

Statement by Geshe Jamyang Nyima at the briefing for Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
(September 17, 2015)

Thank you. I would like to express my gratitude to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for this opportunity to update you on the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, my cousin and a Tibetan political prisoner. I am highly honored to be here to speak about Rinpoche, a revered Tibetan Buddhist leader, who died in Chinese prison on July 12, 2015.

After Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's death, his family and community asked the prison authorities how and why he died. They asked the authorities for the body of Rinpoche in order to perform Buddhist final rites as per Tibetan tradition. But the authorities withheld Rinpoche's body for several days, and finally, secretly cremated it. When Tibetans in Lithang, Rinpoche's hometown, organized a peaceful protest to demand Rinpoche's body for final rites, the Chinese police fired at them. Two of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's relatives were detained and interrogated for 5 hours. Rinpoche's sister Dolkar Lhamo and the community leaders submitted a 5-Point Appeal to the Chinese prison authorities, urging them to release the body for final rights and rituals.

However, the Chinese authorities not only withheld the body, they also prohibited any kind of religious prayers or gatherings in the region of Lithang, Rinpoche's hometown. Tibetans were banned from observing any prayers, or displaying his photographs, or lighting butter lamps, or any other religious rituals for several days.

After the secret cremation, Rinpoche's family was at first given the ashes of the body. While the family was transporting the ashes from Chengdu to Lithang, they were stopped by police in the middle of the night and the ashes were forcibly seized at gunpoint. The police then proceeded to detain Dolkar Lhamo and her daughter Nyima Lhamo. They were practically missing for 14 days, before finally being released.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was not involved in separatist activities at all. In fact, Rinpoche did not even engage in political activities. He was essentially a humanitarian and an educator who founded schools, established orphanages, and built elderly homes. He was a champion of women's rights and established nunneries to promote education for women. He established 8 monasteries to promote and protect Tibetan culture and Buddhism. His key goal was to improve Tibetan welfare and empower Tibetan people. China's accusations against him – separatism and terrorism – makes absolutely no sense.

Eventually, however, it is because of his growing influence in his region that the Chinese government targeted him and decided to take him down. As a result of Rinpoche's humanitarian work, he has become a leader with thousands of followers and China was threatened by that.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche was arrested in 2002 by Chinese authorities for false charges of bombing in Chengdu. On January 26, Rinpoche and his nephew Lobsang Dhondup were given the death sentence. Lobsang Dhondup was executed immediately while Rinpoche's death sentence was given a two-year reprieve. In 2005, following sustained international advocacy on Rinpoche's behalf, his death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

This, then, is the plight of Tibetans who love Tibet, Tibetans who try to do something for their people. Look at the case of Shokjang, a writer in Siling who has been jailed for simply writing his opinions on paper. There is Dolma Kyab, the husband of a self-immolator. And now, to punish him for the self-immolation of his wife, Dolma Kyab has been sentenced to life imprisonment. And then there is Lolo, who is serving a six-year prison sentence for simply singing the wrong song.

Now another update I have for you is that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is paying close attention to finding the reincarnation of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, in keeping with the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of reincarnate lamas. But the Chinese government is saying that Rinpoche was not a "real reincarnate lama," thus trying to meddle in Tibetan religion. China's interference in Tibetan Buddhist tradition of reincarnation is not only cruel, it's made all the more ironic by the fact that the CCP is an atheist government. I hope that the US Congress will continue to pay attention to Tibetan efforts and processes through which the reincarnation of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche will emerge, and ensure that the Chinese government stays out of these religious traditions.

Now, as we all know, China's ruler Xi Jinping is coming to Washington, DC next week. I am taking this opportunity to urge the US Congress and the US government to publicly pressure Xi Jinping to stop the crackdown and repression in Tibet. The US has many leverages to make China change its treatment of Tibet.

For example, right now, the Chinese government does not allow any media or foreign leaders to travel to Tibet. They have put Tibet under lockdown. I believe that the US government can tell Xi that "if China does not allow us to go to Tibet, then we won't allow Chinese journalists and leaders into the US." China will respond only to this kind of reciprocity.

The US and EU are probably the two entities in this world that can have some impact on China today, especially the US. If the US remains silent right now, and if President Obama does not speak out publicly for freedom and rights during his meeting with Xi Jinping, then that means the US becomes complicit in China's repression. That would be tragic and unbearably sad for us. Therefore, I believe that the US Congress should and will urge President Obama to do the right thing.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for organizing this briefing, and for your important work in advancing freedom and human rights in Tibet and worldwide. I know from my own experience being in Tibet that every statement you put out, every resolution you pass, every letter you send, every hearing you organize, they all have a profound impact on the ground inside Tibet. These gestures and actions, no matter how symbolic, make the Chinese government more careful and restrained in its dealings with Tibet. And they also give a dose of relief to Tibetans struggling for freedom, creating more breathing room for them even if temporarily. This breathing room helps Tibetans to survive in spite of China's tyranny.

To Congressman McGovern, I would like to thank you in particular for your vision, genuine dedication and for your unstinting effort to support the Tibetan people's struggle for freedom and human rights. Every single Tibetan is indebted to you, and we all feel immensely grateful to you.

I assure you that Tibetans inside Tibet are also aware of your efforts, and I venture to say that even Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, before his death in prison, was probably aware of your efforts to promote Tibetan freedom and human rights. On behalf of him, his family, and on behalf of all Tibetans, I express my heartfelt gratitude to you.