Blood on the Snows:
Torture in Tibet 2008-2015
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Tibet Watch works to promote the human rights of the Tibetan people through monitoring, research and advocacy. We are a UK registered charity (no. 1114404) with an office in London and a field office in Dharamsala, India. We believe in the power of bearing witness, the power of truth.

www.tibetwatch.org
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Introduction

This report has been produced by Tibet Watch as a tribute to all the Tibetans who have suffered torture as a consequence of their ongoing resistance to the Chinese occupation of Tibet.

In November 2015 China was reviewed by the Committee Against Torture (CAT). China was last reviewed by CAT in 2008, just after the Beijing Olympics Games. The award of the Olympic Games to Beijing was accompanied by numerous promises from both the Chinese government and the International Olympic Committee that the Games would generate greater openness and respect for human rights across China. In reality, security was tightened in many areas, especially Tibet, and 2008 was also the year of a mass Tibetan uprising. This was violently suppressed and previous reports from Tibet Watch and Free Tibet detailed a number of the protest incidents - this included eye-witness reports of security forces opening fire on unarmed civilians, lists of people who were arrested and believed to be at risk of torture and some specific examples of torture.

In December 2014, almost one year before the review, Tibet Watch began preparing the evidence we would later submit to CAT. We decided to work closely with Gu-Chu-Sum, the Tibetan association for former political prisoners, in order to secure the strongest possible evidence.

This report summarises the process of engaging with CAT and details the outcomes we were able to achieve at each stage. It also draws together the key testimonies and reports that we presented to CAT in our various submissions.

The process of gathering testimonies from torture survivors is never easy but there are some specific challenges in Tibetan cases. For the purposes of our engagement with CAT we needed to find evidence of torture that had taken place since the last review in 2008. Many of the protesters who were arrested in 2008 are still in prison and very few of those who have been released have managed to travel into exile. With all the security restrictions that the Chinese government has in place, it is impossible for Tibet Watch researchers to travel into Tibet and speak directly to prisoners or former prisoners. We are reliant on the testimonies of those who have escaped China’s control and are brave enough to speak out. Some fear reprisals against the friends and family they have left behind in Tibet. We have kept the testimonies of these people anonymous and also omitted some details which might identify them or their families.
The UN Committee Against Torture

The UN Committee Against Torture (CAT) is a body of ten independent experts which monitors implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by its State parties i.e. those states which have signed up to the Convention.

China signed the Convention on 12 December 1986 and ratified it on 4 October 1988. This means that, like all other State parties, China is obliged to submit regular reports to CAT on how the Convention is being implemented. States must make an initial report one year after signing up to the Convention and then continue to submit reports every four years. These are known as periodic reports.

There are a number of steps in the reporting process and opportunities for NGOs to get involved.

State Party Report:

At the start of each reporting cycle, the state in question submits their periodic report, which is published on the UN website. China’s report was due on 21 November 2012, received by CAT on 20 June 2013 and published on 3 April 2014.

Once the report has been received and published, CAT invites concerned NGOs to submit written information and comment on the initial report.

List of Issues:

Tibet Watch compiled a report together with Gu-Chu-Sum and Free Tibet and this was submitted in February 2015. We provided background information on the human rights situation in Tibet and the ongoing repression following the 2008 uprising. We presented testimonies from torture survivors and reported on deaths in custody and deaths resulting from torture. We highlighted prisoners of concern, who we believe to be at risk of torture, and we summarised the issues relating to China’s interference in the Spanish universal jurisdiction lawsuit against former Chinese officials. Finally, we addressed specific articles of the Convention that China has breached and made recommendations regarding the specific issues that we would like the Committee to raise.

Once CAT has received all of the NGO submissions, it pulls out the key issues and creates an official List of Issues which is adopted during a formal meeting, published on the UN website and communicated to the government in question.

The List of Issues for China was adopted during the 54th session, which was held between 20 April and 15 May 2015. The document was then published on 15 June 2015. The document picked up on each of the cases Tibet Watch and our partners had raised and listed each Tibetan prisoner by name.

State Response to List of Issues:

The state being reviewed is then given the opportunity to respond to the List of Issues in writing. China’s response was published on the UN website on 1 October 2015. They failed to provide any response whatsoever to most of the question regarding Tibetan prisoners.

Second NGO Report:

At this stage NGOs are given a second opportunity to submit a written report, which should focus on new information which has come to light since the first report was written. Tibet Watch and our partners compiled a second report, which was submitted at the end of October 2015.
This report provided further detail on the Convention articles which China has breached, presented new torture survivor testimonies, reported on new cases of deaths in custody (including Tenzin Delek Rinpoche) and emphasised our concern for prisoners who remain at risk of torture.

**NGO Briefing Session:**

The NGOs which have engaged with CAT and submitted written information are invited to attend a briefing session in Geneva prior to CAT’s meeting with the state delegation.

The briefing session for China took place on 16 November 2015, at the Palais Wilson, the headquarters of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Tibet Watch’s Director and Research Manager attended the session and met with the other NGOs involved as well as the Committee. Golog Jigme, who gave evidence for our first report, was also present and had the opportunity to address the Committee during the Q&A part of the session.

**State Party Review:**

CAT’s formal review of China took place on 17 and 18 November 2015. The session was streamed live online and China’s opening statement was published on the UN website.

CAT had clearly taken on board the issues raised by Tibet Watch and other NGOs. They asked China some difficult questions and repeatedly pressed for answers on issues where China was reluctant to respond.

**Concluding Observations:**

The concluding observations were published on 9 December 2015. As usual, they were written in very diplomatic language but the content was certainly a vindication of our own submissions. CAT described torture as “deeply entrenched in the [Chinese] criminal justice system”. In doing so, CAT made it clear that they had found torture to be institutional in China and not something which could be dismissed as the unauthorised action of over-zealous individuals.

CAT opened and closed the document with their concerns about Tibet. The first paragraph of the recommendations noted that China has still not accounted for “events in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and neighbouring Tibetan prefectures and counties” dating back to the previous review in 2008.
document went on to criticise a number of failures, noting that many of them are repeat failures, and again highlighted all of the key issues that were raised by Tibet Watch, Gu-Chu-Sum and Free Tibet in our joint submissions.

Furthermore, CAT noted and rebuffed China’s attempts to discredit our reports as “groundless” “allegations”, emphasising that they had “received numerous reports from credible sources that document in detail cases of torture, deaths in custody, arbitrary detention and disappearances of Tibetans”. They called for independent investigations into all reports of custodial deaths, disappearances, allegations of torture or ill-treatment, and use of excessive force against Tibetans. They also pointed out very clearly that that are “no exceptional circumstances whatsoever” that can justify the use of torture.

The two reports which Tibet Watch and our partners submitted as part of the review process are available on our website¹. In addition, all formal documentation relating to the CAT review is available on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights².

¹ http://www.tibetwatch.org/reports--publications.html
Background

The Beijing Olympics and human rights in Tibet

On 13 July 2001, the Chinese government was triumphant when Beijing won the right to host the 2008 Olympic Games. But the selection of Beijing was controversial, especially in light of China’s human rights record both within China itself and in Tibet, which China has occupied since 1950. Upon being awarded the 2008 Olympics, the Chinese government swiftly made a number of promises regarding the promotion of human rights across China for the seven years leading up to the Beijing Olympics, as well as promising freedom of movement and access for the thousands of journalists who would be in China covering the Olympics in Beijing before and during August 2008.

The head of the 2001 Beijing Olympic Games bidding committee, Wang Wei, promised that being awarded the 2008 Games would “enhance all social conditions, including education, health and human rights”\(^3\) in China. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) also claimed that awarding Beijing the Olympics would lead to improvements in human rights across China. “Some people say, because of serious human rights issues, ‘We close the door and say no [to China],’” said François Carrard, IOC Executive Director, on 13 July 2001. “The other way is to bet on openness ... we are taking the bet that seven years from now we will see many changes [in China],” he added\(^4\).

By the end of 2007 it was clear that, despite repeated pledges from the IOC and China that the Games would inevitably lead to major improvements in the field of human rights, the situation in Tibet had actually appreciably worsened. The persistent strengthening of state control over Tibetan Buddhism, together with the increasing marginalisation of Tibetan language, culture and identity represented a blatant refusal by China to live up to its earlier pledges.

Two Tibetans, Dhondup Wangchen and Golog Jigme, decided to make a film documenting the true situation on the ground in Tibet in the run-up to the Olympics. The film, entitled *Leaving Fear Behind*, was based on 35 hours of interview footage of 108 ordinary Tibetans talking about their lives and their country. As one participant explained:

“The situation is very dangerous. China was awarded the Games on the condition that the situation in China and Tibet would improve. They made promises to the whole world to grant freedoms, democracy and other basic human rights. They were only awarded the Games because they made those promises. However, after they were awarded the Games there has been no greater freedoms or democracy and repression is getting stronger and stronger.”\(^5\)

*Leaving Fear Behind* was first shown in Beijing on 6 August 2008, two days before the start of the Olympics. Dhondup Wangchen and Golog Jigme had already been detained in March 2008, just days after filming had been completed and the footage secured. On 28 December 2009, Dhondup Wangchen was sentenced to six years in prison for “subversion of state power”. He remained in prison until 5 June 2014, when he was released. He remains under tight surveillance and it has not been possible for Tibet Watch to contact him securely. Golog Jigme, however, managed to escape into exile and his testimony is included within this report.

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\(^5\) Participant in *Leaving Fear Behind*
The 2008 uprising and ongoing repression

The years of increasing abuses, almost entirely ignored by the IOC despite its own solemn pledges, created a simmering resentment amongst Tibetans both inside and outside Tibet. Such resentment surfaced dramatically, first in Lhasa and then throughout Tibet, in March 2008.

On 10 March 2008, approximately 300 monks from Drepung monastery and nearby Sera monastery marched towards the Barkhor area in central Lhasa, demanding the release of six monks who had been arrested the previous October. Between 50 and 60 of the monks were arrested at roadblocks created by the police in an attempt to stop the protest from growing and spreading to other parts of the city. Tensions in the city escalated over the next few days as thousands of security forces surrounded the city’s major monasteries. On 14 March protests erupted in central Lhasa. After years of violent repression, some Tibetans turned on Chinese residents, while armed Chinese police reacted brutally towards Tibetans.

The uprising quickly spread outside the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) into the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures in the adjacent Chinese provinces. Monks and nuns staged spontaneous but peaceful demonstrations against years of religious repression by the Chinese regime. These demonstrations were also violently suppressed, leading to further protests. More than 80 Tibetan nuns were detained in Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, in Sichuan Province, in May 2008, after a series of peaceful protests. The nuns, several of whom unfurled Tibetan flags in public and called out the name of the Dalai Lama, were protesting against the violent crackdown that had followed the peaceful religious protests in March. Nunneries across Kardze were subsequently subjected to stringent ‘patriotic education’ campaigns, aimed at coercing the nuns into denouncing the Dalai Lama.

An eye-witness to one of the Kardze protests described the reaction of the Chinese police:

“[Chinese] Police has sealed off the area, but bloodstains were still visible on the street. They said [the bloodstains] belonged to the young man, Sergah. The three [Tibetan] nuns and Sergah were beaten to the point where they couldn’t move and then thrown on to a truck as if they were bags of luggage – it is difficult to tell whether they were alive or not.”

After investigating the uprisings in March and April 2008, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) in Dharamsala, India, confirmed that, to the best of its knowledge, 203 Tibetans had been killed following the Chinese government crackdown on the protests from 10 March-25 April 2008. CTA spokesman, Thupten Samphel, stated that these figures were based on information from six different news sources, including Chinese state media.

“We confirm that the actual figure for the dead is 203, the number of injured is more than 1,000 and the number of those still detained is more than 5,715” he said.

On 23 April 2008, Steven Marshall, Senior Advisor of the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China addressed the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He spoke about human rights in Tibet and the possibilities of “finding a path to peace.” Marshall, who has documented human rights in Tibet and China for more than 20 years, made a clear distinction between the March 2008 protests and previous uprisings in Tibet, emphasising that the 2008 protests spread far beyond Lhasa and the TAR and into the Tibetan areas in the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan. Marshall also noted that,

“...faced with the choice between blaming the protests on the Dalai Lama or acknowledging acute Tibetan dissatisfaction with policies that do not deliver the rights and freedoms under China’s constitution and legal system, the Chinese leadership blamed the Dalai Lama”.

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8 Steven Marshall is also Prisoner Database Program Director of the US Congressional Executive Commission on China.
According to a 2010 Human Rights Watch study, in 2008

“Chinese security forces opened fire indiscriminately on demonstrators in at least four separate incidents, including in one area of downtown Lhasa on March 14. In order to avoid external or independent scrutiny of the security operations, the Chinese authorities effectively locked down the entire Tibetan plateau and dispatched massive numbers of troops across all Tibetan-inhabited areas. It expelled journalists and foreign observers, restricted travel to and within the region, cut or monitored telecommunications and internet, and arrested anyone suspected of reporting on the crackdown.”

Since 2008, China has been quick to smother any hint of protest, however peaceful, and has also forcibly dispersed cultural and religious gatherings. Tibet Watch has documented mass arrests, arbitrary arrests, imposition of curfews, raids on residential and religious properties, and the disproportionate use of force including the use of gunfire on unarmed civilians. The following list comprises fatal incidents that Tibet Watch has been able to verify since 2008:

- 16 March 2008, Ngaba: Between 13 and 30 people were shot and killed when security forces opened fire on protestors calling for the release of the Panchen Lama and two monks from Kirti Monastery who had been arrested the previous day.
- 3 April 2008, Thongkor: 8 people shot during a protest against patriotic re-education and the arrest of two monks. The deceased are confirmed as: Zampel, monk; Tsering Yangzom, female; Druklot Tso, female; unnamed female (daughter of a Tibetan man called Sangay); Delek, male; Tenlung, male; and Tsering Phuntsog, male.
- 17/18 August 2010, Palyul: An unnamed man was shot dead by security forces at an environmental protest. Chinese state media reported that a 47-year-old Tibetan named Babo died after being hit "by a stray bullet when police fired warning shots with an anti-riot shotgun.”
- 21 April 2011, Ngaba: Two people were killed while trying to prevent the forcible removal of over 300 monks from Kirti monastery. The deceased are confirmed as: Dhunko, male, aged 60, from Ngaba town, and Sharkyi, female, aged 64, from Nagtsang, Ja Township, Ngaba County.
- 23 January 2012, Drango: Norpa Yonten and one other, unnamed, Tibetan man were shot dead at a protest against repression and the arrest of peaceful protestors. Tibet Watch can confirm that a further 36 people were injured, 12 seriously.
- 24 January 2012, Serthar: Two people, one named Popo, were fatally shot during a protest against China’s repression.
- 26 January 2012, Dzamthang County: One young man named Urgen, aged 18-21, shot as crowds tried to prevent the arrest of a local activist.
- 9 February 2012, Drango: Yeshi Rigsel and Yeshi Samdup (brothers) were shot dead by security forces while visiting their family home in Norpa village. It is reported that they had taken photographs of the

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10 Ngaba town, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Qiang and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
11 Thongkor (Ch: Donggu) town, Rongtrag (Ch: Danba) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
12 Palyul (Ch: Baiju) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
13 Ngaba town, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Qiang and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
14 Drango (also known as Drango) (Ch: Luhuo) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
15 Serthar town, Serthar (Ch: Seda) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
16 Barma (Ch: Zhongrangtang) township, Dzamthang (Ch: Rangtang) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Qiang and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
17 Drango (also known as Drango) (Ch: Luhuo) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
protest in Drango the previous month. Chinese state media reported that two murder suspects had been shot after resisting arrest and shooting at police officers.

- 6 March 2012, Pema: One Tibetan man, Choeri, aged 28, was shot dead when security forces fired at a crowd calling for the release of detained protestors. Two other men were wounded in the same incident.

- 12 August 2014, Kardze: Three men died of their injuries after being shot during a protest against their village leader’s arrest. The deceased have been confirmed as Jinpa Tharchin, aged 18, Tsewang Gonpo, aged 60 and Yeshe, aged 42. They were taken into custody following the shooting and their bodies were returned to their families on 18 August 2014. Two other men were hospitalised with gunshot wounds following the same incident and their condition and whereabouts remain unknown.

- 21 November 2014, Driru: Ngawang Monlam, leader of Wushong village, was killed by local Chinese authorities. A number of his supporters were also arrested.

NB: There have been numerous other incidents where security forces have used tear gas, batons, electric prods and gunfire on unarmed civilians, resulting in varying degrees of injury. The list above is limited to those incidents involving fatalities.

Self-immolation protests

Since February 2009 a new pattern has emerged of self-immolation protests by Tibetans. The first Tibetan to self-immolate was a monk in his twenties called Tabe who set himself alight in protest at religious restrictions in the restive area of Ngaba County on 27 February 2009. Chinese armed police shot at Tabe, extinguished the flames once he had collapsed to the ground and then transferred his body to a nearby van which drove away to an unknown location. Tibet Watch and other Tibet Support Groups have been unable to confirm whether he died of his injuries.

Self-immolation protests by Tibetans of all ages and social background have continued throughout Tibet since 2009 and the number currently stands at more than 130 people. The response from the Chinese authorities has been harsh and, in some cases, collective punishments have been imposed on entire communities following self-immolation protests. The act of self-immolation has been criminalised and at least one Tibetan has received a suspended death sentence for allegedly inciting self-immolations. Seven other individuals have also received lengthy sentences for the same ‘crime’.

Increased surveillance and security

Security in Tibet has remained tight since the 2008 uprising. Freedom of movement for Tibetans has been severely restricted and surveillance measures are constantly increasing. Tibet Watch has received a significant number of reports of people being arrested simply for having made comments on social media which were critical of the Chinese government. For example, a young mother was arrested in Driru County on 13 October 2013 and charged with expressing anti-Chinese opinions on the social networking application Wechat. Numerous writers, singers and other artists have also been arrested for producing material which celebrates Tibetan identity and culture.

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18 Tagkhar township, Pema (Ch: Banma) County, Golog (Ch: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province
19 Shukpa and Denma villages, Lochung (Ch: Luoxu) township, Sershul (Ch: Shiqu) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
20 Wushong village, Driru (Ch: Biru) County, Nagchu (Ch: Naqu) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region
21 The protest took place in Ngaba town, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Qiang and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
22 For a full list of self-immolation protests, see: http://freetibet.org/news-media/na/full-list-self-immolations-tibet
23 Driru (Ch: Biru) County, Nagchu (Ch: Naqu) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region
24 See Free Tibet’s campaign for Tibet’s Jailed Musicians for further examples: http://freetibet.org/get-involved/tibets-jailed-musicians
In October 2013, Driru County was placed under lockdown after a political re-education campaign sparked a series of protests. Any movement in or out of the county was restricted and many residents who were staying in Lhasa or other parts of Nagchu Prefecture at that time were unable to return home. On 8 October a notice was issued to all police stations and security checkpoints in Lhasa by the Old Lhasa Neighbourhood Headquarters. The notice instructed all police and security personnel to “observe the movements of Tibetans from Nagchu and increasingly interrogate the suspicious people from Nagchu”. The notice also provided details of the monitoring procedures and the code language to be used. All Tibetans from Driru were to be referred to as “tourists”. Driru was defined as “A Sector”, with additional sector codes given to certain other counties within the prefecture. Personnel who observed Nagchu Tibetans moving from their area into that of the next station or checkpoint were to advise their colleagues via two way radio using the terminology: “…tourists from A sector entered your area, please extend hospitality”.

One of the consequences has been fewer Tibetans managing to travel into exile and the Tibetan Reception Centre in Dharamsala has reported a distinct drop in the number of new arrivals. This has been largely attributed to the increasing levels of surveillance and border security.

In 2014, Tibet Watch obtained a copy of official guidelines issued by the local government of Purang County on “rewards” to be handed out in exchange for information. Purang County is located in the sensitive border region close to Nepal and India. It is also the location of sacred pilgrimage sites such as Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar. The border with Nepal in Purang County has previously been a route used by Tibetans escaping through Nepal. A Tibetan woman in her late thirties who tried to escape Tibet via Purang County recounts her experience of torture in detention:

“I was caught by police when I was quite close to reaching the border with Nepal, that first time I tried to leave for India. I was travelling with a group of six of us from my village, including two children. But we were stopped and arrested by People’s Armed Police border security at a checkpoint. They took us to a local border security headquarters in Purang. There, they started to question us separately, and we were all kicked and punched by the soldiers. “After five days in detention, we were transferred to the county police detention centre. They locked me up in a solitary cell with both my arms and feet shackled. I was kept there for some days. Then I was transferred to the police station for seven days and then taken to a labour re-education camp.

“When I was in a solitary cell at Purang county police detention centre, it was so tiny that only one person could fit inside it and move around a bit. But later on, at the re-education camp, it was much worse because the cell was totally dark. I could not see a thing. I was locked in there on my own for a few days. I have no idea why they left me in there – later on, other prisoners told me that prisoners could not survive much time in that cell. They said that even if a prisoner was healthy beforehand, if they spent a month in that cell, they might lose their mind.

“It was very normal to be beaten and tortured in detention. Sometimes when they were interrogating me the police beat me with electric batons and belts. Later on I could feel nothing because I lost all sensation in my body. Several times I lost consciousness, I think this was when they used electric batons and gave me shocks. When I was lying on the floor they would kick me. When I regained consciousness I would find myself again handcuffed in a cell alone. One day at the labour camp they locked me up alone without any food or water. Once they hung me up by my arms for a whole night from the ceiling.

“At the beginning of my sentence, they told me that my thinking should be reformed through labour, this is what re-education through labour means. So I had to do a lot of hard work, carrying stones and bags of sand. Two or three armed Chinese guards would follow us to supervise our work and sometimes in the fields outside the labour camp.

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25 Information passed to Tibet Watch – source identity withheld.
26 Purang (Ch: Pulus) County, Ngari (Ch: Ali) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region
“Sometimes, when we felt so sick that we were unable to move, the guards at the camp registered that we were absent from work. This affected our overall record in the camp and we knew that if we missed too many days we might have to stay longer. After a year, of hard work every day with poor food, my health got worse and worse. I got really sick and felt I was close to death. I was released from the camp then, I think because the Chinese authorities were worried that I might die in prison. They summoned my relatives to prison and they had to sign a document guaranteeing that I would not get involved in any activities that are against the law.

“After I was released my parents took me to hospital, where I stayed for a few months, and when I went home again, the labour camp officials still came to visit my family to check up on me. After a few years, I was finally able to safely escape again into exile in India.”

According to the International Campaign for Tibet, Deputy Party Secretary of the TAR (and Secretary of the Party Committee on Politics and Law in the TAR), Deng Xiaogang, visited border security and People’s Liberation Army bases in Purang County in May 2014. Deng Xiaogang was cited by state media as saying that border security checkpoints were key to maintaining social stability in the Tibet Autonomous Region and that security personnel should study Chinese leader Xi Jinping’s speech, with particular reference to his emphasis on maintaining social stability in Tibet and its importance to national security.

The copy of the document obtained by Tibet Watch is titled “Document on Giving Rewards for the Protection of Stability and Management of TAR Border Areas’ Farmers and Nomads” and outlines how rewards will be offered for “information on illegal escape and entry into the country”, “information affecting the stability of border areas”, “information on separatist activities of the Dalai Clique” and “information related to terrorist activities”.

The rewards offered range from 500 Yuan up to 50,000 Yuan. The majority of the rewards offered are 10,000 to 20,000 Yuan. The document further states that:

- Any person having knowledge and collecting and arresting the concerned person and bringing him to the Public Security Bureau (PSB) will be rewarded two and a half times more than the prescribed reward;
- For collecting information and helping the PSB in the arrest of the above described person will be rewarded one and a half times more than the prescribed reward; and
- For information collected by two or more farmers and nomads, an average reward will be given according to the number of people.

The rewards offered are financially substantial and there is a significant risk that anyone arrested on any of the specified charges will be subjected to torture or other mistreatment.

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29 Original document in Chinese language – source identity withheld. Although not published on the official Purang County website, this document has been referred to in articles published on the County website, such as in July 2014: http://www.chinatibetnews.com/2014/0714/1346384.shtml
30 Approximately €70 / £52 / US $80
31 Approximately €6,970 / £5,216 / US $8,000
32 Approximately €1,394 to €2,788 / £1,043 to £2,087 / US $1,600 to US $3,200
Torture Survivor Testimonies

Golog Jigme

Golog Jigme was initially arrested in March 2008, following his involvement in the film project Leaving Fear Behind. He was severely tortured while in detention. He was released and re-arrested two more times before disappearing in September 2012. On 18 May 2014 he arrived at the Tibetan Reception Centre in Dharamsala, India. The following testimony was provided to Tibet Watch shortly after his arrival.

I have several names. People call me Golog Jigme and Golog Jigme Gyatso. My birth name is Lotsa and my monk’s name is Jigme Gyatso. People in my home town also call me Jigme Lotsa, mixing my lay and monk’s names. I am 43 years old. I am the third oldest of the five children in our family. I was born in Serthar County in Sichuan\textsuperscript{33}. I became a monk at the age of 15 and later joined the influential Labrang Tashi Khyl Monastery in Sangchu County in Gansu\textsuperscript{34}.

First arrest

I was first arrested on 23 March 2008. On that day, I was asked by Golog Lhabzo (Lhabzo means painter in Tibetan) to say some prayers in the house where he paints, which is located near my Labrang Monastery. At first I refused his request, saying that I was in danger and there were many troubles I was related to, but he insisted I come to his studio and do the prayers of Tara. That morning, I felt that I was in danger of being arrested, that someone was following me and that my mobile phone was being monitored. While doing the prayer, I also told one of my friends that I sensed something was going to happen to me.

Most of the monks who were invited to the prayer at Golog Lhabzo’s painting studio had participated in the protests of 14 March 2008 (which the Chinese call the 3.14 protests). When they were leaving for home in the afternoon, after the prayer, I stayed back, fearing police would be waiting for us at the end of the bridge which leads towards our monastery. I told them to go home without me, saying I was staying back to talk to Golog Lhbzo.

After that, I went into Golog Lhabzo’s kitchen and watched TV for a while. On the local news channel there was coverage of protests in Sangchu County which were being condemned. After 15 minutes, dozens of standard police officers and Special Police Units (SPU) of Kanlho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP) stormed into the house. They were led by Captain Zhang, the head of the Kanlho TAP police department. Captain Zhang was in plain clothes and the rest of his officers were in uniform. There were more police outside, with different weapons and electronic rods.

Upon entering the house, Captain Zhang reached for his mobile and started to dial a number. Fearing that the phone call was to me – in order to identify me – I switched off my phone immediately. Without the mobile phone ringing to identify me, Captain Zhang walked back and forth in the house several times. Everything went deathly quiet. Golog Lhabzo started arguing with the police saying his house and studio was a registered company and had all the legal papers of a company. He asked what the reason was for the police storming into his home.

\textsuperscript{33} Serthar (Ch: Seda) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
\textsuperscript{34} Sangchu (also known as Labrang) (Ch: Xiahe) County, Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province
In the middle of their argument, I stood up nervously to back up Golog Lhabzo and told them that as security personnel of a country they should treat people with respect. I was told by a police officer that it was none of my business. I replied that it wasn’t a matter of one individual’s business and you couldn’t tame people by intimidating them with weapons. The officer looked at me sternly. I told him not to look at me like that. I asked them to tell us the reason for having all these forces here.

At this point they all went outside and had a look at some photos Captain Zhang had brought along with him. Then they re-entered the house and looked around closely, pointing guns at us. They asked us to take out our phones and lay them down in front of them. I switched on my mobile phone and put it down on the floor. As soon as Captain Zhang started dialling again, my mobile rang. They asked whose phone it was and I admitted it was mine. One policeman tried to take the phone but I snatched it back and held on to it. They started beating me all over my body with their gun butts and electronic rods. I was beaten like you beat leather to soften it.

They put a black cloth over my head and I was dragged outside and put in a vehicle. Later I was told by friends that there were two armoured vehicles and approximately 1,000 armed security personnel in the area; all there to carry out my capture.

They took me to the police station in Sangchu County and started beating me again. I was also beaten on the way and some of my clothes were ripped off. Blood was dripping off the edge of my robe. At the police station, they took away all my belongings, including my mobile phone and wallet.

I found out later that those of my fellow monks who had attended the prayer ritual and left earlier had not been arrested. I believe that many of them would have been arrested if they had stayed with me at the house. There were several other monks in the house who were kept at gunpoint for half an hour after my capture but after that they were released.

I was beaten until 11 p.m. that night and then taken to another part of the police station for interrogation. I was told to kneel down by one of the interrogating officers but I refused, saying I would only do that for my kind parents and teachers, not for people who give harsh orders. I was beaten again.

During the interrogation I was asked why I was there. I told them: “How could I know? You brought me here.” They said there were over a thousand monks at Labrang Monastery and that, out of all of them, I alone had been brought to the police station for a special reason. I argued back bitterly that if they had a reason then they should just tell me. What was the point of asking me?

They didn’t ask anything specific. They just repeated a few questions such as “Why did you come here?” and “What do you know?” I was interrogated in this manner for the rest of that night, the whole of the next day and the whole of the next night. I was not allowed to sleep. Later in my detention, after I had been tortured, they started asking more specific things. One time they brought a print out of all my phone calls and asked me why I had made so many calls. They were sarcastic, saying that even the secretary of the TAP and county officers do not make so many calls. But all that was ahead of me. At this early stage the questions were just vague and frustrating. On the third day, I was transferred to Manker Prison in the capital of Sangchu County.

In that prison, I spent one night and half a day. Then I was handcuffed and taken into a changing room to put on a prison uniform. It was there that I saw Sangay and Jigme Guri, a senior monk from Labrang Monastery who is also known as Labrang Jigme or Jigme Gyatso. I found three identical uniforms hanging on the walls. One was for me and the other two were for Jigme Guri and Sangay.

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35 Jigme Guri is also known as Jigme Gyatso or Labrang Jigme. Like Golog Jigme, he is a senior monk from Labrang Monastery and recognised as a ‘Tibetan Hero’. (http://freetibetanheroes.org/jigme-guri)
At first I struggled to keep my monk’s robes but they forcibly took them off me and put on the uniform. There were no shoes for us and we were told to walk barefoot. When I tried to put on my own shoes a policeman slapped my face for disobeying their orders.

The three of us were put into separate police cars and I was taken to Kachu (Ch: Linxia) Prison in Linxia City. I spent that night in Kachu Prison. The next day, I was hung from the ceiling by my handcuffs, which were put through a hook in the ceiling. My toes just touched the cold floor. That day, I was interrogated by two Chinese officials. They couldn’t understand Tibetan and my Chinese was not good enough to understand their questions. We had trouble communicating with each other and they started punching and kicking me to entertain themselves. I was hung like this for a whole day.

When it got dark, I was taken down and brought to a hot wood/coal burning stove. My handcuffs were removed and then I was re-handcuffed with the hot chimney of that stove between my arms. The stove and its chimney got hotter and hotter and my arms, chest and both sides of my face got burned and blistered. I kept turning my face, so the middle part (nose, chin and forehead) would not burn. At one point, I couldn't stand the heat any more. So I gave a hard tug to the chimney with my handcuffs. The hot chimney fell down and hit the neck of one of the police officers and burned him. My action made the policemen angry and they started beating me.

That night, I was taken into a freezing cold room with all the windows open. My guards went to sleep with warm clothes on. I couldn’t sleep with all the pain of the burns on my chest and, even worse, I became very cold and started to get a fever. The next day, I was hung by my arms again. In total, I was tortured for two days and one night in Kachu Prison. Then I was taken back to the police station in the capital of Sangchu County. No-one bothered to interrogate me that night so I was able to sleep. The next day I was taken to what seemed to be a hotel room and kept there for five days.

After the hotel stay, I was taken to another place; my head, once again, covered with a black cloth. I could feel the bumpy road and hear several iron gates being opened, one after another. After my release, I went to check out this place and found out it was three kilometres away from Kachu military hospital in Linxia City. I also found out this place was notorious for torturing people with a device called the iron chair (also called the tiger chair).

When the black cloth was taken off my head, I found myself in a big room with an iron chair along with all sorts of torture devices laid out in front of me. They told me to have a look at these devices and I told myself that I was doomed to being beaten that day. As it started getting dark, some Chinese officials arrived and I recognised the man who had arrested me. Captain Zhang came towards me and hit my neck with a police baton several times. Captain Yu, another police official from Kachu, kicked me a couple of times. Then they all started beating me and slapping me with shoes.

After this, someone said in Chinese to hang me up. I thought it would be like before when they hung me from ceilings hooks, but I couldn't see any hooks or pipes in the room. To my surprise, I was tied to the iron chair, with both legs and hands shackled. Now the weight of my whole body was born by my shackled legs and wrists, without anywhere for my upper or lower body to lean against.

I was hanging from the chair, just above the floor, and they gave me electric shocks as well as kicking me in the head; all the time calling me “separatist” and shouting at me to confess, without telling me what to confess to. The pain of being hung from this iron chair was so great that I could not feel the pain from their

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36 Linxia City - county level city, Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province
37 Chinese security personnel sometimes use hotels to detain prisoners. This practice is denied by the state but well documented by NGOs and also noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture following his mission to China in 2005.
38 The torture that Golog Jigme describes is slightly different to some other accounts of the iron chair or tiger chair. In this case the chair seems to have been used as a vertical frame from which to hang the prisoner – several times facing in towards the chair and at least once facing outwards.
beatings and kicking. I saw the time on the watch of a policeman. It was around 9:00 p.m. when I was put onto that chair and I was left there until dawn the next morning. I would guess it was around 7:00 a.m.

Jigme Guri, who was also tortured in the chair, told me later that he couldn’t make it to more than three or four minutes without fainting because of the pain. I wished I could have fainted while hanging from the chair, but I didn’t. Later I was told by one doctor that it may have been something to do with my bones.

I was removed from that iron chair occasionally, but then faced beatings on the floor. Then they put me back onto the chair again. In total, I was put onto the chair seven times and I sustained scars on my wrists and ankles from the restraints.

I was put onto the chair without any clothes and they tried all sorts of tortures while I was there, like beating my back with tiny metal sticks, kicking me and giving electric shocks to my mouth. The pain the chair caused was too extreme to feel any of the pain caused by the metal sticks and kicking. When they gave me electric shocks, I could feel nothing. I only smelt the burning of my own flesh.

There were around 16 or 17 policemen there to force me onto the chair whenever I struggled. Once, they hung me forward from the chair. This made me feel that my chest was going to split into two and all my intestines were going to fall onto the floor. I became very dizzy and could not see properly. I thought I was hung in this position for four or five hours, but I was told later that this would have been impossible because I would be dead by then. But I am quite sure I was in this position for almost two hours.

I remember I heard someone saying in Chinese that it kills people if they are kept in that position for too long and that I was to be taken off the chair. I found out this was an older policeman. If this older man hadn’t come to remind them, they would definitely have killed me from hanging me in that position.

During all my time under arrest, this was the worst form of torture I suffered. One of my ribs was broken and my joints suffered very badly. Whenever I remember that chair I feel scared, even to this day. I felt like it would be better to die than survive being tortured on that chair. I was kept on the chair days and nights. At one point, my feet got swollen, and to my horror, all my toenails fell off.

Besides the iron chair, the pain of thirst was the second worst torture. Due to the blood loss from my body, I felt like I was dying from thirst, but was only given a very small amount of water. Over time, I got used to hunger and sleep deprivation, but never to being thirsty.

I sustained various injuries during my detention and torture, including injuries to my backbone, eyes, hands and feet. Some of my ribs were broken and my knee joints were dislocated. On one occasion they said I would have been lucky to freeze to death. They were implying that it would have been better to die to escape the hell of their torture. The only Tibetan phrase that the police seemed able to speak was “Cho Soje” which translates as “kill you”.

During the interrogations, they used to ask, “What did you do? With whom do you have connections?” They would display several photographs of Tibetans and ask who they were and what they were doing. When my answers didn’t satisfy them, the officer would clap and the rest of them would blindly start hitting and kicking me. It felt like something out of a gangster film. This sort of torture became routine.

I was detained and tortured from 23 March 2008 until 12 May 2008. I still vividly remember my date of release on 12 May as it was the day when the Wenchuan earthquake39 happened.

At no time during my three detentions did I ever receive a visit from a lawyer or any medical treatment. The Chinese authorities did not treat me in accordance with their own law. Nor were my family or

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39 A magnitude 7.9 earthquake in Sichuan Province which, according to BBC news reports, left 87,150 dead or missing, 370,000 injured and 4,800,000 homeless.
monastery informed of my whereabouts. They knew I had disappeared, but nothing more. The authorities consider us Tibetans worse than animals. They do not value us as humans. Once you enter the torture centre, you feel your life is over. Death awaits you. So whether we confess or not, we are their victim. Knowing these things helped me to keep strong.

**Second arrest**

I was arrested again in 2009 on 10 April. I was with my friends in a restaurant when they came to take me. I was kept in captivity for approximately four months in a police detention centre in Sangchu County.

The main reason for my second arrest was my involvement in the dissemination of information about the protests in Tibet in China’s brutal response. They learnt that I spoke to some international media, including Radio Free Asia, and told them that “all of Tibet is controlled in a crackdown by the Chinese”. I told them during the interrogation that even civilians are under surveillance by China’s armed forces, with tanks everywhere threatening ordinary Tibetans in many cities and areas, including Sangchu. I asked them: “Isn’t it true? If it’s not a crackdown, then what is it?” They did not answer me.

The other accusations against me included involvement in activities that “endangered national unity”; having a connection to “splittist groups”, which refers to HH the Dalai Lama; and membership of “terrorist groups”, which is a reference to the Tibetan Youth Congress. They told me that I had a way out if I confessed to connections with these activities and groups.

I told them some things. I told them about my work on the documentary *Leaving Fear Behind* and the dissemination of information to the media outside of Tibet. These are things I did. But the accusations of involvement in other activities and being a member of the Tibetan Youth Congress were untrue so I did not admit to them. I was also asked to revile HH the Dalai Lama. But this is unacceptable.

During this time in detention, they beat me with electric batons but didn’t torture me that much compared to the previous time. Once again, I benefited from international attention. Early in my detention there was a period of five days when I was not fed food or water but suddenly they started feeding me again. I wasn’t aware of the reason at the time but later I came to know that it was because of the constant efforts of international human rights groups and especially Reporters Without Borders.

Eventually I was released, on 29 July 2009, but they kept watching me. At least two security personnel were always following me and all my phone calls were tapped. Every week I had to report to the county police about my daily activities and I had to get their permission if I needed to go anywhere outside of Kaniho TAP.

**Third arrest and escape from detention**

I was arrested once again on 22 September 2012.

*It is reported that Golog Jigme’s residence within Labrang Monastery was razed by a Chinese work unit early in September. His was the only building in the monastery complex that was destroyed and he was obliged to take temporary refuge with one of his fellow monks. On 20 September he received an invitation to visit a family in Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu Province, to perform Buddhist rites. On 21 September he travelled to Tsoe (Ch: Hezuo) County to submit paperwork and obtain travel permission from the prefecture level authorities. He stayed overnight in Tsoe County and disappeared the next day while on his way home to Labrang Monastery.*

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This time my hands and feet were chained but they didn’t torture me. Instead they lectured me on how disloyal I had been to China and they also tried to make out that I was a criminal. They accused me of inciting people to set themselves on fire and being responsible for all the self-immolations that had taken place across Tibet.

Then suddenly they announced that after the national day of the People’s Republic of China, which takes place on 1 October each year, I would be taken to one of the military hospitals in Lanzhou where I would receive a medical check-up to ensure that I was free from any illness. If any illness was found, I was told that I might receive the necessary injections. Despite my expressing reservations about the need to visit a hospital so far away they were insistent.

However, I had information from other sources and I already knew that the medical check-up was fake. They were planning to kill me with one of those injections.

After learning of their plan, I decided to escape on 30 September. Of the two guards, one had to leave early for an urgent matter and the other went to sleep at midnight. After praying to His Holiness I was able to free myself from my chains. I noticed that the other guards were busy playing Mahjong and I took my chance. As I proceeded towards the main gate, I was lucky enough to find it open. At once, I ran out of the gate.

For two months I ran and hid across the mountains, after which I was shocked to find out that the Chinese government had accused me of murder. They had announced a reward of 200,000 Yuan to anyone with information on my whereabouts.

The Chinese government never made any such accusation when I was in their custody and I certainly never had any intention of killing anyone. I thought of protesting this false allegation by setting myself on fire before one of the police stations in either Gansu or Sichuan. However, after careful consideration, I decided not to proceed with this act. I thought that, perhaps, they were ashamed of my escape and were trying to cover it up with these charges. If I set myself on fire they would only continue to defame me by making such unimaginable allegations. But if I were to live I could continue to be of service to the Tibetan cause and so I changed my mind.

After I escaped I went into hiding, no longer wearing my monk’s robes and dressing in common clothes. Those days were not easy, particularly during the first few months, because of the many injuries my body had suffered. I felt as if my body was a crushed and dysfunctional motorcycle. Even to this day I continue to have severe pain in my backbone and ribs and my knee dislocates whenever my body gets cold. I am now part of the evidence of how the Chinese are torturing and oppressing the Tibetans under their regime.

I cannot speak of the places I hid during my journey to India. I can tell you that I hid through mountains, rivers, forests and remote areas. For one year and eight months I hid and ran.

Now I have left Tibet I feel blessed and happy. I received a blessing from HH the Dalai Lama and a very warm welcome from groups and individuals in India. On the other hand, my body has arrived in a land of freedom but my heart feels greater anxiety because in Tibet I could at least involve myself in activities to revolt against injustice but here the feeling of helplessness surrounds me. This pains me. My biggest hope is that a day will come for me to safely return to Tibet. In the meantime, my future plan is to be a voice for Tibetans inside Tibet, to bring their aspirations and difficulties to the world stage and make sure that governments, NGOs and individuals hear it.

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41 Capital city of Gansu Province
Tenzin Namgyal

I was born in Kham, in Tibet, in 1974. I fled to India at the age of 15 to become a monk. At the time I travelled from my home to Lhasa and then on to the Nepal border, paying people along the way to take me to safety. I was a monk in south India for eight or nine years before having to return to Tibet in 1999 for family reasons. My mother passed away a few years after I returned to Tibet. I joined Dargye Monastery in Kham and stayed there for over ten years.

I visited India again in 2006 to take part in Kalachakra Buddhist teachings. I was encouraged by the activities carried out by Tibetan groups and their campaigns to promote human rights in Tibet. When I returned home I wanted to do something for Tibet and the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing were coming up.

2008 protests

I travelled to Lhasa in early 2008 and planned to bomb some bridges, railway or roads. I planned to bomb some sites - not people - but then the plans got changed. On 10 March 2008, protests broke out in Lhasa. I had already decided in February 2008 that it was better to protest than to bomb sites. I heard about the 10 March protests on that day and I also heard about monks being shot and killed in Lhasa. I heard on the phone from Amdo that protests were taking place there too.

By 15 March 2008 I was at my monastery in Khargang of Kardze County. There were a lot of people around and I was too scared to protest. I was looking for people and friends to protest with in Kardze. We were hearing a lot about protests taking place all over Tibet.

We decided we would protest around 18 or 19 March but military started coming in to the area on 15 or 16 March. On the evening of 17 March 2008, military arrived at my monastery. They had been tapping our phones and already knew about our plans to protest. I was told that the authorities needed to see my hukou [household registration card] and also wanted to pass on my phone number to other authorities. They tried to arrest me but I said I needed to go back to my living quarters. A lot of monks were waiting outside the monastery and I planned to escape.

The next day, in anticipation of my arrest, about 200 monks planned to go to Kardze County to demand that I be released. The authorities either knew about this or guessed that something might happen and around 1,000 military came to the area. The military waited on the bridge with machine guns and marked three lines on the bridge. Those who crossed the first line would be talked to but those who crossed the third line would be shot immediately. Two tulku [reincarnate lamas] and all the officials of the township went to the bridge to see the situation and stopped the monks on the way. They told the monks they would sort everything out.

The authorities said that I was a separatist and those who supported me were also separatists. They had searched my home and found Dalai Lama cassettes, photos and confiscated them. My relatives had sent me a lot of these things – the text of Buddhist teachings, Kalachakra teachings by the Dalai Lama and photos. They were all taken away, although I only discovered all of this after I came out of prison.

Arrest and torture

I was arrested and taken to the detention centre in Kardze County. They said I would be investigated for several months but I didn’t hear anything further about the investigation. They couldn’t give me a formal sentence as they had no proof and I didn’t admit to anything so I was in prison for one year and two months with no charges or sentencing.

42 Traditionally the eastern region of Tibet
43 Khargang (Ch: Kagong) township, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
When we first arrived at the detention centre they left me in a room alone for about half an hour. They told me to think hard. After the waiting time had passed, the person they sent to interrogate me was someone I knew, knew well, and had known for a long time, almost like a relative. He asked why I was there and I said that I didn’t know. He went out and asked others why I was there and they talked a lot.

When he came back in he poured me some water and said that I must have done something serious to be there. He said Dargye Monastery had 200-300 monks, Kardze Monastery had 200-300 monks, there were lots of other monks too and I was the only one who had been brought in - so I must have done something. He asked me what I had done and I said I didn’t know. He repeated that I had done something, that I was splitting the nation. I said sorry and that I wasn’t splitting the nation.

He asked me who I had been phoning and where I was getting calls from. I said that I make and receive all kinds of calls and that I was talking to all kinds of people. He asked if I talked to friends in Lhasa who were involved in protests - and if I talked about the protest to friends. My mind became dark when he asked me this question, since I talked about the Lhasa protests to my friends abroad on the phone. Sometimes I would run out of battery as I talked so much on the phone. I talked to them about the Lhasa protests and scenes of 10 March in the local area. But I told him that I just talked about family issues and nothing else.

He told me to speak honestly and that he could help me as we had known each other a long time. He asked me which countries I called and who I was talking to. I told him America, Germany and Australia. He asked me if I called Lhasa. I said I didn’t call Lhasa, only to family and nobody else.

He asked me who I called in Kardze County. When he asked me this question I was frightened because I was arrested on 17 March 2008 and we planned to protest on 18 March so I made frequent phone calls to people in Kardze County. I told him that I made many calls to people in Kardze but we discussed everyday things. They asked me questions for five hours that night. I had arrived at 7pm and was questioned until midnight. They gave me some food.

On 18 March about 600-700 monks from Dargye monastery and other people protested in Kardze County but I was in the detention centre during this time and was not part of it. Among the protesters were monks who had supported me and also other people from Kardze County.

I was interrogated for a second time. Two people called Dorje and Dawa interrogated me and they told me to answer honestly, not like last time. After I said that everything I had said before was true, they hit me across the face. Then they kicked me so that I fell to the ground. They told me to speak truthfully. Dorje continued to question me as Dawa received a phone call and went out. He talked a lot on the phone. Dorje questioned me a lot but I said that I had nothing more to say other than what I’d already said.

Within 17 days about 200 prisoners came to be detained in Kardze County. I thought to myself that I would never tell the truth, even if they were to send my parents to interrogate me, as I didn’t want harm to come to any person by telling the truth.

They hit my head roughly with a bamboo stick. They told me I was the one who caused trouble in Kardze County and I was the main person who instigated people to carry out the protests.

More officers arrived on 27 March, including Chinese officers. I thought maybe they had been sent from Dartsedo County. They carried one long gun and one small gun. They told me to speak truthfully. I had to speak in a mix of Chinese and Tibetan. Even after I answered their questions they said that I was lying and hit me with a chair so that I fell to the ground. They removed my monk’s robes and forced me to kneel. They beat me fiercely and they said they were going to kill me. They said that however many people like me they killed, nobody would ever find out.

They told me: “We are going to kill you so say your prayers as you are religious man. It is better you don’t look at us, we don’t want you to harm us after you are reborn as a ghost.” They made me turn around and
I was bleeding a lot from my injured face. They beat me a lot with a long stick and short stick, even with the gun. They also hit my knees with an iron covered stick. Even today I have many scars on my knees. They tortured me through various ways but I didn’t admit any wrongdoing so they hung me on the door by my hand chains. Due to this, I have many scars on my hand even today. We were many political prisoners together and they mistreated us all the same way. All the political prisoners were beaten and tortured. None of them were treated better than me, but some were treated worse than me.

**Prison conditions**

I was put into section number 10 first, then number 8, then 7, then 11, then 9. I was in five different sections altogether so I came into contact with many prisoners. The prison in Kardze County is considered the worst out of 18 or 19 prisons throughout Tibet. Some prisoners who had been transferred through almost all the prisons said that Kardze County’s prison was the worst one out of all prisons in Tibet.

We didn’t have any mattresses or blankets to put on in the night. It was only the political prisoners who didn’t have these. The other prisoners who were there for killing and stealing had mattresses and blankets but we didn’t have those things.

We were given food twice a day. At 10:00/10:30 they’d give us rice. The food was really poor. We had only a small ladle of rice and three pieces of potato. Sometimes they added leftover food of prison guards to ours. I stayed in the same cell for about four months and then I was moved. There were other Tibetan prisoners there who were very weak, couldn’t stand up and were in pain - prisoners such as Palden Tsering and Tsedor from Derge County. I would give my food to them. The food was really very poor.

All our heads were shaved except for the nuns, who were forced to grow their hair. There were two cameras in the cell. We were not allowed to say prayers or talk. Every morning at 8:00 a.m. we’d have to get up straight away. We had to do everything in a military style otherwise we’d be beaten. We had to keep our clothes and everything in our cell in a certain way, even those empty bottles which we used to drink water with had to be put properly in a line. Sometimes they checked our cell three times a week. Forty or fifty guards came together to check the cell with their guns. They stepped on our clothes and turned around everything inside the cell.

Usually in Chinese prisons, most of the prison officials are related to some industries and prisoners are engaged in manual labour. Since I was kept in Kardze prison I didn’t have to do such work. But they sent us...
to the vegetable gardens to plant vegetables. We were also made to clean toilets and do other cleaning work.

At first when I was taken away my family and friends thought that I had died and later I heard they did many prayer offerings for me. It was only after four months or so that they learned I was still alive. One political prisoner, a Khenpo [abbot], was going out of the prison for medical treatment for tuberculosis. I wrote my home phone number on a piece of toilet paper and handed it to him, so he called my home to let them know I was in prison. They were relieved I was alive but they still didn’t know much about my situation and they didn’t really believe what the Chinese were telling them. My aunt came to the prison gate bringing clothes, food and money - 500 Yuan - and pleaded on her knees, crying, for these things to be given to me. They said this wasn’t allowed and that she had to go back home.

**Political education**

We had to learn all about Communism and learn patriotic songs to sing for officials. We had to learn a song called 没有共产党就没有新中国 - “Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China”. We had to sing these songs to officials who visited the prison, usually once a month. All prisoners had to learn these songs, otherwise you would get beatings from prison guards, and there were no exceptions made, even if you didn’t know Chinese language.

We were taught that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a separatist operating from India. They said we needed to learn the laws according to the Communist Party, laws about the unity of nationalities and to be against the separatists. If you didn’t understand during the classes or were unable to sing those Communist songs they’d punish you by putting you in a very small room in which you couldn’t even stand up.

**Release from prison**

If you’d completed your sentence and were healthy, they’d release you on the right day and you’d be free to go. If you were in poor health they’d call relatives or friends to come and pick you up. Once 17 nun prisoners were released together and their family, relatives and friends came to receive them. There were a lot of people and about 60 motorbikes. Later the Chinese police criticised the nuns, saying they were at fault that so many people came to receive them from prison. After that they didn’t inform prisoners’ families about their release - they sent the prisoner directly to their home.

When I was released from Kardze prison they told me on the day that I would be released and they let me gather up all my things. All the other prisoners could see that I was getting ready to leave. I took off my prison uniform and gave it back. I was taken by car to the PSB office. They told me that I was being released and that I was a separatist and had admitted my wrongdoing. They showed me five or six pages about me. They said that I’d been imprisoned for a year and two months but was now being released for health reasons.

They told me I wasn’t allowed to talk to people abroad. Also, I would have to report whatever was being discussed in the monastery. They also told me I wasn’t allowed to travel or move around freely, that I’d have to seek permission. And that I couldn’t return to my monastery for six months. Every month I had to report to the main PSB office in person and to the local PSB office three times a month. I had to sign many documents. If any kind of emergency situation arose I was told I would have to report to the local PSB office every three days.

The first person I saw after my release was my aunt and when she saw me she was crying a lot. I also nearly broke down in tears but I controlled myself as many Chinese police were around us and I didn’t want them to see my tears.
Kelsang Tsundue

I am 29 years old. I escaped into exile in 2014 and am currently studying in Sera monastery in Mysore, south India. I was born to a Tibetan family in Choeshul village in Trotsik Town of Ngaba County.  

2008 protests

I headed to Ngaba County’s main town to protest against China’s rule in Tibet along with 17 other monks from Trotsik monastery on 16 March 2008. We started protesting with the slogans “Let His Holiness the Dalai Lama Return to Tibet” and “Let Tibetans in exile and Tibetans inside Tibet be reunited”. We walked along ‘Heroes Street’ in the main town. Gradually, more and more Tibetans, including monks, nuns and lay-people, joined the protest. Then we realised hundreds of Tibetans were at the protest.

Just a few moments after the protest had started, Chinese paramilitary police, army and police arrived. Initially they barricaded the protesters from the main points of the street. Then a number of trucks were moving alongside the crowds. The security personnel were in black uniforms, with masks on their heads so that they could not be identified and guns in their hands pointed at us. Suddenly, they began to shoot at the crowd randomly. During that time, a young girl, seemingly around 20 years old, was shot in front of my eyes. A few Tibetans took her to hospital but I don’t know what happened to her afterwards. I think another man was shot dead but I didn’t see him myself because of the distance between us and the large number of protesters surrounding him.

On the same day, there were many protests happening in Ngaba, including at Kirti monastery. Thirteen Tibetans were shot dead on that day and a monk named Trinley Tsering (from Kirti monastery) who took photos of dead bodies and bullet wounds to send abroad was arrested. He was later sentenced to nine years in prison and is currently serving his term in Mianyang prison.

Later the same night, we came back and pulled down the Chinese national flags from the local government office and the government school based in Trotsik town. The next day, Chinese official cadres shut down Trotsik monastery and its religious activities. They closed the school and the monks were detained in the school hall. Every day they conducted meetings on Patriotic Re-education for the monks. Between the meetings they interrogated the monks, particularly those who participated in the protest.

At the end of a morning meeting a few days after the protest, Chinese official cadres read out a list of names, including mine and eight other fellow monks from the group, and asked us to stay back. Nine of us were from the group of 18 monks who had travelled to the county town for the protest on 16 March. When they asked us to stay back, many other monks also stayed back because they knew something would happen to us. But there were so many security personnel who forcefully dispersed the monks.

Arrest and detention

Then they arrested us. Chinese police handcuffed us together in pairs, put us in their vehicle and took us to a county detention centre. The moment we reached the detention centre, they pulled us out of the vehicle and, without a word, paramilitary police started beating us with the butts of their guns and batons. Then we were put into a prison cell which contained over 40 people. It was far too crowded. The county detention centres were all over-populated at that time as they had arrested so many Tibetans from the region. The food was terrible in the prison. They gave us the leftover food of the police and prison staff twice a day by adding water (the food was almost like water) in which we could find cigarette stubs and other dirty things. We were detained there for a few days.

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45 Choeshul village, Trotsik (Ch: Hezhi ) town, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) County, Ngaba (Ch: Aba) Qiang and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province

46 Heroes Street in Ngaba acquired its name after becoming the location for a number of self-immolation protests.
On the morning of 31 March, the prison guards called me to come out. I thought they might interrogate me. When I came out, there were around 30 paramilitary police waiting, fully armed. They forced me down and shackled my hands. Five of my fellow monks and some other monks from nearby monasteries were already there, shackled in pairs. All of us were put into the vehicle on our knees. They took us to Mongshen prison.

On the way to Mongshen prison, the vehicle got stuck in the Trochu (Ch: Heishui) area due to snowfall. So they forcefully took off our clothes and used the fabric to wrap the tyres. It took us a day to get from Ngaba county town to Mongshen prison.

They sent us to different prison cells, so that each pair of Tibetans was placed with five Chinese prisoners. The Chinese prisoners treated us badly but the prison guards never cared about us, even though they could see everything. Later we came to know that the prison officials intentionally instigated this kind of thing from behind the scenes.

On 12 May 2008, a large earthquake occurred in Wenchuan and some other areas in Sichuan. The prison officials, guards and other staff ran away after locking the prison cells and gates. Fortunately, the prison didn't collapse nor was it badly damaged. After the earthquake settled down, they came back and took us over a mountain and we stayed there overnight under tight military surveillance to avoid the following aftershocks. The food became worse after the earthquake, which led to the weak health of prisoners. Many of us were unable even to stand on our feet. Some of the prisoners would lose consciousness due to malnutrition.

A month after the earthquake, a group of us were transferred to Kakhok (Ch: Hongyuan) prison. In addition to myself, there were five monks from Dhongri monastery, five monks from Trotsik monastery and a Tibetan named Namse. That time they shackled all of us in pairs and covered our heads with black cloths.

After six months in Kakhok prison, my five fellow monks (Tsultrim, Rabten, Gedun, Kelgym and Thubpa) were sentenced to one year and nine months in prison each. The monks from Dhongri monastery were sentenced to one year and five months each.

**Court hearing and sentencing**

Then they took me back to Ngaba County and Ngaba People's Court sentenced me to two years on charges of being the main instigator behind the monks from Trotsik monastery who participated in the protest and for taking down China's national flags in Trotsik Township and at the government school. They labelled me a separatist.

Days before my court hearing, two Chinese men visited me claiming they were my lawyers. They asked me to pay a 500 Yuan fee to each of them. I rejected their claims and demanded a lawyer of my own choice but this wasn’t allowed. Finally I had to sign their documents and these two Chinese men said it was fine if I didn’t pay them but they asked me to sign the document which stated that 500 Yuan was paid to each of them.

During the court hearing, neither my family members nor a lawyer of my own choice was present. I didn't have the right to say anything when the court declared the accusations, my alleged guilt and the court decision. I wasn’t given any opportunity to clarify the accusations which were read out. A false confession of “mine” was also read out and I could not say anything in defence.

**‘Reform Through Labour’**

I was imprisoned for around one month in the county prison while court procedures were taking place. Afterwards I was transferred to Mianyang prison where I served the rest of my prison term. There are five sections in Mianyang prison, with around seven hundred prisoners in each section. The work that each
section does is different from the others. I was in section IV and we were making shoes. We had to work from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. (except meal times) under the policy of ‘reform through labour’ and without any form of payment. We had to get up at 6 a.m. and finish breakfast and get ready before 7:00 a.m. Work started from 7:00 a.m. and continued until 11:00 a.m., when we had one hour for lunch. Then we worked again from 12 noon to 5:00 p.m. We had one hour for dinner and evening work took place from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Then everyone had to go to sleep at the same time.

We did not receive any form of payment for our work. However, they gave out punishments, including beatings, or being put in a cage, either to individuals or to the whole group, if prisoners were unable to complete the planned number of shoes. They gave a certain target number of shoes to be made every week. If prisoners worked well, then they gave points to individual prisoners. Prisoners with sentences longer than three years could receive a reduction in their sentence if they earned enough points. But this wasn’t applied to the Tibetan prisoners.

On 31 March 2010, I completed my prison sentence. That day, Ngaba County police came to Mianyang prison and secretly dropped me at my home door without informing my family about my release. Because other former political prisoners had been received by local Tibetans and monks with great honour, they took me home secretly to avoid a public reception.

Once I was released, I saw that a police station had been set up inside the monastery. They interrogated me several times every month and I had to seek permission if I wanted to travel out of the county.
Gonpo Thinley

Gonpo Thinley is from Village No. 7 in Serkhar (Ch: Shengkang) Township of Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) County, in Sichuan Province. Gonpo Thinley was detained in Kardze in June 2008 at the age of 18 and served two and a half years in total in Kardze County Detention Centre, Dartsedo Prison and Deyang Prison. He was released in December 2010 and escaped to exile in 2014. He currently lives in South India.

2008 protests

In 2008, a lot of people demonstrated in their respective hometowns by shouting His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s name and shouting about the pressures of living under the duress of martial law imposed by the Chinese government. They uttered openly anything that came to their minds.

I had gone to Kardze County that year. At that time, Tibetans weren’t allowed to move around town freely without explicit permission and papers, and there were a lot of restrictions on our movements. The military and police made sure that the orders were carried out. I was a monk then and we had to have the monastic authorities sign our permit papers for travel and then obtain the signatures of the county office.

The morning when everything started, one of my brothers, Nyida Sangpo, who is also a monk, woke me up and we caught a vehicle from the nearest road. The vehicle was headed to the main county market and, since the vehicle had Kardze County registration, we were allowed to pass through. We reached our destination at around 8am. On checking the area, we saw that there weren’t many people around. We decided to wait for more people to be present in the vicinity before beginning the protests. At around 10am, the area started filling up with people and military, riot police and local police personnel, who were in big groups.

In the Kardze County area, there is a popular place called Do Sengye (Stone Lion), where a lot of people visit. That morning there were a lot of people there so we had around 300 or so leaflets which said, “His Holiness should be allowed to return to Tibet” and “We need freedom in Tibet”. My brother headed in one direction and I went in the other. We were able to distribute the leaflets here and there for only about five minutes before the military and police and plain clothes police arrived, numbering maybe 300 or 400. They started beating us for the next two to three minutes and then took us away.

The message being sent to the people from the law enforcement was a warning; a threat that if people were to carry out any demonstrations, they had guns, grenades, batons and they were all in groups at strategic places of the market. The Tibetans hardly had any space to even move around freely.

During those times, officials or authorities in Kardze County didn’t make any announcements to introduce themselves or to explain their presence. When I carried out my demonstration, they caught me straight away and started beating me with sticks and their guns. No reasons were given for detentions either, let
alone an arrest warrant.⁴⁷ They didn’t even try to explain why they were detaining, hitting and beating me; they came and just did it.

My family knew that I had demonstrated in Kardze County but had no idea about the detention, where I had been taken, and whether I was still alive or dead. Even my monastery’s people, my family and everyone else only knew that I had demonstrated and the law enforcement had detained me. Beyond that, no one had any knowledge of my situation, although a lot of people around the demonstration area saw me being detained.

**Kardze County Detention Centre**

Kardze County Detention Centre was quite small. In 2008, most people detained or jailed were political prisoners, only two or three were criminals. When I first came in, I found out there were around nine or ten prisoners, most of them political.

There wasn’t a specific place for sleeping as they don’t provide anything. First, when they bring you in, you have to strip off all your clothes and leave on only a thin underwear set, on the top and bottom. They didn’t give us any covers for warmth while sleeping. The prison where I was later kept had a lot of political prisoners and most of them, whom I know, were suffering from urinary infections, kidney infection and a lot of health problems. There was a latrine, but since we hardly had anything to eat, the water that came from the latrine had to be drunk to quench our thirst.

My prison cell had a tiny ventilator window, with sliding glass panels to open and close it, a long way away from the floor. The ceiling was pretty high and since Tibet is a cold place, the walls would be all covered in ice. In the mornings when we opened the window to let in fresh air, it would freeze our faces. With barely anything to cover us, it was freezing all the time.

There was a small prison yard. I think it was meant for strolls and exercising for the prisoners, but political prisoners were hardly allowed to go outside as was usually allowed for criminals. During six months in the detention centre, I wasn’t allowed outside even once.

In 2008, the political prisoners were segregated into two types, dissidents and splittists. I came into the second type according to this categorisation. We were taken to Kardze County’s Detention Centre and the rest were put in the Kardze Township Detention Centre. At the time, I didn’t know the difference between detention centres and prisons. I didn’t even know how many prisons there were in Kardze County. They took me to this big house with walls surrounding the compound. Later, I found out that this was Kardze County Detention Centre.

After we were caught, my brother and I were shoved into this small space of the police vehicle. We didn’t have any idea where they were taking us. It wasn’t a long drive to the detention centre, only about five minutes. Since they had put us in such a small space, they didn’t have room to hit or beat us on the way.

When we got out of the police vehicle at the detention centre, there were a lot more of the different law enforcement people - military, police, riot police, etc. They kicked and hit us with their batons. I didn’t know much Chinese then, so I asked my brother what they were saying and was told that we were the people who had protested and now we would receive good beatings. After showering us with blows from their sticks, batons, guns, they then took us to a tiny cell.

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After they put us in that tiny cell, one of the top officials of Kardze County came and asked us the reason for our protest. I replied that a lot of Tibetans were being imprisoned and tortured unjustly; that land belonging to Tibetans was being grabbed by the Chinese; that we Tibetans were put under so much duress and repression that we are suffering greatly; that the Dalai Lama, who is our beloved leader, is not free to come to his land; all these things are causing a lot of distress and suffering. Those were the reasons for our protest.

I was around 18 years old then and they told me that I was young and didn’t understand everything. They said, “You Tibetans had nothing to eat and drink and were starving when the Communist Chinese government came and rescued you. None of you remember the good that we did.” They told us that we were young so we would learn to understand and think accordingly.

They didn’t provide us with legal counsel or anything. I was in the detention centre for more than six months but my family wasn’t informed about anything and had no idea where I was all that time.

They tortured us for about a month and a half. I and many others were severely beaten during the first two days. Our eyes turned blue and our noses were running. I couldn’t even walk by myself and two guards carried me to the cell. Our eyes remained black for many days. They beat us with batons. When I started to feel a little better, they would leave me a day or two without torture and then continue with the beatings and torture. The interrogators were tired after we told them we came here by ourselves and, no matter what they did, we would not change our thinking.

They tortured us using electric batons, metallic water pipes and handcuffs. They would also tie our hands back, one going above the shoulder and one from below. Sometimes they put beer bottles in between, causing a lot of pain. Slapping and kicking are not even counted as beatings. When they beat us, I remembered the promise I made as we entered the prison that I would not have any regrets, even if I was killed. I encouraged myself when I was being beaten up and was never going to submit. The same is the case with other Tibetans. They were also saying that the beatings motivated them more, rather than demotivating them.

During my six months in the detention centre, I was never seated on a chair but always on my knees during interrogation sessions. If our answers didn’t satisfy the interrogator, they would pour boiling hot water on us. The interrogators were both Tibetan and Chinese. When a Chinese person questioned us, there was a Tibetan interpreter as we didn’t speak Chinese.

Our heads were burned. They also tied both hands up on the ceiling and beat us on our feet with batons. We were hanging above the ground. Sometimes they also used electric batons in our mouth, which caused us to lose consciousness. During cold days or winter, we were put in cold water. We shivered and weren’t able to talk with our chattering teeth. During the beatings, they interrogated us and their questions were about how many of us were there and if we had any groups who financed our activities. We answered saying that we didn’t protest for any money, we stood up for the Tibetan people and our rights. “What was the point of protesting for money if you were to kill me today, then how would I be able to enjoy the money?” I asked.

They told us that, after what we had done, they took signatures from our family and friends as a guarantee that we would not repeat the same thing. This was done in order to secure our quick release. They also said that Kardze County had paid a lot of money for our release and that we should think carefully. However, we rejected the offer and this led to us being beaten again. We thought from the beginning that we would not regret it even if we were killed.

The guards would often threaten us. They would say, “Now that you have protested, your whole families will face detention too”. Sometimes they would say, “You have lands and fields so the government will
take all that away from you”, “Your decision to protest will lead to your family suffering too” and “If you
don’t change your tune, if you don’t accept your mistakes, then we will shoot you right now”.

I think the teachings of Buddhism helped me. When they beat us, my feeling was that it is their job, they
get paid for this and they have no choice. Never have I ever thought that I would take revenge for their
beating me. They beat me because they were getting paid to do this and some of them said that they had
no other choice but to torture us like this to get the information out because if the other officials got the
information that they didn’t get, they would be demoted, their salary would be reduced and they would
have family problems.

In 2008, many Tibetan prisoners were in very bad health condition: some couldn’t even stand, some
prisoners bled so much after the beatings that we feared they might die and some prisoners were near to
dying. As political prisoners, we were not allowed to say anything. They would let the political prisoners
die and would then call the family members to get the body. They told us not to speak out. If we did, we
would be beaten.

The food was very bad. What they fed us wouldn’t fill our stomachs. Every day, in the mornings, they gave
us a very small amount of water. For lunch they gave us rice and some vegetables, like potatoes. The
portions were very small, not enough, very little rice and two small pieces of potato. We were made to
survive on that for months and months. So we were not even able to stand up properly due to weakness.
All of us suffered from weakness from lack of food and water. We reached a mental state where we prayed
for enough food in our bellies that we were willing to even take more beatings and torture as long as we
were not hungry and weak anymore.

Once the summer of 2009 arrived, we, all the political prisoners, had to work. At the time this included me
and my brother, Nyida Sangpo, also Dandey (Pema Choephel) from Kardze County and Thoknye (also
known as Jampa Choephel), who is at Sera monastery in South India now. Thoknye and I were in the same
cell and there was one more young man who was also a political prisoner. The rest were all
criminals. One
day, we were told to dig out all the excrement from the toilets and to spread it on the fields. Two or three
of the criminals asked us not to handle the excrement as we were monks. The authorities enquired as to
why Thoknye and I were not doing any work and, when we explained, they said that monks had to do the
work. They made us get into the excrement pit and dig out the waste. We did that for two days.

The detention centre had mostly Tibetans in it and the majority were political prisoners. The political
prisoners who were older and had been sentenced for longer periods were the guides and teachers to the
rest of us. We became like a family, looking out for each other, sharing our little joys and problems. We
had many problems due to lack of proper food, the regular beatings and torture, but we younger ones were
taught how to hold our heads high and to keep our minds strong despite everything. We gave
encouragement and support to each other and that kept us afloat.

We weren’t allowed to meet our families. Our families weren’t even notified of our whereabouts. It wasn’t
only in my case; it was the same for all Kardze County’s political prisoners.

As soon as we were placed in detention, as part of the detention centre’s rules, we had to read or recite
out loud some pieces of writing. Since, initially, I didn’t know or read any Chinese, they made me read it in
Tibetan first but, ultimately, I had to memorise the text in Chinese. Since I was young, I learnt quite quickly
but for the older political prisoners, either robed or lay, it was hard and they were beaten severely.

One day, they took us out and we saw a huge number of military personnel outside - around 500 to 600, I
think - and they were fully armed. A lot of ropes were laid on the ground nearby and small wooden planks
had writing on them for each of us. For example, mine said: Name - Gonpo Thinley. Below that it said “I’m
a Splittist”. At around 12pm, they took only about 12 of us, the political prisoners. Each of us had three
military personnel handling us, our hands were tied behind our backs and the wooden placards were put around our necks with the ropes. One of the officers told us that it was a day to test us, to see if we had learnt to behave and not protest anymore.

During 2009 the farming community of Kardze County decided to protest, saying that until all the political prisoners were released, they would not continue farming. The military and other law enforcement powers, of course, retaliated by populating these communities with more military and beating and detaining anyone who protested openly. When they took us out, the farming community’s protests had just recently been curbed. We, the political prisoners, were placed in vehicles in pairs, each with our respective three army escorts, and we were taken on a ride. It filled us with intense fear. All of us were headed to the Kardze County’s main market area and there they paraded us around the whole place once. People who knew us, either myself or the rest of the prisoners, saw us and came to realise that we weren’t dead.

Seven days after the parade, about nine of us were taken to Dartsedo Prison and they told us that if we behaved well then we would be fed well by the people in charge and they would let us live, but if we didn’t then we would be shot dead right then and there. Most of us were set in our minds to die if needed. There was no fear when we heard their threat but we realised that a protest in a place where there weren’t many people would be useless as the word wouldn’t spread far. They led us with our hands and feet cuffed and we were put in the middle of the police van.

**Dartsedo Prison**

All the administrative work was done while at Dartsedo Prison. All our documents were done there so they didn’t beat and torture us, they only interrogated us and did the paperwork. At Kardze County Detention Centre, they beat us regularly and interrogated us. The food and water there were very bad, hardly enough to fill our stomachs but at Dartsedo prison, even though the food didn’t taste that great, they at least gave us enough to fill our stomachs.

I still didn’t get to meet my family because they told us that political prisoners weren’t allowed to have family visits because we were splittists.

The cell in Dartsedo Prison was big and I was kept in cell number 1 with three other Tibetan political prisoners and a Chinese criminal prisoner. The three Tibetan prisoners were Sonam Penpa from Lithang (Ch: Litang) County, who was arrested after participating in a peaceful protest in Lithang County in 2008; Tsewang Lhundup from Tawu (Ch: Daofu) County, arrested for spreading “free Tibet” literature in Tawu County on 22 June 2008 near Choden Karpo; and the other one was a boy from Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) County.

The toilet facilities were the same as in Kardze County Detention Centre - we didn’t have separate toilets, only the one inside the cell. I heard that there were some separate bathrooms, but prisoners could only use them when they happened to encounter some good prison guards. One time, a Chinese prisoner appealed for permission to wash his body, he got the permission, so we also did the same and they gave us permission too.

We political prisoners enjoyed a good relationship. I was kept in cell number 1 and Losang Jinpa, who also fled into exile after his imprisonment, was in cell number 2. We were very close to each other. They sent us to work in the vegetable fields during the summer season. Usually we liked to work rather than stay in the cell all day but they didn’t send us out to work that often. Mostly they used to send the Chinese prisoners who were familiar to them. They sent us out only to do the tough work when Chinese prisoners refused to do it and they recommended us to them by saying we could do it.
It was while I was at Dartsedo Prison that I was formally sentenced, along with my brother, Nyida Sangpo. Nine prisoners received their sentences while at Dartsedo Prison. One day, by brother and I were taken to a big house by car. The house was full of people and armed police, who read a letter about my crimes and their reasons for my arrest. They sent us back to the prison and brought us in again the next week. I was sentenced to two years and six months, while Nyida Sangpo was sentenced to three years in prison.

Before announcing my sentence they provided me with a lawyer and said that if I didn’t like the lawyer I could hire another one myself. I replied that I neither wanted to hire my own nor wanted the one they arranged because they were all Chinese and I didn’t trust them. So I told them that I wouldn’t mind if they hanged me, I rejected the lawyers. They forcefully arranged a lawyer by saying it was the law and I had to have one.

The text below is a translation of the document (below left) which Gonpo Thinley was forced to sign accepting the services of a Chinese lawyer who was appointed to deal with his case. Gonpo Thinley states several times in his testimony that he doesn’t understand Chinese and didn’t want a lawyer. It is clear that Gonpo Thinley had to sign this document under duress and may not have understood the contents.

Authorisation of Power of Attorney

The client Ebu Cinai, because of being suspected of inciting separatism, has applied to receive legal support from the Ganzi County Legal Centre. His request has been accepted. Quan Jianbo, from the County Legal Centre, has been appointed to assume the office of defender (or deputy) of the suspect for inciting separatism. This is valid from the day of issue by the power of attorney until the end of the examination of the legal case.

Entrusted jurisdiction as it follows

The client: Gonpo Thinley
18 June 2009

Note: This document has been produced in four copies, respectively handed to: the client, the legal help centre, the staff undertaking (the case), the organ hearing the case.

I didn’t have any chance to speak apart from saying “yes” and “I agree” to their question of “Do you admit that whatever you have said is true?” Their sentencing letter said that I was arrested on 21 June 2008 and kept at home for six months to acknowledge my individual faults. I was sentenced for not accepting the charges against me.

I don’t know Chinese well but I was asked by another Chinese prisoner if I was kept at home for six months to acknowledge my faults. I replied that I wasn’t and that police had taken me directly to the detention centre as soon as I was arrested. The Chinese prisoner told me what my sentencing letter said and told me

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48 The Chinese title of this document is 授权委托书 (jiaoshou weituoshu) which translates as “an authorisation of power of attorney”. It should be noted that the meaning of the term ‘power of attorney’ under Chinese law seems to be different to the meaning this term often has in other legal systems.

49 俄布次乃 (Ebu Cinai) is Gonpo Thinley’s name in Pinyin (the name given to the transcription of Chinese characters). It is quite common for Tibetan names to sound different once transcribed from the Chinese characters.
that I should tell the prison staff to change it. I explained to them and requested them to change it. At first they became uncomfortable as I asked about it in front of many other prisoners but later they changed the content of my sentencing letter.

They kept me at Dartsedo Prison for three months. After I received the sentence of two years and six months, I was taken to Deyang Prison in Sichuan Province.

**Deyang Prison**

Deyang Prison is a big prison with about 2,700 prisoners. We were around 40 Tibetan political prisoners. There are many Chinese prisoners in Deyang Prison and many other ethnic minority prisoners too. Most of them said that they had never seen any Tibetans before 2008.

We had to do military training for two months when we first arrived at Deyang Prison. We had to wake up very early in the morning and the duration of the military training was two hours each day. During that time the weather was very hot. It was as hot as the summer weather in Delhi\(^\text{50}\) and we didn’t have proper food to eat. The older prisoners faced many problems during the military training as they were old and had never done such exercises in their earlier years. Our feet swelled up and we could hardly put our shoes on. During that time we thought it was better to die rather than live, but we still encouraged each other by saying that everything would be fine after some time. They were testing us to see whether we did the military training well or not. If we passed the test we were sent to work. They never sent Tibetan prisoners out together to work. Each Tibetan political prisoner was sent out along with other Chinese prisoners, in groups consisting of four prisoners and one staff member.

380-400 prisoners were kept in each prison unit at Deyang. Out of 380-400 prisoners there were only four or five Tibetans. All of us were not kept together in a cell, we were kept separately. Each prison block was a several-storeyed building and Tibetan prisoners were usually kept on separate floors. We rarely met each other. If we did meet somewhere we were not allowed to speak in Tibetan, we were forced to speak to each other in Chinese. We weren’t allowed to come out of the prison block except to work.

We had to wake up before dawn. We ate a small tingmo (steamed bun) and a small bowl of porridge for breakfast, washed our face and cleaned the bed, then we had to go to work. Sunrise would usually be an hour and a half after we started work and we’d have lunch at 12 noon. We had to eat it within 30 minutes. Lunch was a little rice and some vegetables. The same meal was repeated for dinner. We had fried tomatoes and egg once a week. It was the most delicious meal. We had to watch the news and hold meetings after dinner. We went to bed at 10pm.

We had only one toilet for each floor and didn’t have any specific bathroom, only a water tap which we used to wash our faces. We also had to use that tap to wash our bodies. Even during the winter we had to use the cold water from the tap.

Normally all prisoners were allowed to have a visit from family and were allowed to make a phone call to family once a month but the whole time I was in Deyang Prison I was only allowed to call my family once. They imposed a lot of restrictions on Tibetan political prisoners and didn’t allow us any visits from our families. They said that our families would brainwash us if they were allowed to meet us.

We had political meetings every day except for weekends. The duration of the meeting was one hour and the main topic of it was political education. They said we were foolish for participating in the protest and carrying out other activities for a free Tibet. They also advised us not to do such things in the future as we

\(^{50}\) According to the BBC, the average maximum temperatures in Delhi are 41C (105.8F), 39C (102.2F) and 36C (96.8F) for May, June and July respectively.
would not benefit from any of these activities. They said that even the Dalai Lama returning to Tibet wouldn’t benefit us and reminded us to give this advice to our family too. We also had to watch Chinese news. The news was mainly about the development of China, there was no news about other countries.

Everybody was watching us inside the prison and we got worried when people talked but there were some Chinese prisoners who supported us. When we showed our documents to some of the educated and politically aware people, they acknowledged our work and said that it was only Tibetans fighting that was being broadcast on television and not what we actually did. They said that we should be happy because we can walk with pride and with our heads held high and call the Chinese authorities liars and thieves. They also said that there was nothing to regret about what we had done. This was what the educated Chinese prisoners said.

When Tibetan and Chinese prisoners engaged in small quarrels, the Tibetans were punished. They were confined in a small, solitary room for a month, with just a little food and heavy chains, weighing 30kg to 40kg, on their legs to restrict them from moving. I was never confined in these rooms but some of my friends were. Tibetan and Chinese prisoners were looked at differently. While Tibetan prisoners were punished for small quarrels, Chinese prisoners were not.

When one of us was confined to a solitary room, the remaining Tibetans went on hunger strike demanding to be confined with the one in solitary and saying that they had truth on their side. When we refused to eat, they got a little worried and asked us to eat, not to engage in quarrels and said that the confined Tibetan would be out soon.

‘Reform Through Labour’ in Deyang Prison

We had to undergo reform through labour (Ch: 劳改, “laogai”) in the prison. Actually, it was wrong to send political prisoners for labour reform but they sent us anyway. We were forced into stitching shoes and sticking them. In a day I was supposed to complete work on 600 pairs. At the beginning our fingers swelled up and we were unable to move them. But still we had to work. We weren’t allowed to rest even if we became sick. They never listened to our words whenever we asked to take a rest, but for Chinese prisoners it was different.

We worked in a production line and six hundred shoes a day was the lowest amount accepted - that’s the quota that I had to meet. Some other Tibetans working at different points in the production line had to do more than me. If I failed to fulfil my quota, I had to attend two hours of patriotic re-education class at night or I had to run for two hours when all the others could sit by the fire in the yard. If one failed to do the work twice or three times, he would be confined in a small room. But we Tibetans felt the punishments given to other Tibetans as our own and felt unhappy. They set the quota and I tried to work as best I could to achieve it. If I was punished for not completing my work, it was fine since it was my work, but other Tibetans in prison felt pain for me. Therefore, I worked really hard.

China doesn’t have to pay anything for the work done by prisoners and their income per month amounts to approximately CNY 3,000,000 – 4,000,000 (475,000 – 630,000 USD approx.). The prison authorities said that we were very quick with our work but we had no choice when the prison guards were looking at us. We couldn’t even have a minute’s rest. Every week, huge transportation vehicles would come to the prison and it was surprising to see how big the vehicles were.

The shoes we made were the ones which would be worn by labourers in Tibet. They look like army shoes and we called them “maglham” (army shoes). We made the shoes in five different colours. When I see the shoes online these days, I think of how they have been made and that I made many like this. When I see these shoes I am reminded of the situation inside Chinese prisons and how Tibetan political prisoners suffer in prison after carrying out political activities. I feel sympathy for them.
Life after prison

A week before my release, some higher level police came to me and said, “You will be released soon. You were imprisoned here and have experienced a lot here but once you are released, you shouldn’t get involved in any political activities”. They further said that those who got involved in political activities don’t use their brains because everyone in the world wishes for their own happiness rather than fighting for their country and people. I was also told not to hold such ideas after my release and instead to think of my livelihood. They said, “You have suffered a lot for involvement in political activities, you have been imprisoned for two years now, but in the future if you are involved in political activities, you may be imprisoned for a decade or two according to Chinese law. So, you should refrain from all this.”

The text below is the translation of the document (below right) which Gonpo Thinley was required to sign upon his release from prison.

Release certificate

Ebu Cinai, male, born on 1 August 1989, belonging to the census location of Ganzi County, Shengkang Township, Village Number 7, on 16 July 2009 was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months in prison under the accusation of trying to split the country. A further deprivation of (civil) rights of the length of 2 years has been added to his sentence.

During the time of his sentence, the sentence has been reduced (/) times, for a length of (/) years and (/) months, it has been extended (/) times, for a length of (/) years and (/) months, so the prisoner has effectively carried out a sentence of 2 years and 6 months with an additional deprivation of (civil) rights for a length of 2 years. Because the time of the sentence has ended, the prisoner is now released.

Hereby this certificate.

(Official Seal)
21 December 2010

Note: this certificate has to be kept by the released prisoner

I was told that I could call my family and tell them to see me on my release. I spoke with my family and a relative came to pick me up and I was released.

I am one of those who survived prison. There are some older Tibetan prisoners serving long sentences who have a wife and children at home. I wished I could serve their sentences on their behalf and let them go. I always wished for my friends to be released before me. I could serve my term. I don’t feel happy with the thought of being released before my friends because they would always remain in my thoughts and I would be reminded of all the suffering they had to go through.

The authorities said I couldn’t stay in the monastery after my release. They gave me a letter during my release and said that I had to keep the letter and a copy must be submitted to the Kardze County police.

I received a great welcome from local Tibetans and monks. Many people travelled on bikes and in cars to meet me on the way and the rest of them were waiting near my hometown to receive me with Tibetan
scarves. I was extremely moved and encouraged to see such support and solidarity from fellow Tibetans for what I had done. I felt so much pride even though I suffered over two and a half years in prison.

Even though I was released, I didn’t feel relieved because I was thinking about my fellow political prisoners. I have made a list of all of them since I knew them. But I was happy with the thought of meeting my family. My family told me that I did what I had to do and, therefore, there should be no regrets.

While I was in prison, I met many Tibetans and we discussed how to stand up to Chinese repression. I often thought about better ways to do things, to learn from previous experiences – in preparation for the day when I would be free from prison. We saw and experienced how brutal the police and authorities were, especially in prisons. That made us more committed to the idea that there was no way to live under Chinese rule and Tibetan political prisoners, including myself, became more convinced that Tibetans can never have a good life as long as Chinese rule exists in Tibet.

My relatives, friends and people who knew me often visited to say thank you; showing solidarity and gratitude. Even many people I didn’t know visited me to express their support and solidarity of my work done for a common cause.

My name was on the list of political prisoners. I was looked upon as a criminal and I was under surveillance by the police and many spies spread everywhere. I was forbidden to leave my village without seeking permission from the local police as well as being instructed to report to their local police station four times a month and to the county police headquarters once a month. I had to tell them all about my daily life, movements and so on. Even if I had a cup of tea with a friend, I couldn’t omit this from my report.

For over two years I wasn’t able to miss a single report to both local and county police stations. After over two and a half years, they loosened the restrictions on me a little and I could report once a month to local police and once every few months to the county police.

For a few years after release, I was prohibited from leaving the county as well as going to the monastery or studying in a school. The monastery administration suggested I continue my studies but I didn’t want to cause problems so I decided not to go there.

Eventually, I left my hometown to go on pilgrimage to monasteries in Serthar County and Derge County. Then I went on extensive travels as I was planning to run away to India and didn’t want to arouse suspicion when I eventually left. They might have arrested me if I had tried to flee to India right away.

When I was in prison, we wondered if that the world outside knew about what’s happening in Tibet and the problems of Tibetans in Chinese prisons. Sometime we discussed that if any of us, once released, could go to India and spread information to the outside world, then it might help to bring the truth to the world stage about what Tibetans are facing inside Tibet and about Chinese brutality towards Tibetan political prisoners.

Immediately after my release, I couldn’t do anything because they were watching me. I thought that what I should do was to flee into the free world and tell people the truth about the condition of the political prisoners in Deyang Prison as well as the real face of China inside Tibet, as we had personally witnessed and experienced. But it was hard as they were always after me for years following my release. After two and a half years passed, they were a little bit more lenient on me. Therefore, I decided to flee to India.

While I study here in exile, I am unable to concentrate because of the problems with my internal organs. Since my release, until now, I have been on medication but still some days I am unwell. And when I look at other Tibetan political prisoners, I am the healthiest. Some days I am fine but some days I am unwell.
Sometimes my head hurts or I feel uneasy, but there are others who have lost their eyesight, some who have suffered mental problems. There is no single political prisoner without health issues.

I don’t have clear plans for my future life at the moment. But I am committed to speaking to people in the outside world on behalf of my fellow Tibetan political prisoners who are in Chinese prisons or living under surveillance even though they have been released.

**List of Tibetan political prisoners currently in Deyang Prison**

Gonpo Thinley made a list of all the fellow Tibetan political prisoners he met in Deyang Prison and carried it with him to India. Originally this was a list of 45 names but many of the prisoners detailed have since been released. Those where were released were all serving sentences of between two and seven years.

The following is the list provided to Tibet Watch of prisoners who remain in Deyang under the conditions described in Gonpo Thinley’s testimony. We urge the Committee to make enquiries about their current condition and seek assurances regarding their future treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Detained</th>
<th>Sentence</th>
<th>Religious Status</th>
<th>Home Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pema Yeshi</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Layman</td>
<td>Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonam Gonpo</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Life</td>
<td>Layman</td>
<td>Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsewang Gyatso</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Layman</td>
<td>Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyima Drakpa</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Layman</td>
<td>Tawu (Ch: Daofu) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gyurmey Thrinley</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Monk at Larung Gar</td>
<td>Qinghai Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngodrub Phuntsog</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Layman</td>
<td>Sershul (Ch: Shiqu) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Anonymous Monk

This interview took place in south India with a Tibetan man in his late twenties in mid-January 2015. The interviewee is from eastern Tibet and arrived in exile in January 2012. He has asked to remain anonymous.

Intimidation and arrest

I was arrested on 21 March 2008 in my hometown. I was accused of storming the local government offices, an incident that had taken place a few days earlier, on 18 March. They arrested seven Tibetans including myself on the same charge. I don’t know how their investigation was conducted but what we knew was that we were arrested for taking down the Chinese flag and breaking into the local government offices.

We never accepted their allegations and said nothing to them, since we had nothing to do with the actions we were accused of. Indeed, we don’t have legal knowledge of human rights conventions to argue with them in order to seek legal defence. We merely remained as if we were deaf during interrogations because we didn’t have other options. From our side, we had nothing to confess or any potential to fight for the rights we deserve.

I asked for the reasons why we were arrested. A few of my other friends also put the same question to them. In response they said, “You guys shouldn’t ask so much. You might have seen on TV programmes how cruel the Japanese were during their invasion. The present situation has reached a similar atmosphere.” Therefore, we dared not ask any further.

The police who arrested us didn’t have arrest warrants or any proof to back up their accusations. Before I was arrested, police had come to the area and summoned Tibetans and conducted meetings. They said that they had some issues to discuss with the residents and even threatened the Tibetans that they would be stopped from going to pick caterpillar fungus (it was close to caterpillar fungus picking season) if locals didn’t hand over those suspected individuals who might have been involved in storming the government office. That year, local Tibetans had to report to government authorities even if someone wanted to go outside of our home area. It was as though the entire Tibetan community was under house arrest.

They deployed armed forces and randomly searched homes. They forcibly removed the photos of His Holiness the Dalai Lama from altars. Wherever they found photos they tore and broke them, even crushed them under their feet. Those armed forces never hesitated to beat and hit Tibetans. Even families who were facing great troubles, like nursing sick people at home, weren’t spared.

I am not sure about how many police came to arrest us as there were many. I knew a few of them, even their names and where they are from. They came in groups and several groups stayed outside while some came in. Some of them were randomly searching other homes along with armed forces. That time they summoned everyone without sparing a single person. The special armed police raided the homes and took many valuable things when searching, but Tibetans don’t have any opportunity to file complaints.

Preliminary detention

We were arrested in front of all the villagers. They put all the local Tibetans in one place and seven of us were kept separately afterwards. We had been singled out as the main suspects. My family members were

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51 The interviewee explained that TV programmes depicting the cruelty of the Japanese invasion were common.
52 Caterpillar fungus (Ophiocordyceps Sinensis) is a kind of mummified larva naturally found across the Tibetan Plateau. The harvest season for caterpillar fungus runs from April to June and the fungus has to be picked within 10 days of reaching maturity. It is used in Chinese traditional medicine. Its value has increased steadily in recent years and nowadays it has become one of the primary sources of income for many Tibetan households.
there among others. I said to the police that I would get my own back on them as they were arresting me even though I hadn’t committed any crimes. It was then that they started beating me.

We were taken to the local government office where we were kept in separate rooms. They made those empty rooms like a detention centre. They never once asked us if we had any health issues. We didn’t have any medical check-ups. They also never informed us about our rights to hire lawyers. They said our situation was nothing different from the Japanese invasion of China, which the Chinese consider as a lawless and dark era.

They interrogated us separately. They were fully equipped with guns and police instruments, like handcuffs and electric batons. They threatened us by showing us the electric batons and saying, “Do you know how we use these instruments?” Those armed forces were specially trained police who are actually People’s Security Personnel but, instead of protecting, they suppress ordinary Tibetans.

They told us that we had better confess now as our friends had already confessed. Even one policeman I knew personally, who I was very friendly with, told me that they would keep my confession secret and wouldn’t punish me if I confessed to them. Furthermore, he said that they could give me a huge amount of money if I worked for them as a spy in the Tibetan community. In reply I said that I didn’t storm the government office or do anything against the government, regardless of what my friends said. I also said that I couldn’t be a spy as that kind of work was beyond my capabilities.

They never even gave us a single meal or water for one week except for the food brought by friends. They didn’t allow our friends or family members to meet us but sometimes the food they brought was given to us. The seven of us were kept in separate rooms and they wouldn’t let us meet each other.

One day the authorities made us clean the entire local government campus, including their offices and living rooms. The rest of the days we couldn’t even go out of the rooms where we were kept. That cleaning day we could all see each other but weren’t able to talk that much as the police were watching us from all around.

**Interrogation and torture**

They interrogated us separately. I wasn’t beaten that badly but my friends were tortured a lot, especially one of my relatives who was badly beaten and burnt with a hot iron. There are still scars on his body from that. They made us stand up in the sun for hours, even for the whole day following every interrogation because we didn’t say anything. One of my friends was tied to the flagpole in the centre of the government campus for two days and two nights without food and water. At those times I thought to confess even though we hadn’t done anything. They shoved me down over pieces of broken glass spread on the ground and beat me a lot with batons after I’d refused to confess. They said we were like animals because we said nothing in between beatings.

The beating and torture carried out in the detention centre is inhumane. They consider us nothing more than animals. A normal human won’t beat and torture animals in such a heartless manner. They beat us like anything until we were unconscious. Once we had lost consciousness, they doused us with water on our bodies and faces. After regaining consciousness, they started to beat us again.

We didn’t even have the freedom to go and urinate in privacy. Each person was watched by one policeman and two soldiers. They were very strict because they were charged to watch us and they would be held responsible if any of us escaped.

At first they accused us of storming the local government office, breaking into government properties and pulling down the five-starred flag. But later, during the interrogations, they made us out to be criminals.
who were subverting state power and they accused us of being involved in separatist activities by breaking into government property and burning the Chinese national flag.

They kept us for a week in that local government office. None of us confessed anything despite their torture, threats and deceit. That incident has never been cleared up about who exactly committed the alleged crimes but they placed the blame on a Tibetan from my hometown who is still on the run and hiding in the mountains. No-one has proof of whether he did it or not.

After one week, they transferred me and one of my friends to another prison and kept us there for a few months. Here I can’t tell the details about that prison because I fear to cause trouble for my friend. He is still in Tibet and no one knows what will happen to him if I speak here. They can trace my friend if I say anything about the prison. Moreover, someone took full responsibility for me after my release from prison that I wouldn’t do anything against the government. He will be at risk instead of me if Chinese authorities learn that I have been speaking against them. That’s why I’m saying these things on the basis of anonymity.

**Release from prison and life afterwards**

I was never informed that I was to be released. One day, the prison authorities summoned my friend and I and told us that we could go home. But we were asked to inform them whenever we would travel outside of the county. We were even warned that we should be there whenever they called us and that failing to obey their orders could result in us going back to prison at any time. They didn’t take us home after our release from prison, we went by ourselves. Local Tibetans were very supportive and expressed solidarity with us. They could not do anything more than express moral support for us after our arrest and torture.

I never felt like I was free after being released. They were always after us and we were always fearful that either something might happen to us or we might be arrested again. I lived in that tension and fear until I escaped to India.

There were no positive views or reactions toward us by the authorities after our release either. Their stance on Tibetans never changed for the better. For me, the only changes were that I was not physically in their prison or receiving beatings. But at the same time, they were always after us, keeping us under surveillance, and we were tense as we might be re-arrested or summoned at any time. We were like birds in a cage. I just lived my life with family and friends, without work. I wasn’t allowed to work since I was being monitored.

**Escape to India**

I had had the desire to come to India to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama for a long time. During those times I didn’t have much idea about the Tibet issue and its historical facts. The 2008 uprising and violent crackdown on Tibetans made me committed to do something for Tibet as I realised that we Tibetans don’t have freedom under China’s brutal rule. Therefore, I decided to flee to India since I couldn’t do anything after release from prison as they were always after me.

Personally, I didn’t face specific trouble apart from the long walk to cross the border. Walking across the border was not such a big issue for me compared to prison life and the troubles we faced earlier. Now I am completely free but my worries about my family and friends exist within me. So I know that I can’t feel fully relaxed and free until Tibetan freedom has been restored or my last breath has ceased.
Dorjee Rinchen and Anonymous Monk

This section includes the testimonies of Dorjee Rinchen and an anonymous monk. Both are from Tongkor Monastery in Tibet and participated in the 2008 protests in Drango (Ch: Luhuo) County.

Dorjee Rinchen was born in Kardze County on 15 November 1991. He arrived in exile in India on 9 January 2009. The anonymous monk was born in 1982 in Kardze County.

The interview took place in January 2015 in South India, where the two are currently studying Tibetan Buddhist philosophy at Sera Monastery. The first part of the testimony was provided jointly by both monks. The second part was provided solely by Dorjee Rinchen.

Joint Testimony

Intimidation and protests in Tongkor Monastery

On 1 and 2 April 2008, police arrived at our monastery and went to the chant leaders and other leaders of the monastery, asking them to sign documents to show they would follow patriotic campaigns and denounce His Holiness the Dalai Lama. The chant leader and other leaders said, “We will stay quiet if you don’t give us these kinds of orders but we will protest against you if you introduce these rules.” Still the police insisted that we had to sign these documents.

On 3 April 2008, at 4am, police and army surrounded our monastery. They told us that we weren’t allowed to come outside. If anyone came outside they would be shot and no one would be responsible if they were injured by bullets.

At 8am, armed police came to search every residence of our monastery. We were forced to remain in our rooms till 4pm or 5pm. They confiscated His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s portraits and portraits of other lamas from our residence. We begged them not to take them away, but instead of listening to our pleas they destroyed and burned the portraits in front of us. They used the fire they lit to burn the precious portraits to warm their hands. They confiscated His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s portraits and beat us for no reason. We were helpless.

We were unable to assemble for our morning monastic gathering because of the restrictions placed on our monastery by security forces but we held our evening gathering. That day they forcefully took away a monk without giving any reasons and also detained a layman near our monastery. During the evening monastic gathering, our leaders told us all about the threats that the police had given on 1 and 2 April regarding signing the documents. All the monks agreed that we wouldn’t sign.

The police station was situated on the opposite bank of the river which flows near our monastery. They intimidated us by gathering a huge number of troops doing drills. They also shot at the sky in order to scare us. At around 5pm, many monks and local Tibetan residents gathered to shout slogans of “Release the two detained Tibetans”, “Tibetans need independence” and “Return His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Tibet”. We saw 98 military vehicles near our monastery that day.

We continued shouting slogans for three hours, from 5pm to 8pm. We also shouted that we wouldn’t go home unless they released the two detained Tibetans. We kept shouting in the big field near the river. Around 700 people were gathered, including lay people, monks, old men, women and children. We kept moving forward and when we reached the willow trees they started shooting at us. We didn’t really believe they were shooting at us, but the bullets were flying near us. Many protesters cried out in fear. Some fell to the floor, while others tried to run away. Almost 80 protesters were injured, 20 of whom were people I knew. Fourteen protesters disappeared that day - seven monks, four laymen and three women.
We heard many protests had taken place all over Tibet in 2008. Especially that year, the authorities had cracked down on our monastery without giving any reasons. They also confiscated portraits of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and beat our elder monks for no reason. So we protested against their oppression and the restrictions imposed on the monastery.

The Chinese government usually says that Tibetans are enjoying good policies but we have no rights, no freedom of speech at all. They came frequently to our monastery to get us to sign various documents with rules or policies that they wanted to introduce in the monastery. They also made rules about age requirements for new monks and put limits on the number of monks in the monastery.

Solo testimony from Dorjee Rinchen

I am Dorjee Rinchen. I came to India after participating in the 2008 protests in Drango (Ch: Luhuo) County, Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. I was 18 years old when I participated in the protests.

Protest aftermath and injury

At first, I didn’t think that they would directly shoot at us or kill us during the protests but later I was hit by a bullet and suddenly I thought that they really were going to kill us. The bullet hit my upper right arm. Luckily it didn’t hit me on the bone. I was unable to go to hospital but I managed to get treatment from a small clinic in the countryside by buying medicine, applying it on my injury and slowly I recovered.

Many protesters were also injured by bullets in the protest and no one was able to receive treatment from the city hospital. We all ran away to the nearby hills to avoid being arrested. Not one of us was able to go to hospital as we were in fear of being arrested so we stayed in the hills and got treatment from the small clinic there.

Fifteen people died in the protest. Some of them died from being hit by bullets, some disappeared and their whereabouts remain unknown even until today. During that time we could hardly see what was happening as it was dark and everyone started running as soon as the police started shooting at us.

A woman called Tsewang Tso died and her death was witnessed by her elder brother. Another man called Geleg also died in the protest and this was witnessed by his nephew. His nephew carried him on his back and tried to run away, but he died on his nephew’s back as he was already seriously injured.

Another monk called Lobsang Rinchen, one of my relatives, also died from being hit by a bullet to his forehead. At first we were walking in the protest hand-in-hand but we lost each other as soon as the police started shooting at us. We tried to run but later I was told by others that he died in the protest.

Escape to India

After the protest, the authorities issued a statement calling all the monks back to the monastery but they detained three or four monks every month after they returned. So we thought they would arrest us too if we returned to the monastery. We heard about some monks we knew who had been arrested. They also arrested many more monks that we didn’t know. I had the wound on my arm which was quite hard to hide. I thought they would definitely arrest me if they saw it. Outside of the monastery I didn’t have any family members who could support me to continue living as a monk. I only had my uncle who disappeared on the protest day. So I didn’t want to go back to the monastery and decided to flee to India.

Deaths in Custody

Tibetan political prisoners suffer from routine mistreatment and torture in custody and Tibet Watch has documented several cases of death in custody. In some cases it was clear from the condition of the body that the person had been tortured. In each of these cases the family of the deceased was threatened and told not to reveal any details of the death. In other cases the body was not returned. Witnesses have told Tibet Watch that it is quite common for the body to be withheld when a Tibetan dies in custody as the body may show evidence of the prisoner’s treatment and the manner of their death.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche (Ch: A’an Zhaxi) was a 65-year-old high Tibetan lama serving a life sentence in Chinese prison. He died on 12 July 2015.

In 1982, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche fled to India and studied in Drepung monastery. In 1987 he returned to Tibet and soon came under Chinese scrutiny. Upon his return, he worked for the preservation of Tibetan culture and environment. He also organised and fundraised for the building of many monasteries, schools for nomadic villages, orphanages and old people’s homes.

The authorities first tried to arrest him in 1997 by connecting him to the distribution of pro-Tibetan independence leaflets. Tenzin Delek Rinpoche fled to the mountains and remained there for about six months. Following protests and appeals by the local Tibetans, he returned to the village in 1998.

In 2002, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was arrested along with his relative, Lobsang Dhondup, on charges of their alleged involvement in bombings in Chengdu, Sichuan Province. Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve in December 2002 and Lobsang Dhondup was executed on 26 January 2003.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s death sentence was commuted to life following a widespread international campaign in 2005. Tenzin Delek Rinpoche always maintained that he had not committed any crime and that the charges levelled against him were untrue. During a court hearing in 2003, he said, “I have neither distributed letters nor pamphlets, nor planted bombs secretly. I have never even thought of such things.”

In early July 2015, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s sister, Dolkar Lhamo, and his niece, Nyima Lhamo, were suddenly summoned to Chengdu to visit him. However, the authorities made the family members stay in a hotel for days and delayed their visit to the prison. Then, during the night of 12 July 2015, the authorities informed the family members that Tenzin Delek Rinpoche had died of a heart attack. They said that he had been found collapsed in his cell and attempts by medical staff to revive him were unsuccessful.

Following Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s sudden death in prison, over a hundred Tibetans staged a sit-in protest in Chengdu and thousands of Tibetans in Nyakchukha (Ch: Yajiang) County demanded the release of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s body to the family members so that they could perform the final Buddhist rites. The authorities not only ignored the Tibetan protesters’ plea, but broke up the demonstrations. In Nyakchukha County they used beatings, tear gas and guns. More than seventeen people, including nuns and old people, were injured and taken to hospital.

On 16 July 2015, Chinese authorities cremated Tenzin Delek Rinpoche despite global calls for his body to be returned to his family. Before the cremation, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s sister wrote letters to the prison authorities demanding that they provide legal justification for their actions in the period around and following his death. In response to the letters, the authorities offered brief access to the body, but insisted it would still be cremated in prison.
A group of 18 monks went to the prison to change Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s clothes and wash his body before the cremation. At 6:30am on the cremation day, a number of visitors were allowed into the prison to see the body but only two lamas and two relatives were allowed to stay and witness the cremation. Following the cremation, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s ashes were handed over to local Tibetans. However, the small group transporting the ashes back to his hometown for Buddhist funeral rites was stopped at gunpoint in the town of Luding. No members of the group were detained but the ashes were seized and it has not been possible to confirm what happened to them.

A day later, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s sister, Dolkar Lhamo, and niece, Nyima Lhamo, were detained for almost two weeks. No charges were filed against them. When Dolkar Lhamo and Nyima Lhamo were detained, Lithang County authorities claimed that the two would have been given life sentences if they (Lithang County officials) had not given guarantees and taken full responsibility for their release. Dolkar Lhamo and Nyima Lhamo were also threatened with life imprisonment if they spoke about Tenzin Delek Rinpoche after their release. Dolkar Lhamo and Nyima Lhamo remain under strict surveillance. Their movements are restricted and closely monitored.

On 16 July 2015, authorities in Lithang County also issued a notice titled “On the ‘7 NOs’ About the Funeral of A’an Zhaxi” (see below)\(^3\). This included the prevention of prayer services in honour of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. The situation in Lithang remained tense following Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s death and troops were deployed in the area to prohibit Tibetans from attending prayer services.

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\(^3\) From 1982 to 1987 Tenzin Delek was in India, where the Dalai Lama recognized him as a tulku (reincarnated lama). A tulku (or a Rinpoche) is usually recognised at a young age but in the case of Tenzin Delek the title was conferred on him much later. China did not recognise Tenzin Delek as a tulku and the Chinese government has, over the years, been trying to exercise control over religious affairs. In 2007, China’s State Administration for Religious Affairs issued a decree that all reincarnations of tulkus of Tibetan Buddhism must gain government approval, otherwise they were deemed to be “illegal or invalid”: Reincarnation of living Buddha needs gov’t approval (Xinhua), 4 August 2007 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-08/04/content_5448242.htm
The Rinpoche’s death came at a time of summer horse-racing events in the local nomadic area. Some of the events were cancelled in honour of his passing. Although some people had put up their tents in preparation for the horse racing event, they later packed their tents and left without participating.

In some other areas, however, the authorities forced local Tibetans to participate in the horse racing event. In Golok, in Nyakchukha County, the authorities arrested and beat some Tibetans who refused to take part in the horse racing festival.

30 August 2015 marked the 49th day since Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s death. Tibetans inside and outside Tibet organised prayer services and paid tribute to Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. Tibetans in Nyakchukha and Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s monastery, Orthok, observed the Rinpoche’s 49th day without repercussions. However, a ban on any prayer ceremonies was imposed in Lithang so Tibetans in Lithang couldn’t observe the 49th day.

Chinese state media, while reporting on Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s death, claimed that he died of a sudden cardiac arrest, despite the prompt medical care they claim he was offered. This version of the facts does not explain why Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s sister, Dolkar Lhamo, and his niece, Nyima Lhamo, were suddenly summoned to Chengdu to visit him days before his death. The state media article states that Tenzin Delek Rinpoche had been offered medical attention on many occasions while in detention, including several visits to local hospitals. State media stress the fact that Tenzin Delek Rinpoche had often refused to take medication prescribed to him by Chinese doctors, thus actively worsening his own condition. In state media, no mention is made about protests held by Tibetans for the body to be given back to Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s family for funeral rites. Similarly, the arrest of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche’s sister and niece following his death is not mentioned. The report does note that prisoners serving a life sentence are not eligible for medical parole in China.

**Lobsang Yeshi**

64-year-old Tibetan political prisoner Lobsang Yeshi died in a hospital in Lhasa on 19 July 2015. Lobsang Yeshi was the head of Kewa village in Tombar (Ch: Donba) Township of Dzogang (Ch: Zuogong) County, Chamdo (Ch: Changdu) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region. In May 2014 he had participated in a protest against mining operations near the village.

The anti-mining protests were targeted against the authorities’ plans to mine near the sacred Gyalmo Ngulchu (Salween) river that runs through the Tombar region. One of the protesters, Phakpa Gyaltsen, jumped from a roof in protest and died. Another man named Rigzin seriously injured himself by stabbing himself in protest against the mining operations.

Lobsang Yeshi and some of the village elders led a continuous protest throughout 9 and 10 May 2014. Police and security forces arrived at the village and threatened them with arrest if they did not end their protest, so some leaders from Dzogang County and Chamdo Prefecture came and convinced the protesters to return home by saying that the issues would be resolved. But on 12 May 2014, Lobsang Yeshi and with seven other Tibetans, who had been at the forefront of the protest, were forcibly taken to Dzogang County, where they were interrogated, beaten and tortured at the detention centre.

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54 The 49th day after death is a significant day for Tibetan Buddhists and represents the culmination of seven weeks of mourning. The prayer ceremony and rituals mark the end of a period called “bardo” - the 49-day transition period between death and rebirth.

Later they were taken to another detention centre in Chamdo and held there for one month. Lobsang Yeshi and his two friends, Ngata (also known as Ngawang Tashi) and Choluk Tenzin, were then taken to Chushul (Ch: Qushui) Prison in Lhasa and sentenced to two years in prison in May 2015.

Lobsang Yeshi was sent to Lhasa hospital after he suffered bouts of nausea and dizziness. He died in hospital on 19 July 2015 at around 2pm. At first, the authorities neither returned his body to the family nor allowed them to come near his body, but after repeated requests made by his family members they allowed three people to be present during the cremation - one Tibetan monk to conduct prayers near his body and two of his siblings.

Lobsang Yeshi was the father of eight. He was loved and respected by local Tibetans for his integrity and dignity.

**Chonjor**

Tibet Watch received reports that a young Tibetan man (in his twenties) named Chonjor was beaten to death in police custody in the Labrang area\(^56\). He was detained by local police and handed over to the People’s Armed Police on 9 December 2011. When his family went to the police station the next day to enquire as to his whereabouts, they were told that he was dead. A witness reported that he faced severe torture while in custody. No reason was given for his arrest.

**Tsering Gyaltsen,**

Tsering Gyaltsen was one of many Tibetans from Drango\(^57\) who went into hiding following a protest there on 23 January 2012 (although he did not personally participate in the protest). During the protest, two Tibetans were shot dead and scores more sustained gunshot wounds when Chinese state security forces opened fire on the protesters. Over 100 Tibetans from the area were arbitrarily detained following the protest.

Tsering Gyaltsen was last seen on 9 February 2012 being taken away by security forces. According to an eyewitness, he had been badly beaten and was unable to walk. They believed his back had been broken. His relatives repeatedly went to the Public Security Bureau office to inquire about him. Each time they asked, local officials denied any knowledge of him.

In late May 2012, a police officer told Drango Monastery that Tsering had died. The family held a death ceremony but could not perform the traditional sky burial because they had not received his body.

**Karwang**

Karwang, a 36-year-old monk from Kardze County\(^58\), carried out a solo protest which involved handing out leaflets calling for religious rights, Tibetan independence and the Dalai Lama’s return to Tibet. He was spreading the material in an area where the Chinese government had recently built 20 new houses for the purposes of ‘nomadic resettlement’, a policy enforced by the Chinese government in order to ‘end the nomadic way of life in Tibet’. After his protest, Karwang left the area for religious teaching but was

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\(^56\) Labrang (also known as Sangchu) (Ch: Xiahe) County, Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province  
\(^57\) Draggo (also known as Drango) (Ch: Luhuo) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province  
\(^58\) Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province
arrested on his return and taken to the Kardze County detention centre by Public Security Bureau (PSB) personnel.

Eight days after his detention, in the third week of May 2012, Karwang's family received a call from the PSB informing them of their son's death and instructing them to collect his body. The family were repeatedly harassed by the local authorities following Karwang’s death, including through the duration of the traditional Tibetan death ceremony.

**Guldrak**

A Tibetan man named Guldrak, believed to be 29 years old, was arrested for theft on 8 August 2013 in Maywa village. He was severely beaten during the interrogation and died in detention the same day. It has been reported that the interrogation was led by Rinchen, the head of the Public Security Bureau in Maywa, but this cannot be independently confirmed.

At first, police tried to disguise Guldrak’s death as suicide, but this was rejected by around 500 local Tibetans who staged a sit-in protest in front of the detention centre where Guldrak was being held and demanded the truth about the cause of his death. In response to the protest, local police accepted responsibility for Guldrak’s death and offered 50,000 Yuan (approximately US$8,000/£5,200) for his funeral services and another 500,000 Yuan (approximately US$80,000/£52,000) for compensation.

**Kunchok Drakpa**

Kunchok Drakpa was detained by Chinese authorities at the beginning of December 2013 on suspicion of having played a leading role in mining protests in Driru County earlier that year.

Kunchok was in his mid-forties, came from Chamram village, Driru Township, and had a wife and two young sons. He was known for his commitment to the environment and speaking out against the mining activities. His body was returned to his family towards the end of December 2013 but news of his death only reached the outside world two months later. His body bore signs of severe beatings and torture. His family were threatened not to disclose any details about the incident.

**Ngawang Jamyang**

Senior and highly respected monk Ngawang Jamyang was among three monks from Tarmoe monastery in Driru County who were arrested on 23 November 2013. Ngawang Jamyang was born in 1968 in Totho village and became a monk at Tarmoe, his local monastery, in 1987. He had previously been imprisoned for two years in 2008 on charges of ‘having relations with outside’.

No reason was given for their arrests and their families were given no information about their detention. On the same day, a large number of armed forces and police raided Tarmoe monastery. They searched every room and confiscated two laptops from Ngawang’s room. Driru County had been the scene of ongoing protests and arrests since Tibetans refused to fly the Chinese flag on their houses in September 2013. A number of religious institutes were targeted during the crackdown.

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59 Maywa village, Khyungchu (Chinese: Qiongxi) Township, Kakhok (Ch: Hongyuan) County, Sichuan Province
60 Chamram village, Driru Township, Driru (Ch: Biru) County, Nagchu (Ch: Naqu) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region
61 Driru (Ch: Biru) County, Nagchu (Ch: Naqu) Prefecture, Tibet Autonomous Region
On 17 December, Ngawang Jamyang’s dead body was returned to his family by the authorities in Lhasa. The family were threatened with execution if they shared news of his death with anyone outside of Tibet. Despite these threats, Tibet Watch researchers were told: “It was clear from Jamyang’s body that he was tortured and beaten to dead in a secret detention centre. He did not have any health problems before and was fine when leaving his monastery to Lhasa”.  

Another person from the area spoke of the impact of the monk’s death on the community:

“Jamyang's death came as a huge shock to the residents of Driru, especially the monks of Tarmoe monastery. He was the most efficient administrator, teacher and a very conscientious person. Tarmoe would never be the same again without him, beside monastic excellent services, he was also well respected by the local community for his numerous social welfare activities such as helping to peacefully mediate disputes and helping local Tibetans to stop harmful habits such as gambling.”

Ngawang Jamyang’s family took his body to the traditional cremation ground near Sera monastery in Lhasa. The whereabouts and situation of Kelsang Choklang and the other monk who was arrested with Ngawang Jamyang remain unknown.

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62 Quote from Tibet Watch source - identity withheld.  
63 Quote from Tibet Watch source - identity withheld.
Deaths Resulting from Torture

Tibetan political prisoners suffer from routine mistreatment and torture in Chinese prisons and detention centres. Over the years, Tibet Watch has noted a pattern of gravely ill Tibetan political prisoners in China being released early in order to reduce the number of deaths in detention.

Norla Ashagtsang

In December 2011, Tibet Watch was able to confirm that Tibetan former political prisoner Norla Ashagtsang had died in Lhasa the previous year. Norla Ashagtsang was arrested protesting against Chinese repression in June 2009 and was severely beaten at the time. He was imprisoned, subjected to torture and suffered from a prolonged illness as a result of injuries sustained during detention. In 2010, Norla Ashagtsang was released on medical parole but witnesses informed Tibet Watch researchers that he finally “suffered from Chinese torture” on 27 December 2010.

Goshul Lobsang

Goshul Lobsang died at the age of 43 on 19 March 2014 having served three years of an 11 year prison sentence.

A warrant for his arrest was issued in 2008 based on accusations of having played a leading role in protests which took place in Machu County earlier that year. He evaded the authorities for two years but was eventually caught and arrested in 2010.

Following his arrest, he was subjected to severe interrogations, beatings and torture for a period of approximately five months. The torture included being left outside naked in Tibet’s bitter winter. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), “he was subjected to severe torture including pain-inducing injections, and deprived of sleep and food by the interrogation officers in Machu County”. Another source told TCHRD that “police officers used sharp-pointed objects such as toothpicks to repeatedly pierce and penetrate into the tops of his finger nails and cuticles. This stabbing, applied with force and consistency, resulted in severe bleeding, swelling and pain making Goshul Lobsang unable to temporarily use his hands.”

Goshul Lobsang was then transferred to a prison in Lanzhou City and a sentence of 11 years was confirmed. He continued to suffer interrogation and torture in Lanzhou and his health deteriorated as a consequence. He was emaciated, in constant pain and his skin colour had changed. It became clear that he might not survive for much longer and he was released from prison on 29 November 2013.

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64 Machu (Ch: Maqu) County, Kaniho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province
A witness told Tibet Watch that, despite his dire condition, Goshul Lobsang refused to seek treatment from any Chinese hospitals after his release from prison. Tibetan doctors were consulted but were unable to effect any real improvement in his condition. Eventually, all medical treatment had to be stopped as his family could not afford to continue. In the weeks leading up to his death he was unable to swallow any solid food and gradually became completely unresponsive.

Tenzin Choedak
Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, December 2014

Tenzin Choedak died on 5 December 2014 in Lhasa’s Mentsee Khang (Traditional Tibetan Medical Institute). He had been serving a 15 year prison term in Chushul prison near Lhasa and was released by prison authorities just days before his death. Tenzin Choedak was severely beaten and tortured over the six years he was in detention.

Tenzin Choedak fled Tibet for India in 1991 and joined the Tibetan Children’s Village in Upper Dharamsala, northern India. He returned to Tibet at the end of 2004. He spent many years in Lhasa with a European NGO working on environment and health issues of rural Tibetans.

In mid-April 2008, Tenzin Choedak was arrested by Lhasa police on allegations of leading the March 2008 protests and his whereabouts and situation remained unknown to family members for several months. In September 2008, Lhasa Intermediate People’s Court sentenced him to a 15 year prison term.

Tenzin Choedak lost his vision as a consequence of beatings and torture suffered in prison. He also suffered chronic diseases as a result of torture which damaged his brain and he would often vomit blood. In November 2014, the family were allowed to visit Tenzin Choedak but he was almost unrecognisable as his body had become so emaciated. He had become mentally unsound and was unable to recognise his own mother. Even in this condition, Tenzin Choedak was still shackled by his hands and feet in bed and was watched by four members of police personnel in the ward of the hospital.

Tenzin Choedak was handed over to his family on 2 December 2014. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, “When he was returned to his family, Choedak had dislocated jawbones and damaged kidneys. He was physically emaciated and vomiting blood because of a brain injury. All the bones in his feet were broken.”

On 5 December 2014, Tenzin Choedak died at 1:13 p.m. in Mentsee Khang, Lhasa.

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