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China: Tibetan child detainees at risk of torture and ill-treatment

Four Tibetan children aged 15 years, detained since 7 September in Gansu province, are at grave risk of torture and mistreatment on suspicion of writing pro-Tibetan independence slogans. A fifth child, 14 years old, is in hospital suffering severe head injuries received in detention.

On 7 September some 40 children were detained by police in Xiahe county, Gannan prefecture, Gansu province for exercising their right to freedom of expression. All but seven of the children were released from police custody within 48 hours. Two of these seven children, aged 14 years old, were later released after payments were made by their families to the police, believed to be in the amount of 2000 yuan (US\$250). Another boy, aged 14 years, believed to be called Lhamo Tseten, was allowed to go to hospital for treatment of severe wounds to the head received in detention, also after payments to the police.

Public Security Bureau officials are reportedly demanding payment for the release of the remaining four boys still in custody, said to be more than 20,000 yuan (\$2500). It appears that the police will not release any of the boys until full payment is made for all of them. However, children released after payment by their families may be rearrested shortly after, in a pattern previously observed by local residents.

Amnesty International has received reports that electric prods have been used on the children and that Chopa Kyab, one of the children still in detention, is being taken away at night, and has been severely traumatized by his treatment.

Amnesty International has long-standing concerns about arbitrary detention without charge, trial or judicial review, as well as torture and ill-treatment of detainees in Tibet. Amnesty International demands the immediate release of the four children still in detention, and calls on the Chinese authorities to launch an investigation into the brutal treatment of the children, and into the reports of corrupt practices by local police demanding payment from families for the release of those in detention. The children should be given immediate medical treatment and be protected from further abuse.

No one should be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The Chinese authorities have further violated their international obligations as a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which accords special protection to children. Nor is their treatment of the juvenile detainees in compliance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules). Freedom of religion, expression and association continue to be severely restricted in Tibet, and as result many are imprisoned for peacefully exercising their basic human rights. As elsewhere in China, arbitrary detentions, unfair trials, torture and ill-treatment remain commonplace.