

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND SELF-IMMOLATION

TESTIMONIES BY TIBETANS IN EXILE

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood. Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms. Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel,



TIBETAN SELF-IMMOLATIONS
2009-2012



Map of Tibetan self-immolations (2009-2012). Source: ICT

Introduction 3

Six testimonies from Tibetans in exile 5

Recommendations to the international community 9

Introduction

Fifty years after the brutal crackdown that led the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of Tibetans to escape from Tibet to India, the self-immolation of a young Tibetan monk from Kirti Monastery in Sichuan Province on 27 February 2009 marked the beginning of a new form of protest against the severe repression imposed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the people of Tibet. Between 16 March 2011 and 20 April 2012, the self-immolation of 34 more people, most of whom died, has revealed the degree of tension that prevails in the region. It also overwhelmingly suggests that the PRC's policy for dealing with the Tibet question has failed.

Self-immolations in Tibet: an overview

The number of self-immolations by Tibetans in the Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture,¹ Sichuan Province, is higher than anywhere else in Tibet. Twenty five Tibetans have set fire to themselves in this region since 27 February 2009, out of a total of 35 self-immolations up to 20 April 2012. Of these 25 self-immolators, 15 (including the first, Tapey), were monks or former monks from Kirti monastery. Kirti monastery is one of the most important and influential monasteries in Tibet. It has been subject to heightened surveillance, police control (including military lockdown), the forced removal of monks, the imposition of 'patriotic education', and other internal management strictures, since at least 16 March 2008, when Chinese forces opened fire on unarmed Tibetan protesters in Ngaba town, and their bodies were brought to Kirti monastery.

In total, 25 self-immolators are known to have died following their protest; of all 35 self-immolators, 30 were men and 5 were women.

(Source: ICT)

What are the causes of such unprecedented acts of protest? Despite China's tight control over the media and information coming out of Tibet, data received from reliable inside sources makes it clear that human rights abuses in Tibet are widespread. Such abuses include not only the severe repression of any form of protest, arbitrary arrests and torture in detention, but also violations of freedom of religion, belief and association. Tibetans in Tibet are prevented from freely practicing Buddhism. Monks are regularly threatened and put under pressure. Young Tibetans are forced to seek authorization to become monks from central authorities and their overall number is regulated by the imposition of quotas and the issuance of permits and restrictions. The Tibetan identity is further oppressed by sophisticated techniques such as the use of 'patriotic education' sessions. These correspond to a set of systematic interrogation and thought-influencing techniques (such as publicly reciting political literature) to make subjects denounce the exiled Tibetan leader the Dalai Lama as a 'separatist', and demonstrate the allegiance of the Tibetan people to the Chinese government and to Gyaincain Norbu, the government-picked 11th Panchen Lama.²

1. The region is historically part of one of three traditional regions of Tibet, Amdo; the other two regions being Kham (Khampa) and U-Tsang (Central Tibet).

2. One of the most important religious leaders in Tibet. In 1995 the Dalai Lama recognized 5-year-old Gedhun Choekyi Nima as the 11th reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. Shortly thereafter the Chinese government took the young boy into custody and appointed its own Panchen Lama, Gyaltzen Norbu, viewed by most Tibetans as a puppet of the State. Gedhun Choekyi Nima is still missing. For more information on the Panchen Lama and religious repression in Tibet please see the ICT report (<http://www.savetibet.org/documents/reports/communist-party-living-buddha>)

In 1996, the first major wave of re-education campaigns was launched in Tibet for the first time since the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s. It was extended in 1998. The current wave of repression started in March 2008 when Chinese authorities launched an intensified crackdown on protests that had erupted all over Tibet, bringing thousands of people to the streets in hundreds of peaceful protests against the suppression of their fundamental rights. There were reports of excessive use of force by government security personnel. Many were killed and some of those arrested after the riots were subject to illegal forms of punishment such as severe beatings and deprivation of food, water, and sleep for long periods.

Like other minority groups in China,³ Tibetans feel their culture, language and way of life are marginalized by an authoritarian government dominated by Han Chinese. Government policies include the large-scale settlement of Han Chinese in local communities, heavy restrictions on freedom of movement and the forced relocation of nomadic communities from their grasslands to small towns, where they are cut off from their traditional ways of life. As a result, thousands of Tibetans each year flee their homeland due to the repressive atmosphere that prevails there. They risk their lives to cross to Nepal or India – a risk that has heightened since Chinese security forces have tightened border controls following the March 2008 crackdown.

This report, prepared by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) in partnership with the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), presents a selection of six testimonies from Tibetan asylum seekers in Europe. The testimonies are based on thirty interviews carried out by FIDH throughout 2011 in Belgium, France and Switzerland – the three European countries hosting the largest number of Tibetans. It aims to contribute to documenting human rights violations in Tibet in a context where independent observers, foreign researchers, human rights activists and journalists are not allowed to operate in the country.

Names have been changed for the protection of the Tibetan asylum seekers and their families still living in the People's Republic of China.

3. As per official figures, 55 ethnic minorities occupying 63.7% of the mainland along the greater part of the border make up around 8.5% of the entire Chinese population.

Six testimonies from Tibetans in exile

Story 1: Tashi

Until a few years ago, Tashi was a monk. In the monastery where he used to stay, there was an even number of monks and watchers. The watchers' role was to report everything that happened within the monastery. One day, Tashi saw a group of Chinese watchers smoking inside the monastery. He explained to them that smoking was forbidden. Tashi says that this led him to be labeled as a separatist and isolated in an individual cell for 20 days, during which time he had to attend daily patriotic education sessions. Officials asked him why he hated his government and why he was involved in separatist activities. They asked him to hand write a denunciation of the Dalai Lama. He refused on two occasions. Officials threatened that if he did not do so, he would be expelled from the monastery and sent to prison. They also threatened to arrest other monks. Cowed, Tashi wrote what he was told. This brought the patriotic education sessions to an end, but he was expelled from the monastery.

Tashi returned to his parents' home before going to Lhasa. The monastery had previously sent him to Lhasa for a year to learn Chinese, hoping he could serve as an intermediary between the monks and the Han authorities, but he had instead learned English. During his stay in Lhasa, he had met foreigners and wanted to become a guide, but this required government authorization. No former monks were allowed to apply. Tashi arrived in Lhasa with no resident or work permits. He stayed at a friend's house and helped in his restaurant.

On 14 March 2008, Tashi was in a tea shop in the Barkhor district, the old center of Lhasa, drinking tea with some friends. A group of Tibetans rushed in and said that a group of monks peacefully protesting in front of the Ramoche temple had been arrested and were being treated brutally by the police. The monks had been asking for the release of fellow monks, imprisoned several days earlier. Tashi and his friends ran into the street and saw Tibetans arriving from every direction. By the time they arrived at the temple, the Chinese army was already in place, throwing teargas, their sticks and guns drawn and ready to use. The atmosphere became increasingly tense as monks and lay people continued to pour into the streets, asking for the monks to be released. Suddenly, the slogans changed. He could hear people shouting for freedom and calling for the Chinese to leave Tibet. Tashi joined in when suddenly gunshots were fired. A teargas canister landed nearby and his eyes and throat started to burn. People were running in every direction. He heard the sound of bullets whirring past his ears. He saw an old Tibetan lady fall to the ground just in front of him, blood covering her head. He ran.

Soldiers and policemen were everywhere arresting people. By nightfall Tashi had not reached home. He was hiding at a street corner with a group of young Tibetans, when a door opened and a Chinese lady he had met a few days earlier urged him to come inside. Just as he entered her home, a group of Chinese police officers saw some Tibetans and charged on them, shooting one down and beating up the others. With guns pointed in their faces, these persons were all brutally taken away. The Chinese lady helped Tashi to leave Tibet for Yunnan province. She hid him there for over a year before managing to get his travel documents together and finally putting him on a plane to France.

Story 2: Nyima

Nyima used to be a monk in a monastery in Amdo, Qinghai province. At the age of 14, after attending the village school for five years (with classes in Tibetan), he was sent away to a bigger school where he saw Han Chinese for the first time. The majority of his classes were in Chinese and he felt isolated. After two years he left school to become a monk. The central government granted him authorization and he entered a nearby monastery of about 200 monks, where he learned poetry, traditional debating techniques and Tibetan history. On one occasion, a monk came back from India, bringing a hand-written book of teachings of the Dalai Lama as well as the symbol of the Tibetan government in exile. The book was photocopied and handed out to other monks within the monastery. Soon, copies were circulating in other monasteries.

When police officers discovered copies of the book, their search brought them to Nyima's monastery. Everyone was interrogated. Nyima was warned that he was endangering his entire future. He was pushed around, but not beaten. Police collected information on his family members and questioned them as well. The surveillance was such that Nyima decided he couldn't stay in the monastery anymore. His parents sent him to India to get a Tibetan education and enjoy religious freedom. Nyima left Tibet with a group of 25 Tibetans and a guide. The snow was falling so hard they could barely go on. The guide said they had to turn back or all freeze to death, but Nyima refused. Six days later he and ten other Tibetans arrived in Nepal and registered at a refugee center in Kathmandu. He does not know how many turned back or were lost on the way.

Story 3: Dekyi

Dekyi grew up in Kham, North-Eastern Tibet. There were no schools in her area, but Dekyi's father taught her how to read and write before and after daily chores.

Dekyi got married and had three children. She was at home when a group of Chinese officials came to search the family tent. Two to three times a year, Chinese security forces would go and search the tents of every nomadic group or clan, looking for flags, CDs of religious teachings from India and pictures of the Dalai Lama. In Dekyi's tent they found a picture of the Dalai Lama hidden behind a picture of another Lama who had not fled Tibet and to whom Tibetans were allowed to direct their prayers. The police were about to arrest her husband, when Dekyi said the picture was her own and that her husband knew nothing about it. In the following months, Dekyi was frequently summoned to the police station, or interrogated at home. Officials accused her of having connections with the Tibetan government in exile and of being a separatist. She denied being a separatist and explained that having the photo was only part of her religious beliefs. Nevertheless, Dekyi continued to be questioned over and over. She lived in constant fear of being sent to prison, wrongly accused of being a separatist. She finally decided to flee Tibet.

With her husband's help, Dekyi secretly started to sell some of their precious jewelry, which all Tibetan families possess, and prepared for her escape. Dekyi and her husband wanted to go together with their children, but they would have attracted too much attention; so Dekyi left alone.

She joined a group of nine people, including a guide. It took them 16 days of intense walking to reach Nepal. Before reaching the border, they all threw away their identity papers as Nepali police sometimes send Tibetans back to China if they have proof of Chinese citizenship. Dekyi remembers intense cold and exhaustion. She remembers her deep relief at the fact that, just as she started believing she would never make it, the entire group made it safely across the Nepalese border with no losses or serious injuries.

Story 4: Yangzom

Yangzom used to live in her uncle's home in Lhasa with her father, brother and sister. Her family had left their old farmer's house in Kham without authorization after her mother had died and the Chinese authorities had requested to use part of their house as an arms depot. Yangzom's uncle was a merchant in Lhasa, and they were allowed stay at his home in exchange for an annual contribution to the government who issued them a one-year authorization permit. However, this arrangement was not indicated in their hukou, or residence permit. As a result, the children were not allowed to go to school. Yangzom's father and sister helped their uncle, while she stayed at home and helped to look after his children.

In 1989, Yangzom was 15-year old. She was in front of her home near the Barkhor district office in Lhasa waiting for a friend, when a group of Tibetan protesters came in her direction shouting "give us back our lamas, free our lamas". Three of the higher Tibetan Lamas had been arrested the previous day. Security forces arrived from all sides. Caught in the small crowd, Yangzom saw the security forces open fire on the peaceful protesters. Everyone started running everywhere, trying to escape through side streets. Yangzom heard bullets whir by her head. People screamed and bodies fell. An old woman grabbed her arm and pulled her into a dark alleyway. Trembling, she went back home. A couple of hours later, the police went door-to-door for a cordon and search operation, and arrested many people. They came to Yangzom's house and took her father, who was detained for a few days. Later that year, she told two of her friends about her dream of going to India to see the Dalai Lama and go to school.

Yangzom left Lhasa with two older girls she knew. They left without saying anything to anyone, in order not to put their families in danger. All they had was their jewelry. They had to sell one precious pearl after another. Not knowing their value, they exchanged rare turquoises and other precious stones for a loaf of bread or a night at a stable.

Story 5: Phuntsok

Phuntsok grew up in a family of dissidents. Both his grandfather and an uncle had died in direct confrontation with the Chinese during the 1950s and 1960s. Another uncle was dispatched three times into Tibet for guerrilla operations. On his third mission, he was caught by Chinese soldiers and deliberately ate a poison pill. Phuntsok's father was jailed for 19 years in the late 1970s. In 1996, when Phuntsok was only a few years old, his father escaped to India in the midst of the biggest re-education campaigns launched throughout Tibet. As an escaped political prisoner, Phuntsok's father was in constant danger. Phuntsok grew up in Lhasa with his mother and grandmother and his older brother and sister. His mother worked tirelessly to take care of the entire family, and managed to send all three children to school and cover their expenses, despite being illiterate herself. In primary school, all Phuntsok's classes were taught in Tibetan by Tibetan teachers. There were only one or two Chinese language classes. The other classes had a majority of Chinese students. Some Tibetans who worked for the government would send their children to these classes from the beginning, so their entire education would be in Chinese.

Every classroom had a picture of Mao Zedong. When Phuntsok was 13, he turned this picture upside down. At 15, he wrote Free Tibet (Bod rangzan) on the blackboard. His teacher beat him for this, and he was then summoned to the principal's office and beaten again. Fearing for her son's security, as his acts could be labeled a national security threat, Phuntsok's mother sent him to India.

Story 6: Tenzin

Like many Tibetans, Tenzin grew up in a very religious environment at home. At the age of 19, she decided to become a nun. Tenzin experienced the close supervision of the monastery and witnessed a whole group of fellow nuns being beaten up and detained for months just to punish the monastery as a whole for celebrating the Dalai Lama being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. Tenzin and several young nuns couldn't stand the unfairness of this situation and tacitly decided to do something.

Tenzin and the other nuns decided to act during the Shötön, a traditional one-week festival that occurs at the end of the summer in Norbulingka Gardens, near Lhasa. Her group just had time to yell "Long life to the Dalai Lama" and "Free Tibet" before being arrested and taken to a detention center.

Tenzin was held at the Goutsa Detention Center for four months after which she was tried. She then spent 12 years in Drapchi Prison. She suffered numerous hardships, both physical and mental. All political prisoners were frequently interrogated, beaten and even tortured. Their wounds and illnesses were not treated; they could barely walk but still had to work many hours each day and follow exhausting military training where even the slightest mistake meant being thoroughly beaten. Psychologically abusive techniques were also used. These included false liberation, non-authorization to see family members on visit days (even as the family waited outside the prison doors), constant surveillance by both common law prisoners and warders, and a number of other tactics that left political prisoners in a constant state of fear and tension, never knowing when they would be summoned, searched, or interrogated.

On 1 May 1998, during a major ceremony at Drapchi Prison, the prison authorities had raised the Chinese flag, and moved all political prisoners in a far wing of the prison, away from the ceremony. As songs praising China were being sung, common law prisoners shouted "Free Tibet! Independence for Tibet!", a slogan that was soon echoed by other prisoners, including political ones. One week later, all guards and soldiers were posted on the other side of the prison, to once again raise the Chinese flag. A male political prisoner suddenly shouted the same slogan and gun shots immediately followed. The prisoners ran towards the windows, which were high on the wall, and saw other prisoners, all monks, being violently beaten and thrown to the ground by soldiers. The prisoners broke the windows to be sure their voices would be heard, and started to shout with them. As the soldiers were busy with the protesters in the courtyard, prison guards and police officers came rushing to Tenzin's sector. They took all prisoners out into the courtyard, dragging them with unbelievable brutality when they were too slow, and shooting into the air. They kicked them and hit them with belt buckles everywhere they could, though mostly on the head. Some prisoners lost consciousness; a nun was bleeding a lot. There was blood everywhere in the courtyard.

Recommendations to the international community

The European Union and its Member States, as well as all States engaged in human rights dialogues with the People's Republic of China (PRC), including Australia, Canada, Germany, Hungary, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States, should immediately and systematically include issues pertaining to human rights in Tibet in talks with Chinese authorities, including at the highest levels, and with PRC heads of State.

In particular, they should:

- Urge China to respect the human rights of all Tibetan people, as guaranteed by the Chinese Constitution and by international human rights treaties that China has ratified, in particular the International Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights and the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment;
- Urge China to implement the recommendations made by UN Special Rapporteurs, in particular by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food in his report of January 2012 and the Special Rapporteur on Torture following his visit to China in 2005;
- Urge China to invite other Special Rapporteurs who have specifically requested a visit to the PRC, including the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and
- Urge China to return to the negotiating table and engage in a meaningful dialogue with the Envoys of the Dalai Lama.

The same governments should suspend their human rights dialogues with the People's Republic of China, should they fail to achieve concrete improvement in human rights for people in Tibet and China, or should the dialogues be too restricted, for example, by measures like the exclusion of site visits to sensitive areas, or a sharp curtailment of NGO participation in legal seminars.

Establishing the facts

Investigative and trial observation missions

Through activities ranging from sending trial observers to organising international investigative missions, FIDH has developed, rigorous and impartial procedures to establish facts and responsibility. Experts sent to the field give their time to FIDH on a voluntary basis.

FIDH has conducted more than 1 500 missions in over 100 countries in the past 25 years. These activities reinforce FIDH's alert and advocacy campaigns.

Supporting civil society

Training and exchange

FIDH organises numerous activities in partnership with its member organisations, in the countries in which they are based. The core aim is to strengthen the influence and capacity of human rights activists to boost changes at the local level.

Mobilising the international community

Permanent lobbying before intergovernmental bodies

FIDH supports its member organisations and local partners in their efforts before intergovernmental organisations. FIDH alerts international bodies to violations of human rights and refers individual cases to them. FIDH also takes part in the development of international legal instruments.

Informing and reporting

Mobilising public opinion

FIDH informs and mobilises public opinion. Press releases, press conferences, open letters to authorities, mission reports, urgent appeals, petitions, campaigns, website... FIDH makes full use of all means of communication to raise awareness of human rights violations.



The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) works to promote human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet. ICT does the following:

- Monitors and reports on human rights, environmental and socio economic conditions in Tibet;
- Advocates for Tibetans imprisoned for their political or religious beliefs;
- Works with governments to develop policies and programs to help Tibetans;
- Secures humanitarian and development assistance for Tibetans;
- Works with Chinese institutions and individuals to build understanding and trust, and explores relationships between Tibetans and Chinese;
- Mobilizes individuals and the international community to take action on behalf of Tibetans; and
- Promotes self-determination for the Tibetan people through negotiations between the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama.

Founded in 1988, ICT maintains offices in Washington DC, Amsterdam, Berlin and Brussels, with field offices in Dharamsala, India and Kathmandu, Nepal.

Websites : Washington, DC (www.savetibet.org), Amsterdam (www.savetibet.nl), Berlin (www.savetibet.de) and Brussels (www.savetibet.fr)

International Campaign for Tibet

1825 Jefferson Place NW - Washington, DC - 20036
United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 - Fax: (202) 785-4343
info@savetibet.org

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

FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights

17, passage de la Main-d'Or - 75011 Paris - France
CCP Paris: 76 76 Z
Tel: (33-1) 43 55 25 18 / Fax: (33-1) 43 55 18 80
www.fidh.org

Director of the publication: Souhayr Belhassen
Editor: Antoine Bernard
Authors: FIDH
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FIDH represents 164 human rights organisations on 5 continents



inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Article 6: Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination. Article 8: Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law. Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile. Article 10: Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him. Article 11: (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty

ABOUT FIDH

FIDH takes action for the protection of victims of human rights violations, for the prevention of violations and to bring perpetrators to justice.

A broad mandate

FIDH works for the respect of all the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights.

A universal movement

FIDH was established in 1922, and today unites 164 member organisations in more than 100 countries around the world. FIDH coordinates and supports their activities and provides them with a voice at the international level.

An independent organisation

Like its member organisations, FIDH is not linked to any party or religion and is independent of all governments.

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Find information concerning FIDH's 164 member organisations on www.fidh.org