

## New information about imprisoned Tibetan abbot raises fears

Date : June 26, 2014

*This report is an updated version of the report that was posted on June 24.*



Khenpo Kartse was detained on December 21, 2013. (Photo: Tsering Woeser)

There is serious concern for the welfare of a respected and popular Tibetan lama, Khenpo (Abbot) Karma Tsewang, who remains in prison six months on from his detention without access to relatives, or doctor, and only intermittent access to his lawyer. Karma Tsewang, also known as Khenpo Kartse, is seriously ill with a liver condition according to Tibetan sources, and there are fears that he faces serious criminal charges.

Tibetan writer Tsering Woeser, who is based in Beijing, gave new information about possible charges against the Tibetan monk in a blog published on the six-month anniversary of Khenpo Kartse's detention. She reported that his Chinese lawyer was told that charges against the Khenpo have changed from those of 'endangering national security' to 'illegal harboring' and 'divulging state secrets', connected to a self-immolation. When his lawyer, who was allowed only brief access to Khenpo Kartse, raised concerns about his health he was told that "because this was a major case involving stability maintenance they would not allow him to be released, and instead would continue to hold him in detention", according to Woeser. The specific charges against him may not be clear if the case continues to be handled in secret.

In a further blog posted on June 24, Woeser said that Khenpo Kartse's lawyer Tang Tianhao had made his fourth visit to Chamdo (Chinese: Changdu) in Tibet Autonomous Prefecture where Khenpo Kartse is being held, and had been allowed brief access to him for a second time. She also said that Tang Tianhao had been threatened by the Chamdo authorities, who had warned him not to take on the case.

'Endangering national security' refers to a broad category of criminal offences in Chinese law, including separatism and interfering with national sovereignty, among many others. It can carry a sentence of around 15 years. An accusation of 'divulging state secrets' is set forth in China's Criminal Law, Article 282, with a sentence of fixed term imprisonment of no more than three or seven years. But definitions of what is a 'state secret' are opaque and subject to interpretation according to the political climate and the authorities' drive to secure a conviction against a specific individual.

The strength of feeling and distress at Khenpo Kartse's imprisonment has been evident through the actions of Tibetans in his home area. Hundreds of Tibetan monks, nuns, and laypeople gathered in a rare silent vigil outside a prison in January, 2014, to protest his detention. The silent vigil, held outside the high walls topped with barbed wire of Nangchen (Chinese: Nangqian) prison, followed an earlier peaceful demonstration also involving hundreds of monks, who held home-made banners calling for his release.

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.<sup>[1]</sup>

A full translation into English of Tsering Woeser's blog, published on her blogsite on June 7, 2014, is below.

## **Today, half a year after Khenpo Karma Tsewang was arrested, his so-called “crime” has been upgraded and he faces a severe sentence. I strongly appeal for attention!**

*June 7, 2014*

At one in the morning on December 7, 2013, Khenpo Karma Tsewang was arrested in a hotel in Chengdu’s Wuhuo Temple area by members of the Chamdo [Chinese: Qamdo, Changdu] Public Security Bureau operating outside of their province. Until December 14, Karma Tsewang was held in the Chamdo Public Security Bureau office in Chengdu.<sup>[2]</sup>

On December 14, Karma Tsewang was taken to Chamdo and held until December 24 in the Tibet Autonomous Region Chamdo Region National Security Police Office. On the morning of the 24th, lawyer Tang Tianhao of the Chongqing Xinyuanxing law firm, who had been entrusted by Karma Tsewang’s family, arrived in Chamdo and asked the Chamdo police to allow him to meet with his client in accordance with the relevant procedures and the law, but he was told that they weren’t holding Karma Tsewang, and later it was made known that “the case concerns matters of endangering national security.” Lawyer Tang made the following requests to Chamdo Public Security Bureau: 1, they should transfer the suspect to the Chamdo Region Detention Center; 2, they should deliver the relevant judicial documents to the family of the suspect in accordance with the law; 3, he hoped that the suspect would be questioned in accordance with the law, and that police wouldn’t make use of torture; and 4, he asked to meet with his client and be informed of the charges against him.

On the morning of December 25 Karma Tsewang was taken to the Chamdo Region Detention Center (Chamdo Region Detention Center phone number: 0895-4821803) and held in cell block D2 along with seven other people.

On February 25th, 2014, Khenpo Karma Tsewang’s lawyer Tang Tianhao arrived in Chamdo for the second time to work on the case (Lawyer Tang has previously worked for two Chamdo Tibetans and has been in Chamdo several times). After he struggled and made his case in accordance with the law, on the 26th the police agreed to allow Lawyer Tang to meet with his client, Karma Tsewang.

Chamdo police had earlier informed Lawyer Tang that Karma Tsewang had been convicted of “endangering national security,” but this time lawyer Tang was informed that the charge had changed to “illegal harboring.” Namely, it was alleged that Khenpo Karma Tsewang “harbored” monks who had escaped from Karma Monastery in Chamdo. But the lawyer believes that this charge is also inconsistent with the facts and is untrue. Given that Karma Tsewang is suffering from a number of illnesses, Lawyer Tang asked that he be released on bail. But Chamdo police replied that because this was a major case involving stability maintenance they would not allow him to be released, and instead would continue to hold him in detention.

On May 26, 2014, lawyer Tang arrived in Chamdo to work on the case for a third time, but the police refused to allow him to meet with his client. He was told that Karma Tsewang, in addition to having committed “illegal harboring,” had also “divulged state secrets.” As this relates to a major case of stability maintenance, they would not be able to meet.

As to the so-called “divulging state secrets,” it has been reported that this is related to the December 1, 2011 self-immolation of Tenzin Phuntsog in Chamdo’s Karma Monastery. Chamdo police believe that Khenpo Karma Tsewang revealed this self-immolation to the outside world. Meanwhile the Tibet Autonomous Region authorities have denied the event, claiming that “no residents, monks, or nuns have self-immolated inside the Autonomous Region.”

Chinese Communist authorities across Tibet have promulgated “anti-self-immolation special campaign work plans” and “notices on special regulations against self-immolations,” emphasizing that “strike hard rectification campaigns will take place wherever self-immolations occur,” mainly aimed at the immediate family members, relatives, villages, and monasteries of self-immolators. And, when news of self-immolations leaks through their tight barricade, they severely crack down on those who transmit the messages outside and go after the relatives of self-immolators with both carrots and sticks, trying to keep them silent or fabricate lies about them, etc. Based on present reported cases (including Tibet-related media and organizations in exile, and Chinese official media such as CCTV, Xinhua News, and Xinhua online reports), at least 50 people related to self-immolators have been tried and at least 200 Tibetans have been arrested. The highest sentence is death, while the minimum is one or two years, many have a number of years of severe punishment.

The eminent Tibetan monk Khenpo Karma Tsewang has been under arrest for over half a year. Except for one brief meeting with his lawyer, no one – not a single member of his family or clergy – has been able to see him. Before his arrest he had suffered from hepatitis, bronchitis, tuberculosis, and other diseases for years, and during his detention these conditions have been exacerbated.

# International Campaign for Tibet

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His so-called 'crime' has now been upgraded and he faces a heavy sentence, and therefore I strongly appeal for concern from international human rights organizations and international media!

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## Footnotes

[1] ICT report, <http://www.savetibet.org/rare-vigil-outside-prison-to-support-popular-tibetan-monk/>

[2] In the PRC, administrative divisions such as prefectural governments often maintain offices in nearby provincial capitals and in Beijing. If Chamdo officials wanted to arrest Khenpo Karma Tsewang outside of his native area of Golog, it would be likely that they would do so in their Chengdu headquarters.

See more at: <http://www.savetibet.org/new-information-about-imprisoned-tibetan-abbot-raises-fears/>

High Peaks Pure Earth translated this blogpost giving further details about the background to Khenpo Kartse's case: <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2014/the-cross-provincial-arrest-of-khenpo-karma-tsewang-from-nangchen-by-woeser/>