

11 Members of Congress Urge Secretary Kerry to Raise Cases of Tibetan Political Prisoners with Chinese Government

Date : April 1, 2016

On March 31, 2016, as President Barack Obama met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Washington, D.C., 11 Members of Congress sent a bipartisan letter to Secretary of State Kerry urging him to raise the cases of three Tibetan political prisoners — Khenpo Karma Tsewang (also known as Khenpo Kartse), Lobsang Kunchok, and Thabkhe Gyatso—with the Chinese government.

The letter urged the United States “to raise their cases with the Chinese government, make every effort to obtain information about their whereabouts and health status, press for necessary medical treatment, and prioritize their release.”

Khenpo Kartse is a revered abbot known for his environmental and disaster relief work, and efforts to preserve the Tibetan language. He is currently serving a 2.5-year prison term on trumped-up charges, and is believed to be seriously ill with a liver condition.

Lobsang Kunchok was given a death sentence with a two-year reprieve for sending information about self-immolations to Tibetans in exile.

Thabkhe (aka Thamkey) Gyatso, a young monk and well-known writer is serving a 15-year sentence for distributing Tibetan flags during the 2008 protests. Thabkhe Gyatso was in good health at the time of his detention; now he is partially paralyzed.

“We are grateful to Representatives Michael Capuano (D-MA) and Chris Smith (R-NJ) for leading this bipartisan initiative, and to the other Members who joined, for their unflagging commitment to human rights and support for Tibet,” said Andrea Worden, International Campaign for Tibet’s Advocacy Director. “ICT is deeply concerned about the whereabouts and health status of these political prisoners and fear they are not getting the medical treatment they need. We urge Secretary Kerry and others in the U.S. government to raise the cases of Khenpo Kartse, Lobsang Kunchok, and Thabkhe Gyatso and press for their release **today**,” Worden added.

The Congressional letter to Secretary Kerry follows below:

International Campaign for Tibet

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 31, 2016

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write today to express our deep concern about three Tibetan political prisoners, while noting that there are hundreds of other documented Tibetan political prisoners currently being held in Chinese prisons similarly worthy of our concern and attention. We urge you and others at the State Department, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu to raise their cases with the Chinese government, make every effort to obtain information about their whereabouts and health status, press for necessary medical treatment, and prioritize their release.

Khenpo Karma Tsewang, is a revered monastery abbot and community leader in the Tibet Autonomous Region, and well known for his environmental activism, disaster relief work, and commitment to the preservation of Tibetan language. Detained in December 2013, he was subsequently sentenced to two and a half years in prison for "harboring a fugitive monk." Khenpo Kartse is believed to be seriously ill with a liver condition for which he is not receiving necessary medical treatment.

Lobsang Kunchok, a Sichuan-based Tibetan monk, was given a death sentence that was suspended for two years, and his nephew Lobsang Tsering was sentenced to ten years in prison for sending information regarding self-immolations in Tibet to Tibetans in exile. The authorities were seeking to suppress the dissemination of such information and claimed that the news was "used by some overseas media as a basis for creating secessionist propaganda."

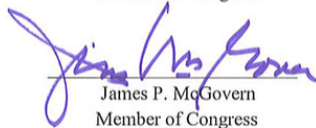
Thabkhe Gyatso, is a humble monk and respected writer from Labrang (Xiahe) in Gansu province, serving a 15-year sentence for distributing Tibetan flags during the protests of March 2008. Although he was in good health prior to detention, he is now partially paralyzed and can no longer walk, see or hear properly.

The imprisonment of these individuals—who have so much to contribute to Tibetan society and who did nothing other than exercise their fundamental human rights—is a grave tragedy and injustice. Again, we urge you to prioritize their cases in your discussions with Chinese officials and press for their immediate release.

Sincerely,



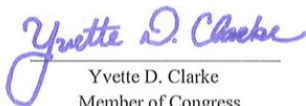
Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



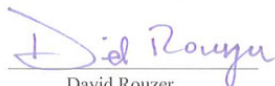
Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress



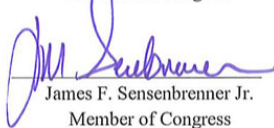
Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress



David Rouzer
Member of Congress



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



James F. Sensenbrenner Jr.
Member of Congress



Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan
Member of Congress



Peter Welch
Member of Congress

TIBETAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

KHENPO KARMA TSEWANG (KNOWN AS KHENPO (ABBOT) KARTSE)



Khenpo Karma Tsewang

Detained: 12/6/2013

Sentence: 2.5 years

Name (Chinese): ????

Location: Tibet Autonomous Region

Karma Tsewang is a highly-educated and respected abbot, whose detention caused widespread distress, with hundreds of Tibetans gathering peacefully to protest his arrest at a prayer ceremony, and a rare silent vigil on his behalf outside a prison after his arrest. Full details of his sentencing and charges against him are not known; the news that he would serve two and a half years in prison emerged from two Tibetan sources in contact with others in the region.

He is believed to be unwell with a liver condition and has not been allowed access to the doctor who had been treating him for some time for his liver ailment. Chinese officials have also prohibited his relatives access to him. According to a Radio Free Asia (RFA) report, Khenpo Kartse “was later specifically accused of harboring a fugitive monk — linked to a bombing incident — from Chamdo’s Karma monastery at his own Japa monastery in Nangchen county.” It was on this amended charge that he was convicted and sentenced, the same source said. His lawyer had rejected the charge as “not compatible with reality.”

Khenpo Kartse, who is known for his environmental activism, disaster relief work, and commitment to the preservation of Tibetan language, wrote a letter from prison on December 27, 2013, appealing to his supporters that no one should suffer for his sake.

LOBSANG KUNCHOK



Lobsang Kunchok, sentenced to death for alleged 'intentional homicide'.

Detained: 2012

Sentence: Life

Name (Chinese): ?????

Location: Sichuan

Tibetan monk Lobsang Kunchok (or Kunchog) was given a death sentence suspended for two years (which is usually converted to life imprisonment), and his nephew Lobsang Tsering was sentenced to ten years for sending information regarding self-immolations in Tibet to Tibetans in exile. The authorities were seeking to suppress the dissemination of such information and claimed that the news was "used by some overseas media as a basis for creating secessionist propaganda."

They were the first cases of Tibetans to be prosecuted for 'intentional homicide' in connection with self-immolations; Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told journalists: "We hope through the sentencing of these cases, the international community will be able to clearly see the evil and malicious methods used by the Dalai clique in the self-immolations and condemn their crimes."

State media coverage did not indicate any evidence for the charge of "intentional homicide." The verdict caused great distress among Tibetans in the area.

THABKHE GYATSO



Thabkhe Gyatso prior to his detention.

Detained: 4/29/2008

Sentence: 15 years

International Campaign for Tibet

Name (Chinese): ????

Location: Lanzhou

Labrang monk Thabkhe Gyatso (also known as Thamkey Gyatso) is serving a 15-year sentence for distributing Tibetan flags during the protests of March 2008. Thabkhe Gyatso, who is severely ill in prison, was also respected for his writings, which before his imprisonment were published in many local newspapers and monthly magazines.

A Tibetan familiar with his writing said: "He was a well-known young Tibetan writer, and most of his pieces concerned the well-being of the Tibetan people and the failed policies of the Chinese government. His writing was rich in detail and content and he is very respected, with a strong sense of Tibetan identity."

Thabkhe Gyatso, who is in his early thirties, was arrested on April 29, 2008 in Labrang, following the major Tibetan uprising in March 2008. In one of the longest sentences imposed on Labrang monks said to be involved in the peaceful protest, he was sentenced to 15 years. The prominent Chinese rights defense lawyer Li Fangping was barred by authorities from representing him.

There are serious concerns for Thabkhe Gyatso's health, as he was believed to be severely tortured upon detention. Although he was known to be in good health before his detention, according to a Tibetan source, the right side of Thabkhe's body is now paralyzed and he can no longer walk. "His right eye, ear, hand and leg are no longer functional," said the source. "He has received some medical treatment but nothing that has helped him to recover. He is unable to move and he just sits on a wheelchair. He can still speak slowly and recognize people."