

Testimony of Kirti Rinpoche, Chief Abbot of Kirti Monastery
to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
on the grim human rights situation in Tibet as reflected
by many cases of self-immolation
November 3, 2011

I would like to thank the US Congress for giving me this precious opportunity to talk about the worsening human rights situation in Tibet today.

Today at this session I would like to report that Tibet was an independent country that the Communist China occupied. It has been more than half a century since the occupation and the situation in Tibet has been deteriorating year by year. The main reason for this is the fact that the early promises made by China to help the Tibetans through the so-called Democratic Reforms have disappeared like a rainbow and instead policies to oppress the Tibetan people were carried out. The Chinese government has not brought about any positive policy changes by pretending not to know that the promises it made earlier have now totally disappeared. As a result the local party cadres carry out repressive policies such as to deny religious freedom and forceful confiscation of farm and nomadic produce. By decreeing everything that they say as laws, the legal punishment has now become a source of income, which has rendered any hope of justice worthless and consequently driven the Tibetan youth into desperation.

Tibet is divided into so-called autonomous regions and autonomous provinces, which sounds nice and appears to have liberal political systems. But in fact let alone such tolerant system, Tibetans do not even have half rights that ordinary Chinese do. The policies framed by the ultra-nationalists have driven the Tibetan people to the end of their tether. It has become a fact that whether a Chinese is educated or not he or she is bound to become a leader. Moreover, the fact that even the few Tibetans who work for the Chinese government are not trusted indicates that there is racial discrimination. If the Chinese leaders had accepted the mutually beneficial Middle Way policy initiated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tibetans and the Chinese by now would be having the same equal relations as enjoyed during the time of Tibet's great religious kings.

Hu Yaobang accepted that the ultra-nationalists officials, who are the real people who engage in separatism, have kept the central government in dark by filing reports written in flowery language. At this point, I would like to report about the situation in Tibet in general and particularly the events taking place in Ngaba in Amdo, a province in North-eastern Tibet that has close personal association with me. Apart from the general suffering of the people of Ngaba Autonomous Prefecture, the people of this region have a particular wound causing excessive suffering that spans three generations. This wound is very difficult to forget or to heal.

1. The wound of the first generation: Ngaba in Amdo was the first place that the People's Republic of China attacked during its occupation of Tibet. Before the founding of PRC, in 1935 during the Long March when the Red Army marched through Ngaba, the Chinese army destroyed Lhateng Monastery, which housed over two thousand monks. They then walked through Muge Gonchen during which many monks and civilians were either killed or wounded. The army convened a meeting in Muge Monastery and later confiscated valuables and grains from Gyarong Choktse, Kyomkyo, Japhuk and Datsang Monastery, which led to the first-ever famine in Tibet. This was the first time that Tibetans in this region survived by eating leaves of trees.

The king of Choktse, chief of Meu and people from many other areas fought against the occupying army but were defeated by sheer numbers of Chinese soldiers. The relatives of Aku Thapkey, the forty-fourth abbot of Ngaba Kirti Monastery and many others were shot dead. When the Red Army Chief, Zhu De, and his soldiers occupied the central prayer room of the Kirti Monastery during which they looted and destroyed images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the people realised that the Red Army members were not only against religion but they were also looters. It was during this time that Mao saw the vast Tibetan region and developed the idea about its occupation, which was done by ordering the Eighteenth Army to be sent into Tibet the year after the PRC was founded in October 1949. These events have caused a wound in the heart of Ngaba people, which is hard to heal.

2. The wound of the second generation: In 1958 the so-called Democratic Reform was carried out in Ngaba. The Cultural Revolution began in 1966 and two years later a local Red Guards

called Hung Cheng was formed in Ngaba. All these campaigns, enforced one after another, led to the imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of Tibetans, torture, public struggle sessions, famine and other forms of inhumane persecutions. The king of Meu, Trinley Raptan, was tortured until he committed suicide by jumping into a river. The Tulku of Jigme Samten Tsang and many others were sentenced to death. In short, a policy to eliminate the entire Tibetan people was carried out. All the religious institutions were destroyed. Even names of all the places and people in Tibetan language were changed into Chinese, thus undermining and stifling Tibetan language and culture. For over half a century, the rich natural resources around Ngaba, particularly forests, were excessively exploited, leading to landslides, floods and other natural disasters. The destruction of the natural environment is so extensive that it appears beyond repair. Thus these caused wounds in the hearts of the second generation of Tibetans growing under Chinese rule.

3. The wound of the third generation: Since 1998, the ‘Patriotic Education’ campaign has been strongly enforced in monasteries around Ngaba. In the same year, on 27 April Thupten Ngodup, an elderly Tibetan man, set himself on fire and died in the Indian capital city of Delhi. In 2003 and again in 2008, the school with over 1200 students run and managed by Kirti Monastery in Ngaba was forcefully shut down and private schools such as Bontse School and another school near Khashe Thon operated by Tibetans were taken over by the government. However, the Chinese monasteries and Chinese people are permitted to run and operate schools.

On 16 March 2008, when the people of Ngaba led by the monks of Kirti Monastery peacefully protested in Ngaba district, the Chinese security forces immediately cracked down against the protesters, killing 23 Tibetans. Kirti Monastery was surrounded by the Chinese forces and was cut off from the outside world, turning it into a virtual prison. Since then five military garrisons have been built up in Ngaba district. According to a recent report by New York-based Human Rights Watch, the security expenses in Ngaba is twice as much as other areas in China’s Sichuan Province. This report further states that there are now over fifty thousand armed security personnel in Ngaba area.

Since 20 March monks of the Kirti Monastery have been divided into eight divisions and a ‘Patriotic Education’ campaign is forcefully imposed on them almost day and night. Monks’

quarters are searched, all electronic devices have been confiscated, holy scriptures are cut into pieces by knives and monks are forced to stamp on photos of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. About 100 monks were arrested en-mass, tortured and interrogated. Furthermore, the ritual instruments offered to the monastery's protective deity were seized and the monastery was wrongly accused of possessing weapons to fight against the Chinese government and this accusation was widely propagated. Two monks from Kirti Monastery, one monk from Dongri Monastery and another monk from Gomang Monastery committed suicide in their quarter because of torture and intense fear. A 70-year-old monk from Kirti Monastery died from heart attack under this suffocating circumstances and the Kirti Monastery was barred from holding an important religious festival in the winter. Likewise, an order was given to ban this year's Tibetan New Year celebration, which was planned according to traditional Tibetan astrological calculation.

On 27 February 2009, 27-year-old monk, Tapey, from Kirti Monastery in Ngaba set himself on fire as a protest against China's repressive rule. The security personnel instead of putting out the fire shot him. His whereabouts remains unknown to date.

Following the immolation incident of 20-year-old monk, Lobsang Phuntsok, on March 16, 2011, the armed security personnel have been deployed in the Kirti monastery and surrounded the monastery for the second time. All communication to the outside world was cut off for the past seven months, the situation in Kirti monastery became like a dreaded jail. Within the barricaded monastery, the monks were divided into fifty-five groups and over 800 government officials moved into the monastic compound. They carried out 'political re-education' and 'patriotic education' campaigns, which were strictly imposed on the monks. There have been cases of starvation in the monastery as well.

Electronic surveillance apparatus such as listening devices and CCTV cameras in the monks' quarters and watchtowers are being built in all sides of the monastery. Furthermore, unscheduled searches are being carried out in monks' rooms at any time by smashing the windowpanes, walls and doors, and monks are randomly beaten, dogs let loose on the people and there are also cases of thieving by security personnel. Monks are threatened that the monastery would be destroyed if

they did not excel in 'Patriotic Education' and 'Re-education' campaigns. In nutshell, the monks are driven to a state of utter fear and desperation.

On the night of 21 April 2011, a large contingent of army swooped down on the monastery and arrested more than 300 monks in military trucks and were detained in an unspecified location. Since then, many new rules have been imposed such as banning young boys to become monks, setting limit to the number of monks in the monastery, and threatening that the survival of the monastery was in the hands of the monks.

Thus, on 15 August, Tsewang Norbu, a monk from Nyatso Monastery in Kham, set himself on fire to protest against the brutal Chinese rule in Tibet.

On 26 September, 18-year-old Lobsang Kalsang and 19-year-old Lobsang Kunchok, both from Kirti Monastery, set themselves on fire on 3 October. Subsequently, many others followed suit: 17-year-old Kalsang Wangchuk from Kirti Monastery on 7 October, 19-year-old Choephel and 18-year-old Khaying on 15 October, 19-year-old Norbu Damdul on 17 October, 20-year-old nun Tenzin Wangmo, from Mamae Dechen Choekhorling nunnery on 25 October and Dawa Tsering, a monk of Kardze Monastery on 26 October. These brave Tibetans set themselves on fire to protest against the China's oppression and to bring attention to the deteriorating situation in Tibet.

On 29 August, the Chinese authorities accused three monks from the Kirti Monastery of aiding Phuntsok, who set himself on fire. Phuntsok's uncle, Lobsang Tsundue, 46, was sentenced for eleven years in jail on 29 August, 22-year-old Lobsang Tenzin (aka Tenzin Gyalmokha) to thirteen years on 30 August and 21-year-old Lobsang Tenzin (aka Nakten) was sentenced to ten years in jail.

Three more monks from Kirti Monastery were sentenced: 30-year-old Tsekho and 22-year-old Lobsang Dhargyal to two and six years, respectively, on 5 September; and Dorjee to a three-year jail term. In all these cases, no legal or judicial procedures were followed during the trial. The decisions of the court were kept secret and only made available much later.

Thus, from 16 March 2008 to 17 October 2011, thirty-four Tibetans have died in Ngaba region from extreme torture, execution, suicides and by setting themselves on fire and more than 619 have been detained (this does not include mass detention of 300 Kirti monks). Only 108 detainees have been put on trial. There have been over 20 writers, poets and intellectuals among the 619 who were detained.

In brief, for the Tibetan people both in and outside Tibet, particularly those born and raised under the red banner, there is no greater expression of their desperate opposition to the Chinese government than by resorting to the most powerful method of a non-violent movement, which is by refraining from causing any harm to the Chinese people and appealing to the Chinese government, than by setting themselves on fire. The main slogans chanted were: "His Holiness the Dalai Lama must be allowed to visit Tibet. Tibet demands freedom. We want religious freedom." Most of those who have committed self-immolation have already died. If any of them are still alive, we ardently appeal to you to please save their lives.

During the first wave of repression in Ngaba this year, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, along with the peace-loving governments and individuals, have urged China to stop repression and start earnest negotiation with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Since the Chinese government not only refused to listen to those appeals but also continued resorting to oppression, it has been the main cause behind the wave of self-immolation protests. If repression continues, it will certainly harm the interests of both Tibet and China. If the repression and the hard line policies are stopped, it will naturally lead to peace and harmony. In fact, in order to promote harmony between Tibetans and the Chinese, I have recently proposed that I will extend my full cooperation whenever required. Upon requests from many of the people concerned, I have, time and again, approached the Chinese government for permission to visit Tibet, thinking that my visit will give me an opportunity to deliver a few words of advice and solace. Unfortunately, I have yet to receive any response from the Chinese government.

The Tibetan youth are setting themselves on fire is a proof of the sufferings of the Tibetan people. They want their appeal heard by peace-loving governments and people around the world,

including world leaders and human rights organizations, so that they could appeal to China to stop oppression in Tibet and also to tell that that repression cannot bring stability. In order to forge a friendly co-existence between the Tibetan and Chinese peoples and in order to create a harmonious society as advocated by Hu Jintao, the dialogue between Tibet and China must start at the earliest. We also urge you to pressure China to allow independent international delegates and the media to visit Ngaba and other Tibetan areas. Your support restores the inner strength of Tibetan people, both in and outside Tibet. As one of the spokespeople of the Tibetans, it is my duty to convey to you the aspiration of the Tibetan people, particularly those who have been directly affected by the recent events in Tibet.

I would like to express my deep appreciation for giving me this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Tibetan people and their plight.