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CHINA

Update on 11 Tibetan nuns arrested in 1993

Gyaltzen Kelsang dies shortly after release

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A 24-year-old Tibetan nun is reported to have died shortly after leaving custody on medical parole. The cause of *Gyaltzen Kelsang's* death on 20 February 1995 is unknown, but she was reportedly ill-treated in detention, held in poor conditions and was recently diagnosed as suffering from a severe kidney complaint.

Gyaltzen Kelsang was arrested with ten other nuns from Garu Nunnery, north of Lhasa, on 14 June 1993¹. They were accused of having taken part in a pro-independence demonstration but reports indicate that the nuns were arrested before they had managed to begin a protest. *Gyaltzen Kelsang* was subsequently sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

¹ See "China: Heavy prison sentences for nuns in Tibet", ASA 17/03/94, 2 February 1994.

At the time of her arrest in June 1993 and also after her arrival at Drapchi prison in Lhasa, Gyaltzen Kelsang is reported to have been beaten. An unofficial Tibetan source said that "she was badly beaten there [Drapchi prison], became weak and was put to hard labour". The source also said that a year after her arrest "her health worsened and she was bed-ridden for more than 20 days in prison, but the prison guards did not care".

In late November 1994 she was reportedly taken from Drapchi prison to a police hospital in Lhasa where she was diagnosed as suffering from severe kidney problems. After admission to the hospital she is said to have lost movement in her lower limbs and suffered speech impairment. A Tibetan who visited her in November 1994 said, "from the waist down she was very thin and didn't feel anything in either of her legs ... she couldn't eat and her face looked really dry. She was very scared of dying and could hardly speak. She spoke very slowly and she was panting a lot. She said she was going to die soon."

A month after she was admitted to the police hospital, Gyaltzen Kelsang's health had reportedly still not improved and she was sent to her parents' home on medical parole². Her parents were requested to report once a week to the authorities on their daughter's health and arranged for her to be admitted to the Tibetan Medical Hospital. She stayed in the hospital for nine weeks but died at her parents' home on the outskirts of Lhasa, seven days after leaving the hospital. Her sentence was due to expire in June 1995.

² Prisoners released on medical parole are expected to return to their place of detention after their health is considered to have improved sufficiently.

Another of the eleven nuns detained on 14 June 1993, **Gyaltzen Pelsang**³, is reported to have been released on 9 February 1995 though official Chinese sources had stated since mid-1994 that she had been released due to "her relative youth". Gyaltzen Pelsang was reported to have been aged 15 at the time of her arrest, but it is now believed that she was aged 13 when she was detained. According to Tibetan sources, she was held in Gutsa detention centre, outside Lhasa where the majority of juvenile Tibetan political prisoners are held, often without charge or trial. Many detainees in Gutsa are subjected to torture and ill-treatment. Gyaltzen Pelsang was born with a handicapped right leg, for which she is said to be in need of medical attention since being detained.

In June 1994, in a reply to a US Government list of detainees, Chinese authorities listed Gyaltzen Pelsang as being detained but "not yet criminally sentenced". In October 1994 a delegation of European Union diplomats who visited Lhasa were told that she had been released "on account of being under the age of criminal responsibility".

Article 14 of the Chinese Criminal Law fixes the age of criminal responsibility at 16 in most cases and at 14 for certain "serious" crimes, making Gyaltzen Pelsang, at 13 years old, too young to be tried by a court. She spent more than 19 months in detention without charge or trial. According to one report, shortly after being taken to Gutsa, she staged a brief protest, with other nuns, shouting pro-independence slogans and demanding to be sentenced. As a result of this she was denied family visits for the remainder of her time in detention and her relatives were refused information about her whereabouts or health.

Of the other nine nuns arrested on 14 June 1993, eight are reported to be held in Drapchi prison serving sentences ranging from two to seven years'. According to Tibetan sources, **Ngawang Chendrol** (also known as Ngawang

³ See footnote 1.

Peldrol), aged 18, sentenced to three years' imprisonment, is in very poor health and is currently at home on medical parole. She reportedly became ill whilst in Drapchi prison and was transferred to hospital in January 1995. A Tibetan nun, who had been in prison with her, said that Ngawang Chendrol was badly beaten while in detention and she is reportedly suffering from kidney damage compounded by malnourishment.

The sentences passed against four of the nine nuns were previously not known, however sources now indicate that **Ngawang Chime**, aged 19, and **Ngawang Choekyi**, aged 21, were sentenced to four years' imprisonment, **Ngawang Palmo**, aged 22, was sentenced to three years' and **Rinchen Drolma**, aged 23, is thought to have been sentenced to two or four years' imprisonment.

There is no further news about the other four nuns: **Gyaltzen Sangmo**, aged 24, is serving a three year sentence, **Ngawang Keldron**, aged 19, is serving a five year sentence, **Ngawang Dedrol** aged 25, and **Phuntsog Choekyi**, aged 22, were both sentenced to either six or seven years of imprisonment.

Amnesty International is concerned that Gyaltzen Kelsang is the third young Tibetan woman to have died shortly after being released from prison since October 1992. It is calling on the Chinese authorities to provide information about the date at which Gyaltzen Kelsang's illness was first diagnosed, what the exact diagnosis was, what treatment was recommended and what treatment she received. It is also calling on the authorities to disclose whether a post-mortem examination was carried out to determine the cause of Gyaltzen Kelsang's death and, if so requests that the findings of the post-mortem be made public.

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

- *expressing grave concern at Gyaltzen Kelsang's death shortly after being released from custody on medical parole, and requesting that full information about her illness, treatment and cause of death be made public;*
- *welcoming Gyaltzen Pelsang's release, but expressing concern that she was detained for political reasons when aged 13, and held without charge or trial for over 19 months;*
- *expressing concern for the health of Ngawang Chendrol, demanding that the charges against her be dropped, her release be made unconditional and that the authorities ensure that she receives proper medical treatment;*
- *demanding the immediate and unconditional release of the nine other nuns currently detained in Drapchi prison, who were arrested on 14 June 1993 for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of expression.*

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KEYWORDS: