

16 October 1998

Further information on UA 210/98 (ASA 17/25/98, 24 July 1998) - Torture and ill-treatment / Fear for safety

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Ngawang Sungrab, aged 26, monk from Drepung monastery
Gyaltzen Choephel, aged 33, layman from Lhasa
Ngawang Sangdrol (f), aged 24, nun from Garu nunnery
Ngawang Choezom (f), aged 26, nun from Chubsang nunnery
Ngawang Tenzin (f), aged 30, nun from Gyadrag nunnery
Tanak Jigme Sangpo, aged 70, teacher

New names Choekyi Wangmo, aged 24, nun from Shar Bumpa nunnery
 Tashi Lhamo, aged 24, nun from Nyemo county
 Dekyi Yangzom, aged 21, nun from Nyemo county
 Khedron Yonten, age not known, nun from Nyemo county
 Ngawang Choekyi, aged 31, nun from Toelun Nyen nunnery

Four, possibly five, nuns reportedly died in Drapchi prison on 7 June 1998 after being placed in solitary confinement in May. This heightens fears for the safety of prisoners who remain in solitary confinement following the violent suppression of demonstrations inside Tibet's Drapchi prison on 1 and 4 May.

The authorities' official explanation for the nuns' deaths is that they committed suicide. They provided no further explanation, however, of how the nuns all died in similar circumstances on the same day, when they were being held in solitary confinement and had no way of communicating with each other.

Choekyi Wangmo is reported to have hanged herself. A mark was reportedly found on her neck. She was serving a five-year sentence for peaceful pro-independence activities and was almost due for release.

Officials said Tashi Lhamo, Dekyi Yangzom and Khedron Yonten all suffocated themselves by stuffing scarves into their mouths. The nuns' bodies were reportedly bloated but had no visible external injuries.

The death of the fifth nun, Ngawang Choekyi, remains unconfirmed. She was serving a 13-year sentence. She was originally detained for participating in a peaceful pro-independence demonstration but her sentence was later increased after she and 13 other nuns composed and recorded pro-independence songs in prison.

There has been no further news about Ngawang Sungrab, Gyaltzen Choephel, Ngawang Sangdrol, Ngawang Choezom, Ngawang Tenzin or Tanak Jigme Sangpo, who were placed in solitary confinement in May and reportedly ill-treated. They are thought to remain in solitary confinement.

Information regarding the incidents at Drapchi of 1 and 4 May and the subsequent suppression and deaths of prisoners remains difficult to confirm. There has been no official public confirmation from the Chinese authorities of the events in Drapchi in May. The European Union, which had a human rights delegation visiting Drapchi prison on 4 May, has however received a preliminary response to their enquiries from the Chinese authorities, who admit that minor disturbances occurred in the prison on 1 and 4 May.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Chinese, Tibetan or in your own language:

- urging the Chinese authorities to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the events of 1 and 4 May 1998 in Drapchi prison and to make their findings public;
- urging a full and impartial investigation into the reports of the deaths in custody of five nuns held in solitary confinement since May;
- urging the immediate release of all prisoners from solitary confinement;
- expressing serious concern at reports that prisoners in Drapchi prison, including Ngawang Sungrab and Gyaltzen Choephel, have been severely beaten, and seeking assurance that no prisoners will be ill-treated and that all prisoners will receive all necessary medical treatment;
- expressing serious concern at reports that other prisoners, including Ngawang Sangdrol, Ngawang Choezom and Ngawang Tenzin, continue to be held in solitary confinement and have been subjected to harsh interrogation and ill-treatment;
- urging the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience;
- reminding the Chinese authorities of the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment".

APPEALS TO:

President of the People's Republic of China

JIANG Zemin Guojia Zhuxi, Beijingshi, People's Republic of China

Telegram: President Jiang Zemin, Beijing, China

Salutation: Your Excellency

Chairman of the Xizang Autonomous Regional People's Government

Legchog Zhuren, Xizang Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu, 1 Kang'angdonglu

Lasashi 850000, Xizang Zizhiqu, People's Republic of China

Telexes: 68014 FAOLT CN or 68007 PGVMT CN

Salutation: Dear Chairman

Telegram: Chairman, Regional People's Government, Lasa, Xizang Autonomous Region, China

Salutation: Dear Chairman

COPIES TO:

Prison Governor, Drapchi Prison/Tibet Autonomous Regional Prison No.1

Jianyuzhang

Xizang Zizhiqu Di Yi Jianyu

Lasashi 850003

Xizang Zizhiqu

People's Republic of China

and to diplomatic representatives of People's Republic of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 27 November 1998.

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment".

Article 5, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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