

Brief Backgrounder on Recent Releases of Political Prisoners in Tibet/China

«Shadows of themselves»

Many of the political prisoners recently released in Tibet are long-term prisoners who had completed their sentences. What shocked most is that they have been reduced to a shadow of their former selves. The Chinese authorities obviously feel secure releasing them and don't fear any harm from them in their present conditions.

Contrary to some observations, the wave of releases of prisoners at a time when situation in Tibet has gotten worse is not due to some sort of leniency (or extending the olive branch, as some say) shown by the Chinese authorities. Some like Dawa Gyaltzen (see below) had received sentence reduction way back in 2004. The explanation for this is coincidence of sentences completed.

However, there is one pattern that evolves and is of concern: Major health complications are witnessed among prisoners. Over the years, Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) has received numerous reports of political prisoners' failing health and also death in prisons. The most common ailments suffered by former political prisoners are hepatitis, spinal injury (causing bent back and difficulty walking), diabetes, paralysis of lower part of the body, weak eyesight, and psychological problems.

For instance, Lobsang Tenzin, one of the most prominent figures, suffered damaged kidney, numbness in his legs and extreme difficulty standing. He also suffers from liver disease, possibly hepatitis. His diabetes has reached advanced stage causing him momentary blindness.

Please refer to the links below for more background on in the individual cases of the political prisoners^[1].

List of Recently Released Prisoners

Lobsang Tenzin, released in late 2012

According to the Dharamshala based Tibetan language radio service, Voice of Tibet, Lobsang Tenzin was released in late 2012 by Chinese authorities on medical grounds. The move came just months before his expected release in April 2013. Lobsang Tenzin, a former student of Tibet University (Lhasa). One of Tibet's longest-serving known political prisoners. Spent 25 years in Drapchi, Powo Tramo and Chushul prisons. He was released after serving 25 years of imprisonment. However, his home is heavily guarded and monitored by security personnel and other government officials who continue to turn away visitors, among them Lobsang Tenzin's relatives and neighbors. According to latest information received today (23 May 2013), Lobsang Tenzin continues to remain under 'house arrest' as he is not allowed to venture outside his home without police escort. Sources told TCHRD that whenever he has to visit hospital, he has to call the police. His relatives and cousins are now allowed to meet him but others are still not allowed meet him.

See for more here:

[See here TCHRD](#)

Lobsang Tenzin' case was highlighted by many international HR organizations particularly Amnesty International. In February 1990, Amnesty questioned the fairness of the trial that punished Lobsang Tenzin for causing the death of a Chinese policeman.

Jigme Gyatso, released March 30, 2013

The case of Jigme Gyatso is very well documented. Please refer to the following.

«The activist, Jigme Gyatso, 52, who returned to his hometown in China's northwest Gansu Province on Monday, was said to be extremely frail after years of torture and poor medical care, ...»

See for more here:

[New York Times](#)

[TCHRD](#)

[UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention \(2000\)n:](#)

ICT has a useful report on former Special rapporteur on Torture Dr Manfred Nowak's visit to Tibet and his meeting with Jigme Gyatso

[ICT International Campaign for Tibet](#)

Dawa Gyaltsen, released around March 2012

«Tibetan sources say Dawa Gyaltsen (Ch: Dawa Jianzan) is in poor health, with the limp in one of his legs having worsened over the years due to ill-treatment and torture in prison for 17 years...»

See for more here:

[Source TCHRD](#)

Soepa and Lobsang Ngodup, released March 10, 2013

«After his release, Lobsang Ngodup is undergoing treatment at a hospital in Siling (Ch: Xining), capital of Qinghai Province. Soepa is said to have lost his mental balance, ..»

See for more here:

[Source TCHRD](#)

Sonam Yingyen, 44, released in April 2013

«Chinese authorities have released a jailed Tibetan monk of the restive Nyatso Zilkar Monastery in Tridu, eastern Tibet, before the expiration of his prison term due to "medical emergency." »

See for more here:

[Source Phayul article](#)

Jigme Gyatso, released April 27, 2013

The 28-year-old Tibetan writer and activist - not to be confused with Jigme Gyatso from Labrang - was released at the completion of his three year prison term. Eyewitnesses have said that Jigme Gyatso is in serious health condition with injuries to his spine and kidneys.

See for more here:

[Source Phayul article](#)

[1] Information provided by Tsering Tsomo, director of Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD). Please contact for more information on this subject: Mrs. Tsering Tsomo, director@tchrd.org