

## PRIORITY TIBETAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

Tibetan political prisoners endure harsh prison conditions, including torture, deprivation of food and sleep, and long periods in isolation cells. Tibetans are frequently convicted of “crimes” relating to peaceful political activities, and for simply exercising their fundamental human rights. In the current political climate imposed by Chinese authorities, even the most mild expressions of Tibetan cultural or religious identity can be punished by torture and arrest. But despite the intensified dangers, Tibetans are continuing to take bold steps in asserting their national identity and defending their culture. The following are seven 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’

*Detained Since: May 17, 1995 Sentence: No official sentence Location: Unknown*



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.

### TASHI WANGCHUK

*Detained: 1/27/2016*

*Name (Chinese): 扎西旺珠 Sentence: Five years Location: Yulshul Prefecture*



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 was charged with ‘inciting separatism.’ His lawyer, Liang Xiaojun said: “All he wants is to try to preserve Tibetan culture.” 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.

### YESHE CHOEDRON

*Detained: March 2008*

*Name (Chinese): 益西曲珍 Sentence: 15 years Location: Drapchi prison, Lhasa prefecture, TAR*



Yeshe Choedron, 53, a retired doctor from Lhasa, was arrested in March 2008. On November 7, 2008, the Lhasa Intermediate People’s Court sentenced Yeshe Choedron to 15 years imprisonment after being convicted for “espionage” for allegedly providing “intelligence and information harmful to the security and interests of the state” to “the Dalai clique’s security department,” according to the official Lhasa Evening News. China has not released any information about her case despite foreign governments repeatedly raising Yeshe Choedron’s case. Tibetan sources report that she has not seen her children since the sentencing and she is reported to be in very poor health.

### 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, 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 returned to Tibet to work as a tour guide. 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." Since the time of arrest, Migmar Dhondup has been kept entirely incommunicado.

### **BONKHO KYI**      *Detained: 11/20/2015*

*Name (Chinese): 本考吉(音)*      *Sentence: Seven Years*      *Location: Ngaba, Sichuan*



Bonkho Kyi, 48 yrs old, was sentenced to seven years. She was arrested around November 20 2015, and her whereabouts have been unknown since then. According to Tibetan sources, she is believed to have been convicted on the assumption that she arranged celebrations for the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday. Earlier she was arrested in 2011 and 2012 and detained for a few months. Her relatives used various means to get her released, but she remained under surveillance.

#### What can you do:

- 1. Urge for religious freedom for Tibetans whenever US policy on China is discussed, and particularly during interactions with Chinese authorities.*
- 2. Adopt a Tibetan Political Prisoner. Join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's "Defending Freedoms Project."*
- 3. Raise the release of Tibetan political prisoners with Chinese government officials.*