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People's Republic of China: Amnesty International condemns execution of Tibetan, following unfair trial

Amnesty International today expressed dismay at reports that Lobsang Dhondup was executed yesterday following his conviction in a secret trial for involvement in a series of bombings in Sichuan province.

"We are appalled by these reports, particularly in the face of widespread international concern about this case from both non-governmental organizations and other governments", Amnesty International said.

There are serious concerns that Lobsang Dhondup's trial was unfair. He appears to have been held for several months incommunicado, he was not given full and adequate legal representation and his trial was held in secret. According to official sources, this was because the case involved "state secrets", but the authorities have not explained how this related to charges against the defendants.

"Given these serious breaches of international fair trial standards, it is quite possible that Lobsang Dhondup's case was a miscarriage of justice," Amnesty International said, adding that the authorities should make public a full account of the trial proceedings.

According to media reports, a local court official confirmed that Lobsang Dhondup was executed yesterday. If this is true, this would be the first known case of the execution of a Tibetan for alleged political offences in many years. Until now, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), home to the mainly Muslim Uighur minority, was the only place where Amnesty International has recorded executions of political prisoners in recent years.

"This case could signal a move by the Chinese authorities to extend the use of the death penalty to those branded as political opponents, 'separatists' or 'terrorists' beyond the XUAR," Amnesty International said.

Lobsang Dhondup's co-defendant, the Tibetan religious leader, Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, had been given a death sentence with a two-year suspension of execution in connection with the same case. His appeal was also rejected by the Sichuan High People's Court yesterday.

Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche was reportedly held incommunicado for eight months following his arrest. On 21 January, Radio Free Asia reported having received a secret tape recording made by Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche in his prison cell in which he claims he has been falsely accused and protests his innocence.

The authorities reportedly tried to arrest Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche at least twice before, including in 1998 when he tried to establish monasteries without official approval. He also organized a popular local protest against deforestation in the area by a local timber company.

"There are serious concerns that Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche may have been wrongly accused of involvement in the bombings because of his peaceful religious and community activities," Amnesty International said.

"The authorities should conduct an immediate review of the case and conduct a re-trial in line with international fair trial standards. If not, Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche should be released unconditionally."

At least ten other people were reportedly detained in connection with the case. Several were apparently beaten or otherwise tortured and ill-treated in police custody, although it is not known whether their testimonies were used to convict Lobsang Dhondup or Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche. Two young monks who were reportedly interrogated and beaten by the police in connection with the case have not been seen since 8 April 2002. There are fears that they may have "disappeared".

"We are urging the Chinese authorities to clarify the names and whereabouts of all those detained in connection with this case and carry out an immediate and impartial investigation into all allegations of torture or ill-treatment," Amnesty International said.

Background

Lobsang Dhondup and Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche had been arrested on 7 April 2002 following a 3 April bombing incident in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. According to official reports, "separatist" leaflets calling for the independence of Tibet from China were found at the scene of the blast.

On 2 December, the Kardze (Ganzi) Intermediate People's Court in the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province sentenced Lobsang Dhondup to death for "inciting separatism", "causing explosions" and "illegal possession of guns and ammunition". Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche received a death sentence with a two year suspension for "causing explosions" and "inciting separatism". According to official sources, Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche appealed against the sentence, but Lobsang Dhondup did not appeal.

Four monks were reportedly arrested along with Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche on 7 April 2002 at Jamyang Choekhorling monastery, Nyagchukha county (in Chinese: Yajiang county), Sichuan province. One has since been released, but the four others, Tsultrim Dargye, Tamdring Tsering and Ashar (or Aka) Dhargye may remain in detention. It is not known whether they have been charged or sentenced. Tamdring Tsering was allegedly severely beaten by police on arrest.

Choetsom and Pasang are also thought to be monks at Jamyang Choekhorling monastery. They reportedly went missing on 8 April 2002 after being interrogated and beaten by the police during the raid on the monastery the day before. They have not been seen since. It is unclear whether they are in hiding or in police custody.

Tashi Phuntsok, from the same monastery, was arrested on or around 21 April 2002 while he was in Nyagchukha hospital undergoing treatment for tuberculosis. It is unclear whether he has since been released or remains in detention. There is no information about his current state of health.

Two other men were arrested on or around 7 May 2002 after collecting 20,000 signatures on a petition to deter an earlier apparent attempt to arrest Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche. Whilst one has since been released, the other, Tserang Dondrup (also known as Jortse or Jotse), was tried in Nyagchukha and sentenced to five years' imprisonment. He is reported to have lost most movement or flexibility in his legs since his arrest, possibly as a result of torture or ill-treatment. Three others are also known to have been arrested in connection with this case, but have since been released.

Reportedly, an official from the local Religious Affairs Bureau recently confirmed that Tserang Dondrup had been sentenced to five years on charges of "separatist activities". He also indicated that two others had been sentenced in connection with the case. It is unclear whether he was referring to Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche and Lobsang Dhondup or to two other individuals. He also said that there had been additional detentions in connection with the case, but that all had since been released.

Amnesty International previously issued Urgent Actions on the above mentioned cases. For more information , please call our press office on +44 207 413 5729 or visit our website www.amnesty.org or www.news.amnesty.org

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