

## **Profiles of Courage: A List of Tibetan Political Prisoners**

*Information prepared by the International Tibet Support Network*  
[current as of November 26 2008]

Students for a Free Tibet (SFT), along with other Tibet Support Groups, is shining a spotlight on the voices and actions of ordinary Tibetans inside Tibet. As part of this effort, we are prioritizing the cases of six current political prisoners. They have been detained for a wide variety of reasons: documenting the opinions of Tibetans inside Tibet (Dhondup Wangchen), writing, (Rangjung), advocating for education and environmental protection (Tenzin Delek Rinpoche), speaking out about the torture and mistreatment Tibetans face in detention (Jigme Guri), and protesting Chinese policies in Tibet and calling for the return of the Dalai Lama (Sangye Lhamo and Runggye Adak), but the common thread is that each of these individuals risked everything to resist Chinese rule in Tibet.

### **TAKE ACTION**

By profiling the cases of these brave six individuals, we can help free them from prison, while raising awareness about the incredible risks Tibetans inside Tibet are taking to publicize and resist China's occupation.

**Dhondup Wangchen**, 34, is the filmmaker of *Leaving Fear Behind*, a remarkable documentary by Tibetans inside Tibet that captures firsthand the thoughts, feelings and opinions of Tibetans living under Chinese occupation. The footage for the film was smuggled out of Tibet in early March 2008. Dhondup and his cameraman, Jigme Gyatso were fully aware of the risks they were taking by speak out openly about the situation in Tibet and choosing not to conceal their identities. In order for the film to be made, fear truly had to be set aside. **Visit SFT's Leaving Fear Behind Action Center: [www.studentsforafreetibet.org/leavingfearbehind](http://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/leavingfearbehind)**

Dhondup Wangchen was detained on March 26, 2008 in Siling in eastern Tibet (Ch: Xining, Qinghai Province). Jigme Gyatso was also detained in late March 2008 but released "temporarily" in October 2008. Dhondup Wangchen is reportedly being held without charge at Ershilipu Detention Center in Xining Kachu town (Ch: Linxia, Gansu Province).

In his own words:

At a time of great difficulty and a feeling of helplessness, [the idea of our film is to] get some meaningful response and results. It is very difficult [for Tibetans] to go to Beijing and speak out there. So that is why we decided to show the real feelings of Tibetans inside Tibet through this film.

Nowadays, China is declaring that they are preserving and improving Tibetan culture and language. That's what they're telling the world. Many organizations and offices have been set up for these things. What they say and what they do are totally different, opposites. If they really want to preserve and improve Tibetan culture and language in Tibet then they should withdraw Chinese people living in Tibetan areas. Tibetan culture and language has to be practiced in all Tibetan areas. If it's not practiced, how can it be preserved?

For further information, see:

- [www.studentsforafreetibet.org/downloads/LFBFilmMakers.pdf](http://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/downloads/LFBFilmMakers.pdf)

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**Jigme Guri (also known as Jigme Gyatso)**, 42, is a monk at Labrang monastery in Amdo (Ch: Gansu Province). He did not participate in the mass protests at Labrang on March 14 2008, but was

arbitrarily detained on March 22<sup>nd</sup> when Chinese authorities swept the monastery. He was beaten badly while in detention. After being released and spending two months in hospital, he made a remarkable and incredibly courageous video statement for Voice of America (VOA), in which he showed his face and disclosed his full name. The statement, first broadcast on VOA on September 3 2008, described the extreme torture and mistreatment Jigme experienced in detention as well as his views on China's devastating policies in Tibet and a possible resolution. He then went into hiding for several weeks before returning to his monastery, where he was detained again on November 4, 2008. He is being held in an unknown location in Lanzhou. There are serious fears for his welfare after he endured severe torture earlier this year.

In his statement to Voice of America, Jigme said:

Many of us support the Dalai Lama's Middle Way approach and the process of solving Tibet's issue through peaceful dialogue. But we are sad about being extremely oppressed today. Today, I, as a witness to truth, am telling the media the story of those Tibetans who were killed, those who underwent torture in prisons, and the countless others who have been forced to flee to the mountains and are too afraid to return to their homes, so that the media can truthfully report on these situations. This is my hope.

For further information, see:

- <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1388> (detailed report with photos in hospital)
  - <http://www.highpeakspureearth.com/2008/09/voa-video-testimony-of-labrang-monk.html> (Video from VOA, with English translation)
  - <http://tchrd.org/press/2008/pr20081103b.html> (report)
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**Rangjung**, 26, is a television newscaster and writer from Serthar County (Ch: Seda), Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Ch: Ganzi), Kham (Ch: Sichuan). Rangjung has presented news in Tibet for the local television channel for several years and he has published two books on Tibetan culture and history. Public Security Bureau officials who detained him at his home on September 11, 2008, reportedly later removed a computer from his home, that they said contained political documents. It is feared that he may be also have been detained for critical writings on his blog. Rangjung's whereabouts are unknown.

For further information, see:

- <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/tibetan-09182008080119.html>
  - <http://tchrd.org/press/2008/pr20080924.html>
  - <http://www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/2899/prmID/1610>
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**Tenzin Delek Rinpoche** (born in 1950) is a religious leader and advocate for Tibetans from Lithang, Kham (Ch: Kardze (Ganzi) Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan). For years, he worked to develop social, medical, educational and religious institutions for Tibetan nomads in the area, as an advocate for environmental conservation in the face of indiscriminate logging and mining projects, and as a mediator between Tibetans and Chinese. Because of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's influence in his community and his efforts to preserve Tibetan identity, the Chinese authorities viewed him as a threat to their control in the region. Over the course of a decade, he was the target of increasing harassment and intimidation by Chinese officials. **Visit SFT's Tenzin Delek Action Center: [www.studentsforafreetibet.org/freetenzin](http://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/freetenzin)**

In April 2002, the Chinese authorities in Lithang, eastern Tibet, arrested Tenzin Delek Rinpoche and his distant relative Lobsang Dhondup, a former monk. Both were accused of involvement in bombings and explosions. On December 2nd, 2002, Lobsang Dhondup was sentenced to immediate death, and Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was sentenced to death with a suspension of two years. Lobsang Dhondup was executed shortly afterwards, and after intense international pressure, Tenzin Delek's sentence was commuted to a life sentence on January 26th, 2005.

According to Human Rights Watch, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's case "was the culmination of a decade-long effort by Chinese authorities to curb his efforts to foster Tibetan Buddhism, his support for the Dalai Lama as a religious leader, and his work to develop Tibetan social and cultural institutions. His efforts had become a focal point for Tibetans struggling to retain their cultural identity in the face of China's restrictive policies and its continuing persecution of individuals attempting to push the accepted boundaries of cultural and social expression."

In Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's own words:

Since I am a Tibetan, I have always been sincere and devoted to the interests and well-being of Tibetan people. That is the real reason why the Chinese do not like me and framed me. That is why they are going to take my precious life even though I am innocent.

– Transcript of recording of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche obtained from the detention center in Dartsedo, the capital of Kardze Tibet Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan province, on January 20, 2003. Radio Free Asia received the recording the following morning.

Recently, I was called to the Religious Affairs Bureau and the United Front Work Department. ... They told me, "You cannot have photos of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, the young Panchen Lama, or pictures of yourself." And they said, "The pictures are getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger, and you cannot do that. And you cannot have a lama's title." I told them that ... I did not need the title of lama; I did not need the title of monk, but I did need the rights of a human being.

- Statement of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, Recorded Just Prior to June 16, 2000, in "Trials of a Tibetan Monk," Human Rights Watch, p. 70.

For further information, see:

- <http://www.tchrd.org/press/2007/pr20070823.html> (August 2007 Update)

- <http://www.tchrd.org/press/2007/pr20070725.html> (July 2007 update)

- <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2004/02/08/trials-tibetan-monk-0> (In-Depth Report by Human Rights Watch)

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**Sangye Lhamo**, 26, is a nun at Dragkar nunnery in Kardze County, Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Kham (Ch: Sichuan province). She demonstrated with two other nuns, Tsewang Kando and Yeshe Lhadon, in the market square of Kardze Town, shouting slogans and distributing leaflets calling for Tibet's independence. Approximately two hours later, Rinchen Lhamo, a student, left her class during a break and, despite the heavy presence of police in the market square due to the nuns' earlier protest, unfurled a Tibetan flag and shouted slogans. According to several sources, she was injured after armed troops opened fire, before she was detained. Sangye Lhamo is one of the many Tibetan nuns who took a leading role in dissent in Kardze Prefecture in May, part of a "second wave" of protests that appeared to be in response to the violent force Chinese army and police used to quash peaceful protests and the stringent 'patriotic education' campaigns authorities are using to force monks and nuns to denounce the Dalai Lama. By June, more than 80 nuns had been detained.

The risks taken by Sangye, Tsewang, Yeshe and Rinchen were were even more remarkable considering the crackdown that was already underway in Kardze at the time. Sangye Lhamo is from Serchuteng Township, Kardze County.

For further information, see:

<http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1317> (with headshot photo)

<http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1328> (additional photo, photo of nunnery)

<http://www.tchrd.org/press/2008/pr20080529.html>

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**Runggye Adak**, 54, is a Tibetan nomad from Lithang, Kham (Ch: Sichuan) who was detained August 1 2007 after calling for the Dalai Lama's return to Tibet. Adak stepped on stage at a Chinese government function commemorating the 80th anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army and spoke to a crowd of several thousand Tibetans who had gathered for the annual Lithang horse-racing festival. Before he was detained, he also called for the release of the Panchen Lama and Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. Tenzin Delek, a revered Buddhist teacher and community leader also from Lithang, is currently serving a life sentence for crimes he did not commit. **Visit SFT's Runggye Adak Action Center at:**  
**[http://actionnetwork.org/campaign/free\\_runggyeadak](http://actionnetwork.org/campaign/free_runggyeadak)**

Runggye Adak was later sentenced to eight years for "provocation to subvert state power." According to the International Campaign for Tibet, Adak's nephew, Adak Lupoe, a senior monk from Lithang monastery, received sentence of ten years, and Tibetan art teacher and musician Kunkhyen one of nine years, both for attempting to provide pictures and information to 'overseas organizations' which were judged to 'endanger national security'. A fourth Tibetan, Jarib Lothog, was sentenced to three years linked to the same case.

An eyewitness described the protest to the International Campaign for Tibet:

"It all happened so fast - Runggye Adak just came onstage and started speaking. Although his voice did not carry very far, because it could have been that they switched the microphone off, I could see Tibetans nodding their heads about what he was saying about the Dalai Lama and freedom. Quite a few people were cheering him. Then a few men came up onto the stage, and it seemed to me that they could have been Tibetans trying to help him, trying to get him offstage so he wouldn't be in more trouble. But then uniformed officers arrived and I could see them moving through the crowd quickly towards the stage. Many Tibetans tried to block their way to prevent him reaching Runggye Adak, but they had no chance. Quite a lot of people followed him when they took him away, and other people around me were saying how scared they were about his fate."

For further information, see:

- <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1186> (photos of Kunkhyen and Adak Lupoe)

- <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2007/11/07/china-tibetan-faces-baseless-subversion-charges>

<http://www.studentsforafreetibet.org/article.php?id=1115> (Open letter from Adak's son and nephew)