



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

A Conversation with Geshe Nyima

Thursday, September 17th, 2015

3:00 – 4:00 PM

441 Cannon House Office Building

Opening Remarks

Good afternoon and welcome to today's briefing and dialogue with Geshe Nyima the cousin and spokesman for the family of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, the Tibetan Buddhist monk and teacher who died in Chinese custody last July 12th. Geshe Nyima is himself a Buddhist teacher based in the Personal Monastery of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, in Dharamsala, India. So we are very pleased that he has been able to travel such a long distance to be with us today.

I also want to recognize the excellent work being done by the Massachusetts chapter of Students for a Free Tibet. SFT has two mottos: "Transforming our world through non-violent action" and "Tibet will be free." I fully endorse both.

We are here today because of the tragic death of a Tibetan man who dedicated his life to learning, teaching and community service on behalf of his people. At the time of his death in July, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was serving a life sentence under very harsh conditions for allegedly 'causing explosions' and 'inciting separatism,' charges against which he steadfastly maintained his innocence. Last April, I wrote to the U.S. State Department to encourage our government officials to prioritize Tenzin Delek's release on medical parole, because he was reported to be suffering from serious health problems. In late June, the State Department assured me the message had been transmitted. But at the end of the day, China ignored my pleas and those of many others around the world. I want to emphasize again today that the Chinese authorities bear direct responsibility for Tenzin Delek's unnecessary death.

After Tenzin Delek's death, his family asked the Chinese government to return his body to them, so that they could carry out funeral rites in accordance with Tibetan tradition. This very human request was denied. Instead, the authorities cremated the body, then later seized and

disposed of the ashes. Crowds of people who protested these actions met with a police response, and Tenzin Delek's sister and niece were detained for a time. If China hoped to quell the outrage with these tactics, it failed; instead, the government only succeeded in demonstrating once again its fear of Tibetan culture and autonomy.

This afternoon Geshe Nyima will update us on what has happened since July, and help us understand the broader consequences of Tenzin Delek's death. He will also share with us the family's and community's recommendations for actions Congress can take to try to prevent a similar fate for other Chinese prisoners of conscience. I am among those who have called for an independent international investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death, with the participation of forensic and human rights experts from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I have also called on the Chinese government to allow a visit and investigation by the UN's Special Rapporteur on torture, in light of the allegations of torture against Tenzin Delek, and China's upcoming review this fall under the Convention Against Torture. But I look forward to hearing what else I and others should be doing.

I now turn to Tsepa Bayul, the Communications Director for Students for a Free Tibet, who will moderate the rest of our discussion.