate medical care."* Choekyi's health has deteriorated after he was reportedly tortured and forced into hard labour in prison. He is now in a critical condition, according to reports (see Political Prisoner Focus on page 6 for more information about his case). ■

French President Macron's first state visit to China

French President Macron visited China between 8-10 January - the first visit by a major European leader since the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress last October.



French President Emmanuel Macron and Chinese President Xi Jinping shake hands after a joint press conference at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on 9 January, 2018. (Photo: Mark Schiefelbein/AFP/Getty Images)

The three-day visit - President Macron's first to an Asian nation - focused on Franco-Chinese relations and co-operation in a number of

areas such as security and Africa, as well as improving business relations. Macron led a delegation of around 50 top business representatives. Climate

change was also high on the agenda - as Macron, who casts himself as a leader in the fight against global warming, now seeks allies following President Trump's decision to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate agreements. Xi Jinping's One Belt One Road initiative was also discussed, and while France had so far been cautious about the plan, Macron endorsed it.

The visit was also the occasion for President Macron to position himself as a leading voice of the European Union, by calling on China for more reciprocity in the EU-China trade relationship - meaning better access for European companies to regulated or protected sectors of the Chinese economy. As highlighted in an [opinion](#) published by Euractiv, the French President's first visit to China comes amid a complex time in EU-China relations, with growing concerns about the implications of Chinese investments in Europe and the consequences of its

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"divide and rule" strategy, which has led several EU members to refrain from criticising the country's bleak human rights record in the past few months in the fear of economic retaliations.

Ahead of the visit, ICT [urged](#) the French President to lead by example and put values before commercial interests. It asked Macron to use the opportunity to raise the issue of Tibet, promote the resumption of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue and raise concerns about incarcerated individuals, such as the

detained Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk. However, during a [joint press conference](#) with his Chinese counterpart, President Macron only briefly alluded to fundamental rights and freedom, but mainly to indicate that diplomacy between France and China would take place while respecting "differences" between the two countries. Macron later argued it was not his role to "lecture" China and that he had voiced his concerns on the human rights situation with Xi "in private" without specifying

the nature of their exchanges. He said he found this approach to be more efficient than what he called "loudspeaker diplomacy". This decision has been criticised by many observers, including [Human Rights Watch](#), French political journalist [Thierry Wolton](#) and prominent Chinese artist and activist [Ai Weiwei](#), who said "A public figure should always speak in public (...) any leader with respect for the history of humanity has a duty to speak out – and this louder than anyone else – against the violation of human rights." ■

U.S. Committee on Foreign Affairs calls for reciprocal access, religious freedom and human rights in Tibet

On 6 December, 2017, Richard Gere, Chair of the International Campaign for Tibet, testified at a Congressional hearing on U.S. Tibet policy in Washington, DC.



ICT Chairman Richard Gere holds a picture of Tibetan monk Tenga during the hearing. (Photo: Screenshot from the Subcommittee's hearing webcast).

At the hearing, hosted by the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, members of the Committee and witnesses who gave testimony called for substantive action to resolve the

Tibet issue. Their call-to-action comes amid a wide-ranging debate covering China's stature in the world, the Dalai Lama and the succession issue and the strategic importance of Tibet to the PRC, as well as other issues. The Subcommittee heard about efforts to advance the bipartisan Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act and a Concurrent Resolution in support of Tibet's place in American foreign policy. Tenzin Tethong, Director of the Tibetan Service of Radio Free Asia, and Carl Gershman, President of the National Endowment for Democracy, also testified.

Richard Gere informed the Committee of the recent self-immolation of a well-respected Tibetan monk named Tenga. He pointed out the contrast between the deepening levels of repression implemented by Chinese authorities with the Tibetan "path towards co-existence, and away from conflict." Endorsing Tibetan calls for genuine autonomy, Mr. Gere stated that China's accountability on conforming to international law must grow as it takes a larger role on the world stage.

Click [here](#) to watch the recording of the hearing. ■

Ban on access to nature reserves in Tibet raises concern about Tibetan nomads at UNESCO site

The Chinese authorities have issued a notice prohibiting access to the Hoh Xil nature reserve in Qinghai - which was granted UNESCO World Heritage status in July, 2017 - except for security personnel or other authorised officials. This raises further concern about the exclusion of Tibetan pastoralists there, and across the Tibetan plateau.

The notice, published in the Chinese state media in November, 2017, states that "any unit or individual" would be prohibited from entering three major nature reserves including Hoh Xil (Achen Gangyap in Tibetan, Kekexili in Chinese), an area of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau twice the size of Belgium. The restrictions also apply to two bordering nature reserves - the vast Chang Tang (Chinese: Qiangtang) Nature Reserve and the Altun Shan Nature Reserve in Xinjiang to the north-east. State media reported the Director of the Hoh Xil nature reserve as saying that the joint notice "aimed to crack down on illegal crossing and mining" and that anyone who did not follow the ruling would "be punished by the Public Security organs."

The Hoh Xil nature reserve was granted UNESCO World Heritage status in July, 2017. Ahead of this decision, the International Campaign for Tibet, in a report entitled [Nomads in 'no man's land': China's nomination for UNESCO World heritage risks imperiling Tibetans and wildlife](#), highlighted the significance and dangers of this for Tibetan nomads and wildlife. Although the role of nomads, the preservation of their landscape and the need for their free movement was recognised during discussion over the nomination, and

despite clear guidelines on protecting the rights of local and indigenous people and preservation of their culture, the World Heritage committee approved the application.

The notice is consistent with the Chinese government's approach in labelling traditional pastoral land use of the Tibetan plateau as a 'threat' to the environment, although the opposite is the case, and raises further concerns about the exclusion of Tibetan pastoralists at Hoh Xil and across the plateau. It also appears to counter Chinese assurances made to UNESCO that they would "fully respect" local herders and "their traditional culture, religious beliefs and lifestyle." ■

Two further self-immolations at the end of 2017

Two more Tibetans, a respected monk and a young man, set themselves alight at the end of last year, bringing the number of Tibetan self-immolators since February 2009 to the grim figure of 152.



Tenga, the Tibetan monk who self-immolated on 26 November.

The first man, a Tibetan monk in his 60s named Tenga, set fire to himself and died in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzhi), the eastern Tibetan area of Kham, on 26 November. He reportedly called for freedom for Tibet as he burned. According to Tibetan sources, armed police arrived quickly and took Tenga's body away. The same sources say there has been an immediate lockdown in the area, with internet communications blocked.

According to a relative of Tenga who is now living in exile, the elderly monk was dedicated to educating village children on a voluntary basis in Kardze. The community gave him the respectful title of 'Gen la', or 'Teacher'. Tenga had formerly been a monk at Kardze monastery, but had returned to his village,

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Political Prisoner Focus

Choekyi



Le moine tibétain Choekyi sur une photo non datée.
(Photo :Voice ofTibet)

A Tibetan monk named Choekyi, jailed two years ago for celebrating the Dalai Lama's birthday, is currently in poor health in prison, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported.

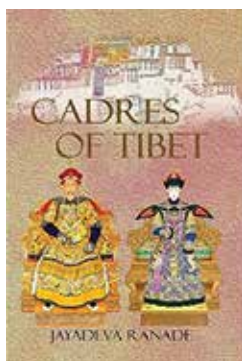
A monk of Phurbu monastery in Serta County, eastern Tibet, Choekyi was arrested in 2015 and sentenced to four years in prison on charges of conducting 'separatist activities'. Some reports

mention that he was wearing a shirt printed with the Tibetan text 'kue-gyat-ton-su', which roughly translates as 'celebrating His Holiness's 80th Birthday'.

Choekyi was reportedly already in poor health before his arrest. "He had kidney problems, jaundice, and other health-related issues which then got worse because he was tortured in detention," RFA's source said, speaking on condition of they remained anonymous. His health deteriorated further as he was forced into hard labour in prison, the source added.

Since 2008, the Chinese authorities have cracked down on displays of loyalty to the Dalai Lama, and Choekyi's is not an isolated case of Tibetans arrested for celebrating his birthday. In December, 2016, nine Tibetans, including four Kirti monks and five laypeople were [handed sentences](#) ranging from five to 14 years in prison for the same "crime". ■

Reading Suggestion



Editor:
KW Publishers
Publication date:
September 2017

Cadres of Tibet by Jayadeva Ranade

There is a lot of information and data on the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in China's official media, but information concerning the cadres who govern it, as well as some key aspects of China's policies on Tibet, is in scant supply. When available, the information is piecemeal and scattered and, as a result, denied to most except those who make a determined effort. This book attempts to make information on Tibet readily available to an interested reader. It presents biographical sketches of important cadres to help analysts and readers form an impression about them, their future career prospects and affiliations. The book also analyses the Aid Tibet Programme, which has exposed many CCP cadres across China to the conditions in Tibet and had an important influence in their career paths. Consequently, over the years it has built a cohort of CCP cadres with a stake in the CCP and Central Government's policies on Tibet.

Click [here](#) to buy this book ■

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Dando, a couple of hours away after a bout of ill health. In addition to teaching, he conducted prayer ceremonies and teachings for local people.

A month later, on 23 December, 2017, a young Tibetan man called Konpe self-immolated and died in Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), close to the site of the first self-immolation in Tibet eight years ago. In a harrowing video circulating online, a woman can be heard calling out, "Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso [the Dalai Lama], grace us with your compassionate gaze."



Self-immolator Konpe is shown in an undated photo.
(Photo: courtesy of Kirti monastery)

Konpe, aged around 30, was taken away immediately by police. By the following morning he had died, according to two monks from Kirti monastery in exile in Dharamsala, India. They also said that his father, Gyakyab, had been detained by the authorities in Barkham (Chinese: Ma'erkang) who said he owed several thousand yuan for his son's medical treatment.

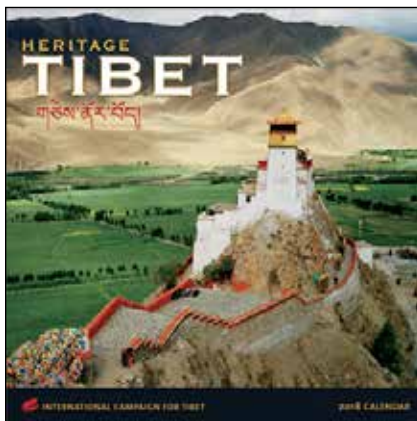
Tenga and Konpe were the 151th and 152th Tibetans to have set themselves on fire since 2009 (including six in 2017), in one of the most sweeping and significant waves of self-immolation as political protest globally. Two Tibetans in exile in India also set fire to themselves in July, 2017. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ▶ **16 - 18 FEBRUARY:**
Losar (Tibetan New Year)
- ▶ **26 FEBRUARY - 23 MARCH:**
37th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
- ▶ **10 MARCH:**
European solidarity rally in Geneva on the 59th anniversary of the Tibetan Uprising Day
- ▶ **AUTUMN 2018:**
China's third cycle Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the United Nations Human Rights Council

ICT 2018 Wall Calendar

The International Campaign for Tibet would like to wish you an excellent New Year!



If you still need a 2018 calendar to organise your busy life, look no further than ICT's "Heritage Tibet" calendar. It features 12 beautiful photographs of sites that hold a special significance and connection to the history and people of Tibet. The images include the breathtaking Yarlung Valley in southern Tibet, where Tibetans believe their first ancestors originated in the dawn of history; Samye, the first Buddhist monastery, built in the eighth century, which incorporates architectural principles of the major surrounding civilisations that Tibet had dealings with;

the renowned Kumbum Monastery, an institute of higher learning whose foundation was laid by the Third Dalai Lama in the sixteenth century and Derge Parkhang, a cultural treasure in the Kham region of eastern Tibet that has produced thousands of volumes of Tibetan Buddhist treatises.

You can buy the calendar from [webshop](#) for just 5€ - a nice gift for yourself or your friends. Each purchase will help support our work in 2018 - and beyond!