



## TIBET LOBBY DAY 2017 – PRIORITY TIBETAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

*The following are six high-profile cases selected out of the hundreds of documented Tibetan political prisoners currently being held in Chinese prisons:*

### GEDUN CHOEKYI NYIMA, THE 11<sup>TH</sup> PANCHEN LAMA

'Disappeared'



On May 14, 1995, the Dalai Lama identified six-year old Gedun Choekyi Nyima as the 11th Panchen Lama. Three days later, the little boy and his parents were 'disappeared.' Denouncing the Dalai Lama's choice as 'illegal and invalid,' Chinese officials soon named their own choice as the 11th Panchen Lama. The whereabouts of Gedun Choekyi Nyima, and his parents Dechen Choedron and Konchog Phuntsok, remain unknown. Foreign delegations have been denied access to him, despite repeated requests. Historically, the Panchen Lama has been one of Tibet's most highly revered religious figures, with a unique relationship with the Dalai Lama. On occasion, Panchen Lamas have played a role in the recognition and subsequent education of Dalai Lamas, and vice versa, which is why control over the institution of the Panchen Lama is considered to be so crucial by Beijing.

### LOBSANG KUNCHOK

Detained: 2012

Name (Chinese): 洛桑贡觉 Sentence: Life

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. 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."

### THABKHE GYATSO

Detained: 4/29/2008

Name (Chinese): 塔开加措 Sentence: 15 years

Location: Lanzhou



Thabkhe Gyatso is serving a 15-year sentence for distributing Tibetan flags during the protests of March 2008. In his early thirties, Thabkhe Gyatso was respected for his writings, which were published in many local newspapers and monthly magazines. He was arrested on April 29, 2008 in Labrang. 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. 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."

**MIGMAR DHONDUP**

Detained: 3/14/2008 Name (Chinese): 米玛顿珠 Sentence: 14 years Location: Chushur Prison, Lhasa Prefecture



Migmar Dhondup, a well-educated man in his early thirties when he was arrested, was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment in connection to the 2008 Tibetan Uprising. Migmar worked for an NGO doing community development work. He is originally from Tingri (Chinese: Dingri) County in Shigatse (Chinese: Xigaze) Prefecture in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Migmar Dhondup was educated in exile (India), and on his return to Tibet he began working as a tour guide. He cared about the preservation of Tibetan culture and encouraged other Tibetans to remember their mother tongue and wear traditional dress. Migmar Dhondup and several others were accused of collecting “intelligence concerning the security and interests of the state and provid[ing] it to the Dalai clique... prior to and following the 'March 14' incident.” Their alleged crimes include distributing CD-ROMs and leaflets that incited a “Tibetan people’s uprising,” as part of an “underground intelligence network” supposedly arranged by the “Dalai Clique.” Since the time of arrest, Migmar Dhondup has been kept entirely incommunicado.

**SHOKJANG**

Detained: 3/19/2015 Name (Chinese): 雪江 Sentence: 3 years Location: Qinghai Province



Druklo (pen name: Shokjang) an intellectual, blogger and writer, is known for his reflective and thought-provoking articles on issues of contemporary concern such as ethnic policy and settlement of nomads. There was widespread dismay when security police in Rebkong detained him on March 19, 2015, with numerous netizens expressing their sadness. Shokjang wrote an eloquent and remarkable letter from prison which asserted his innocence in early 2016. The precisely-worded text of Shokjang’s letter both conveys the absurdity of the charges against him and reveals a fellow feeling with Chinese and other Tibetans who experience similar ordeals. He wrote: “China is a vast country with 56 different nationalities, and Tibetans are one of the largest minorities. I am a Chinese citizen, and as a Tibetan intellectual, I have to be concerned for the precious lives of my own kin. If doing so is called ‘instigating separatism’, nothing is more laughable. I might joyfully and voluntarily serve my sentence, but I never want to be a person without regard for the lives of his brothers and sisters. Come to that, I would do the same for our Chinese brothers and sisters.”

**TASHI WANGCHUK**

Detained: 1/27/2016 Name (Chinese): 扎西旺珠 Location: Yulshul Prefecture Detention Center



Tashi Wangchuk, 31, was detained by police in his home area of Jyegudo (Chinese: Yushu) in Qinghai since January 27 (2016) following an interview with the New York Times on Tibetan culture and language, published as an article and video in November, 2015. He faces charges of ‘separatism.’ His lawyer, Liang Xiaojun said: “All he wants is to try to preserve Tibetan culture.” Tashi Wangchuk told the New York Times that one of the reasons he sought to highlight the importance of language was because he could not find a place where his two teenage nieces could continue studying Tibetan, after officials forced an informal school run by monks in his area to stop offering language classes for laypeople. Officials had also ordered other monasteries and a private school in the area not to teach the language to laypeople. Prior to his arrest, Tashi Wangchuk sold goods in a shop in Yushu and online via the Taobao platform, started by Alibaba, the online commerce company. In 2014, Alibaba featured Tashi in a video produced for its international roadshow.