



November 3, 2011

Open Letter to the President of the People's Republic of China on self-immolations in Tibetan populated areas of Sichuan Province

President Hu Jintao
People's Republic of China
Zhongnanhai, Xichengqu, Beijing
People's Republic of China

Dear President Hu,

We are writing to express our concern regarding a number of incidents in which Tibetans living in Sichuan Province have set themselves on fire apparently in protest against restrictions on fundamental freedoms and human rights and punitive security measures imposed on a number of monasteries in the area. These immolations have drawn renewed international attention to long-standing grievances and on-going human rights concerns affecting Tibetans in China.

We call on you to put an end to policies that infringe on fundamental freedoms and human rights in Tibetan areas of China, such as excessive restrictions on freedom of expression and religion, and the heavy security presence to enforce such restrictions in areas of the country with large ethnic minority populations. Of particular concern to many Tibetan monks and nuns is the requirement that they undergo compulsory political indoctrination under the guises of "patriotic" and "legal education" within the monasteries.

Nine Tibetan monks or former monks and two Tibetan nuns in Sichuan Province have attempted to set themselves on fire between March 16, 2011, and October 25; six are believed to have subsequently died. These individual protests appear to be in response to increasingly harsh punitive security measures imposed on religious institutions and lay communities in the region. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International strongly believe that the Chinese government must address the underlying causes of these protests, including by engaging in meaningful dialogue with the Tibetan community and its leaders on their widely-held grievances and human rights concerns.

Following the March 2008 protests across the Tibetan plateau, strict security measures and restrictions on fundamental freedoms in Tibetan areas have been imposed. Immediately following the protests, thousands of people were detained and arrested, though the total number is unknown. At least two Tibetans were executed in October 2009 on charges stemming from their involvement in the protests. Security measures and restrictions on the exercise of religious freedom imposed on monasteries in Aba (Tibetan: Ngaba) and Ganzi (Tibetan: Kardze) Tibetan autonomous prefectures,

where the 2011 self-immolations occurred, have been especially severe, including intimidating raids, arbitrary detentions of monks, and a permanent official presence inside monasteries to monitor religious activities.

These measures appear to have fueled tensions in the region, to which some have responded in protest with acts of self-immolation, the first by Phuntsok (Chinese: Ping Cuo) Jarutsang, who set himself on fire on March 16, 2011, the third anniversary of protests in the same town in 2008 in which at least ten protesters were shot to death. Despite the fact that ten more incidents of self-immolation have occurred since then, the latest by Palden Choetso (Chinese: Qiu Xiang) on November 3, there is no indication that your government has sought to address the underlying causes or acknowledged the grievances of the Tibetan community.

We urge your government to:

- Commit to a comprehensive review of the human rights concerns raised across the Tibetan plateau and an end to legal and policy restrictions that infringe on fundamental freedoms and human rights;
- Provide information about the current whereabouts and well-being of the individuals who set themselves on fire in protest and were removed from the scene;
- Provide information about lay people and religious personages detained following the self-immolations, including their current whereabouts and reason for detention;
- Provide information about other monks detained and removed from monasteries in 2011, including 300 monks who were taken from Kirti (Chinese: Ge Erde) monastery in April;
- Reduce the heavy presence of military police and other officials and security operatives in and around religious institutions, including Kirti monastery and Nyitso (Chinese: Ling Qiao) monastery, and end the practice of requiring monks to undergo “patriotic education” as dictated by local authorities;
- Resume meaningful and direct dialogue with representatives of the Tibetan community who can represent widely-held human rights concerns;
- Cooperate fully with the United Nations Special Procedures by responding promptly and in full to their urgent appeals and communications. As a matter of priority, facilitate the request of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief to carry out a country mission, including to the area in and around Aba and Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefectures in Sichuan Province, which has been agreed in principle by the government. In addition, the government should respond positively to outstanding visit requests from the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the Independent Expert on minority issues.

We urge you to take meaningful steps towards resolving human rights abuses in Tibetan areas of China and to allow independent monitoring of human rights conditions in the region, so that further acts of self-immolation do not continue.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Given the seriousness of the situation and the ongoing tension in the region, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International will continue to follow it closely in the coming months, and would be pleased to be in contact with representatives of your government on this matter.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director
Human Rights Watch

Salil Shetty
Secretary General
Amnesty International

Enclosure: List of Tibetans who have self-immolated in protest in 2011

List of Tibetans who have self-immolated in protest in 2011

March 2011

1. Phuntsok Jarutsang (平措)
 - Age: 20
 - Date of self-immolation: March 16, 2011
 - Current condition: Deceased (March 17, 2011); officials state that Phuntsok died after “treatment delays” because monks took him from the hospital and hid him at the monastery
 - Institutional affiliation: Kirti monk

August 2011

2. Tsewang Norbu (次旺诺布)
 - Age: 29
 - Date of self-immolation: August 15, 2011
 - Current condition: Deceased (August 15, 2011)
 - Institutional affiliation: Nyatso monk

September 2011

3. Lobsang Kalsang (罗桑格桑)
 - Age: 18
 - Date of self-immolation: September 26, 2011
 - Current condition: Unknown; he was taken for some time to a hospital in Chengdu and was shown on the official “Ngaba news,” which announced that his injuries are not serious. His current location is unknown.
 - Institutional affiliation: Kirti monk
4. Lobsang Konchok (罗桑贡确)
 - Age: approx. 18
 - Date of self-immolation: September 26, 2011
 - Current condition: Unknown; thought to be taken to the Barkham prefecture hospital
 - Institutional affiliation: Kirti monk

October 2011

5. Kelsang Wangchuk (格桑旺曲)
 - Age: 17
 - Date of self-immolation: October 3, 2011
 - Current condition: Unknown; burns are not thought to be serious, but the Kirti monastery in exile reports that he sustained a serious head injury during detention, and was taken to Ngaba county hospital. His current location is unknown.
 - Institutional affiliation: Kirti monk (novice at Kalacakra college)

6. Khaying (康盈)
 - Age: approx. 20
 - Date of self-immolation: October 7, 2011
 - Current condition: Deceased (October 8, 2011); removed from the scene by police
 - Institutional affiliation: former Kirti monk

7. Choepel (曲培)
 - Age: approx. 18
 - Date of self-immolation: October 7, 2011
 - Current condition: Deceased (October 11, 2011); removed from the scene by police
 - Institutional affiliation: former Kirti monk

8. Norbu Dramdul (罗布占堆)
 - Age: approx. 19
 - Date of self-immolation: October 15, 2011
 - Current condition: Unknown; taken away by police after extinguishing the flames, reportedly removed from Ngaba
 - Institutional affiliation: former Kirti monk (disrobed in July 2010)

9. Tenzin Wangmo (丹增旺姆)
 - Age: approx. 20
 - Date and location of self-immolation: October 17, 2011
 - Current condition: Deceased (October 17, 2011)
 - Institutional affiliation: Nun from Mamae Nunnery Dechen Choekor Ling

10. Dawa Tsering (达瓦次仁)
 - Age: 38
 - Date of self-immolation: October 25, 2011
 - Current condition: Unknown; thought to be in critical condition. Dawa Tsering was removed by other monks to the People's Hospital in the monastery car (another source says he was taken away by security guards)
 - Institutional affiliation: Monk at Kardze monastery (甘孜寺)

November 2011

11. Palden Choetso (Qiu Xiang)
 - Age: 35
 - Date of self-immolation: November 3, 2011
 - Current condition: Deceased (November 3, 2011)
 - Institutional affiliation: Nun from Tawu Nunnery