

## PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

### Prison terms increased for nuns in Tibet

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*Government authorities in Tibet have confirmed that 14 nuns, who are serving various terms of imprisonment in Drapchi Prison, in Lhasa, have had their sentences increased by up to nine years for composing and recording in prison pro-independence songs. They apparently had their sentences extended at a trial that took place on 8 October 1993, one of them, Phuntsog Nyidron, to a period of 17 years' imprisonment, the longest known current sentence for a female political prisoner in Tibet.*

*The songs were recorded on a tape-recorder that had been smuggled into the prison. The tape was then circulated secretly in Tibet. On the tape each of the 14 nuns announce their names and then dedicate a song or poem to their friends and supporters. One nun sings: "All of you outside who have done all that you can for us in prison, we are deeply grateful to you and we will never forget you." Another nun tells of the experience of prison life: "Our food is like pig food, we are beaten and treated brutally. But this will never*

change the Tibetan people's perseverance: It will remain unfaltering". In most of the songs the nuns reaffirm their commitment to Tibetan independence and make assurances that they are in good spirits.

It is believed that the Chinese authorities deemed that the public distribution of these songs amounted to "spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda", an offence under China's Criminal Law which is normally punishable by a maximum of 5 years' imprisonment, or more in the cases of "ringleaders" or others whose crimes are considered "monstrous".

The nuns from different nunneries in the Tibet Autonomous Region were reportedly arrested between 1989 and 1992 for taking part in Tibetan independence demonstrations. At their initial trials they were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from three to nine years. The nuns are not reported to have used or advocated violence and Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience.

**Tenzin Thubten** and **Lhundrup Zangmo**, both from Michungri Nunnery, and **Gyaltsen Drolkar** and **Gyaltsen Choezom** from Garu Nunnery, were among a group of nuns arrested on 21 August 1990 for taking part in a pro-independence demonstration in Lhasa. They were sentenced on 30 November 1990 for "counter-revolutionary propaganda" and received terms of four and five years' imprisonment. At the trial in October 1993 Tenzin Thubten was given the highest increase in sentence with an additional nine years reportedly added to her original sentence, bringing her total sentence to 14 years. Lhundrup Zangmo was given an additional five years, making a total of nine years' imprisonment; Gyaltsen Drolkar an extra eight years, making a total of 12 years and Gyaltsen Choezom an additional five years, making a total of nine years' imprisonment.

**Phuntsog Nyidron**, in her mid-twenties, from Michungri Nunnery, was arrested for her alleged role as "a ringleader" in an independence demonstration on 14 Oct 1989 in Lhasa and was sentenced to nine years. This term of imprisonment was increased in October 1993 by eight years, making a total of 17 years - the longest known current sentence for a

female political prisoner in Tibet. According to former colleagues now in exile in India, Phuntsog Nyidron received the longest cumulative sentence because she was the only one amongst the nuns who had held a semi-official position in her nunnery – that of a store-keeper.

**Rigzin Choekyi**, from Shungsep Nunnery, was reportedly arrested with 5 other Shungsep nuns around August 1990 for an unknown reason, and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. Her sentence is believed to have been increased by five years in October 1993.

**Ngawang Sangdron**, an eighteen year-old Garu nun, was reportedly given an additional six years' imprisonment. She was arrested on 17 June 1992 after participating in a demonstration in Lhasa and had been initially sentenced to three years.

**Ngawang Tsamdron**, **Ngawang Lochoe** and **Ngawang Choekyi**, all from Toelung Nyengon Nunnery were arrested in May 1992 in connection with a pro-independence demonstration and each sentenced to five years' imprisonment. At the October 1993 trial Ngawang Tsamdron and Ngawang Lochoe reportedly had their sentences extended by five years, and Ngawang Choekyi by eight years.

**Jigme Yangchen** and **Palden Choedron**, from Shungsep Nunnery, had their original sentences of seven years reportedly increased by five years. They are believed to have been arrested in October 1990 for shouting independence slogans in Lhasa.

**Namdrol Lhamo**, from Chubsang Nunnery, had her original six year term increased by another six years. She was arrested on 12 May 1992 for taking part in a demonstration. **Ngawang Choezom**, also from Chubsang Nunnery, had her four year sentence increased by five years. She was reportedly arrested on 21 March 1992 for demonstrating in Lhasa.

Reports of the length of the sentences handed down to the nuns in October 1993 vary. Except in the cases of Tenzin Thubten and Phuntsog Nyidron, whose individual sentences were confirmed by the authorities, the actual additional sentences for the other nuns may be slightly higher or lower than stated above.

The re-sentencing of the 14 nuns follows on from reports that 11 nuns from Garu Nunnery, arrested on 14 June 1993, were given prison sentences of up to seven years for allegedly participating in a demonstration or attempted demonstration. Among those arrested at the time was **Gyaltzen Pelsang** a 15-year-old novice.<sup>1</sup>

**Tenzin Dekyong**, a 16-year-old novice nun who was arrested on 13 March 1993 during a demonstration, was apparently released from Gutsa Detention Centre a few months after her arrest according to recent information from Tibetan refugees in India.<sup>2</sup>

According to unofficial reports there are no fewer than 50 women prisoners held in Drapchi Prison, the majority of whom are nuns. All the nuns are reportedly serving sentences for taking part in peaceful pro-independence demonstrations in Lhasa since 1989, mostly involving less than half a dozen people and lasting no more than 5 minutes.

On 31 January 1994 Tibet Television reported that 90 Tibetan prisoners had their sentences reduced "as rewards for having conscientiously followed prison rules and truly repented during their sentences". The official announcement went on to say that of these a number were released on

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<sup>1</sup> See Amnesty International's report *Heavy Prison Sentences for Nuns in Tibet*, 2 February 1994, AI Index: ASA 17/03/94

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

parole. The report did not explain if they were political or criminal prisoners. In a similar gesture the same time last year 100 Tibetan prisoners had their sentences reduced and as a result 28 were immediately released. According to unofficial reports from Lhasa none of those released last year were believed to be political prisoners.

Amnesty International would welcome the release of prisoners of conscience as it has welcomed the release of Gendun Rinchen and Lobsang Yonten in January 1994. However, rather than being released, Amnesty International is very concerned that the 14 nuns have received additional punishment simply for the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of conscience and expression. Amnesty International is also concerned that the nuns have not received fair trials either when they were first sentenced or during the second trial in October 1993. The organization considers that the trial procedures provided in Chinese law do not meet the minimum standards for fair trial set out in international human rights instruments.

*See overleaf for recommended actions and government authorities to write to*

*Please send telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:*

♦ *expressing concern that the 14 nuns are prisoners of conscience and urging that they be released immediately and unconditionally.*

*Please send appeals to:*

**Tibet Autonomous Region President:**

**Gyaltzen Norbu Zhuxi**

Xizang Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu

1 Kang'andonglu

Lasashi 850000

Xizang Zizhiqu

People's Republic of China

*Telexes: 68014 FAOLT CN or 68007 PGVMT CN*

*(Salutation: Dear President)*

*Telegram: President Gyaltzen Norbu, Lasashi, Xizang Zizhiqu, China*

**Tibet Autonomous Region Chief Procurator:**

**Yang Youcai Jianchazhang**

Xizang Zizhiqu Renmin Jianchayuan

Lasashi

Xizang Zizhiqu

People's Republic of China

*Telegram: Yang Youcai, Jiachayuan, Lasashi, Xizang Zizhiqu, China*

**Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Regional People's Congress Standing Committee:**

**Raidi Zhuren**

Xizang Zizhiqu Renmin Daibiao Dahui

Changwu Weiyuanhui

Lasashi

Xizang Zizhiqu

People's Republic of China

*Telegram: Raidi Zhuren, Renmin Daibiao Dahui, Lasashi, Xizang Zizhiqu, China*

*This document is being sent to China and CHIRAN Coordinators for action by groups. It is being sent to sections for information only. Check with the China Research Section at the International Secretariat if sending appeals after 31 May 1994.*

**KEYWORDS:** PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE<sup>1</sup> / RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS - BUDDHIST<sup>1</sup> / WOMEN<sup>1</sup> / LONG-TERM IMPRISONMENT / JUVENILES / DEMONSTRATIONS / RELEASE /



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