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# *amnesty international*

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## PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

### Tibet: Appeal for Ngawang Choephel

**28 March 1996**

**AI INDEX: ASA 17/49/96**

**DISTR: REL CO/GR/SC**

Ngawang Choephel, a 29 year-old Tibetan exile, is reported to have been detained in Tibet since August 1995. He had travelled there in July 1995 to make a film documentary about traditional Tibetan performing arts and was first reported missing by his mother who was expecting him to return to India in December.

Ngawang Choephel

According to exiled Tibetan businessman Dorji Rinchen, who was released from detention in Tibet in October 1995, Ngawang Choephel is currently being held in Nyari detention centre in Shigatse. Dorji Rinchen left Tibet two years ago to settle in India, but was detained by police in Shigatse on 14 August 1995 while visiting relatives. In September 1995 Dorji Rinchen was moved to Nyari detention centre and on 16 September he "was shocked to see two prison officials bringing in Ngawang Choephel". Dorji Rinchen had previously met Ngawang Choephel in Nepal.

During two brief conversations in Nyari detention centre, Ngawang Choephel told Dorji Rinchen that he had been detained from the marketplace in Shigatse and he talked about the work he had been doing recording traditional Tibetan music and dance on video. He also said that his travel documents, camera and two video tapes had been confiscated. Dorji Rinchen said that at the time of his release, on 8 October 1995, "Ngawang Choephel was still in prison at that time and he appeared to be in good health".

The exact date of Ngawang Choephel's detention in Shigatse is not known. Before being seen by Dorji Rinchen in Nyari detention centre he was last seen on 20 August 1995 when he parted from his travelling companion in Lhasa with the intention of travelling alone to Shigatse before returning to India in November. During his visit, Ngawang Choephel had

been questioned by police about his filming on more than one occasion and had also been asked to show his travel documents<sup>1</sup>.

Dorji Rinchen's testimony gives a detailed account of him being tortured and ill-treated in Nyari detention centre, including being "strapped and stretched on a wooden plank and left without food for the night" and of being placed in solitary confinement without food or clothing. He says that he was beaten and hit with sticks, "they hit me all over my body and boxed my face. My eyes were stung with each blow. During the whole interrogation session, I was handcuffed and by the time they had finished questioning and torturing me, my wrists were bleeding". He also describes his conditions of detention saying that he was given boiled water for breakfast, lunch was the last meal of the day and consisted of either a Tibetan bun or rice, with boiled water to drink. His relatives were not allowed to bring food or clothing. Dorji Rinchen was released after 54 days in detention and left Tibet on 13 October.

In a document given to Dorji Rinchen's wife by the authorities, the reason given for his detention was that he did not have valid travel documents. However, Dorji Rinchen says that he was accused by the police of "carrying documents about the Panchen Lama reincarnation issue<sup>2</sup> produced by the Tibetan government-in-exile", and that he was also accused of having "come to Tibet with the purpose of disrupting the 30th anniversary celebrations of the Tibet Autonomous Region". Dorji Rinchen reported having heard from other prisoners that Nyari detention centre holds more than 500 prisoners, all but two of whom are Tibetans and that the majority are detained for political reasons.

While he was in the detention centre, Dorji Rinchen met **Lobsang Tsultrim**, a 20 year-old monk from Tashilhunpo monastery, of which the Panchen Lama is the traditional head. Amnesty International remains concerned about the abbot and many monks from the monastery, as well as several laypeople, who have spent several months in detention in connection with the disputed choice of the reincarnation of the 10th Panchen Lama. It also remains concerned about **Gendun Choekyi Nyima**, a six year-old boy announced by the Dalai Lama to be the 11th Panchen Lama, and his family, who have been missing from their home since May 1995.

Originally from Tibet, Ngawang Choephel and his family went to live in India when he was two years old. Ngawang Choephel studied up to the age of 15 in the Central School for Tibetans, in Mundgod Tibetan settlement in South India. He later joined the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts in Dharamsala, from where he obtained a diploma in Tibetan music and dance and went on to become a music and dance teacher. He studied music for one year on a prestigious scholarship at Middlebury College, Vermont, in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Ngawang Choephel has an Indian Identity Certificate but as this is not recognized for travel in China he travelled to Tibet as an "overseas Chinese" visitor with a document issued by the Chinese authorities in India.

<sup>2</sup> See AI documents: *6-year old boy missing and over 50 detained in Panchen Lama dispute*, ASA 17/07/96, 18 January 1996, *Three detained in Panchen Lama controversy*, ASA 17/40/95, 20 June 1995, and *Crackdown on Tibetan dissent continues*, ASA 17/74/95, 29 September 1995.



This document is sent to China and CHIRAN Coordinators for action by groups. It is sent to Sections for information only. Check with the East Asia Sub-Regional Team if sending appeals after May 1996.

**INTERNATIONAL  
SECRETARIAT, 1  
EASTON STREET,  
LONDON WC1X  
8DJ, UNITED  
KINGDOM**

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

- ◆urging the immediate and unconditional release of Ngawang Choephel unless he is charged with a recognizable criminal offence;
- ◆urging the immediate and unconditional release of Lobsang Tsultrim and all other prisoners in Nyari detention centre unless they are charged with recognizable criminal offences;
- ◆urging an immediate enquiry into the torture and ill-treatment of Dorji Rinchen and seeking assurance that the perpetrators are brought to justice;

**KEYWORDS: DETENTION WITHOUT TRIAL / DIRECTORS / RELIGIOUS OFFICIALS -  
BUDDHIST / CHILDREN / PHOTOGRAPHS**

◆seeking assurance that all current detainees at Nyari detention centre are treated humanely in accordance with international standards, write to

President of the Tibet Autonomous Regional People's Government

**Gyaltzen Norbu Zhaxi**

Xizang Zizhiq Renmin Zhengfu

1 Kang'angdonglu

Lasashi 850000

Xizang Zizhiq

People's Republic of China

**Telexes: 68014 FAOLT CN or 68007 PGVMT CN**

**Salutation: Dear President**

**Telegram: President of the Regional People's Government, Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China**

Director of the Department of Public Security Bureau

**Nyima Tsering Juzhang**

Gong'anju

Kung Jue Lin Zhe lu er hao

Shigatseshi

Xizang Zizhiq

People's Republic of China

**Salutation: Dear Director**

**Telegram: Director of the Department of Public Security, Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China**

Mayor of Shigatse City

**Tsewang Palden Shizhang**

Shigatse Shizhengfu

Kung Jue Lin Zhe lu er hao

Shigatseshi

Xizang Zizhiq

People's Republic of China

**Salutation: Dear Mayor**

**Telegram: The Mayor, Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China**

*3 May 1996 is Ngawang Choephel's 30th birthday, greetings can be sent to him c/o*

**The Director of Nyari Detention Centre**

**Nyari Kanshousuo Suozhang**

Shigatseshi

Xizang Zizhiq

People's Republic of China

**Salutation: Dear Director**

**Telegram: Director of Nyari Detention Centre, Shigatse, Tibet Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China**