

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

**AI Index: ASA 17/72/91
Distr: UA/SC**

UA 425/91 Health Concern/Fear of Ill-treatment

5 December 1991

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: Sonam Wangdu

Sonam Wangdu, a 36-year-old Tibetan trader who is serving a life sentence for the alleged murder of a policeman during a demonstration in March 1988, is reported to be critically ill in Drapchi prison in Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

According to an unofficial source in Lhasa, Sonam Wangdu's "health is deteriorating day by day and his condition is serious. The worst part is that he can no longer control his bladder. Secondly he cannot support his own weight and cannot stand up any more."

Reports at the beginning of 1991 suggested that Sonam Wangdu may have been seriously injured when prisoners were beaten or punished for taking part in protests following the death of Lhakpa Tsering, another political prisoner held in Drapchi prison, who died in custody on 15 December 1990 (see UA 04/91 ASA 17/01/91, 10 January 1991). Shortly after that date Sonam Wangdu was first reported ill and unable to walk on his own. He was reportedly transferred to the Public Security Hospital sometime in December 1990. According to Tibetan sources he was returned to Drapchi prison despite still being too ill to move. He was returned to hospital at an unknown date, but according to reports on 28 April 1991 he was once again sent back to prison. The exact nature of Sonam Wangdu's illness is not known. Tibetan sources indicated that his wife and family are not allowed to see him.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sonam Wangdu, also known as Shungden or Shukden, was arrested along with Lobsang Tenzin and four other Tibetans on 16 April 1988. They were accused of involvement in the murder of policeman Yuan Shisheng during violent clashes between demonstrators and police at the climax of the Monlam prayer festival on 5 March 1988. Lobsang Tenzin was sentenced to death but had his sentence commuted to life imprisonment; the other four Tibetans were sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from 5 to 15 years. The news of their public trial was announced by the New China News Agency on 19 January 1989.

Amnesty International has had reports of at least two political prisoners dying in detention in Tibet since 1988. The organization is gravely concerned about the state of health of Sonam Wangdu.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Telexes/airmail letters:

- expressing concern about Sonam Wangdu's health and urging the authorities to ensure that he gets all appropriate medical attention, and to make public information about his current state of health;

- expressing concern at reports that ill-treatment reportedly takes place at Drapchi prison in Lhasa and urging that these reports be impartially investigated.

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APPEALS TO

Tibet Autonomous Region President:

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Dear President

Regional Chief Procurator:

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Xizang Zizhiqu Renmin Jianchayuan
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Dear Procurator

Supreme People's Procuratorate President:

LIU Fuzhi Jianchazhang
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Dear Chief Procurator

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and to the office of the Xinhua news agency and diplomatic representatives
of the PRC in your country

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 January 1992.