

My tashi deleg to the organizers and all those present here today. I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to highlight the situation of political prisoners inside Tibet today.

I would like to expand on my own personal experience and what I witnessed briefly in two parts.

First, through my own experience, I will speak to how Tibetan prisoners are tortured in prison and the difficulties they face even after they are released from prison.

Second, I will speak about current human rights situation in Tibet.

My name is Ngawang Sangdrol. My birthplace is Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. I am a former political prisoner in Tibet. I am neither a scholar or expert on Tibetan history, nor am I a politically savvy person. But my parents raised me to be a person of courage and having seen with my own eyes, the brutal actions of the Chinese government, I could not sit back silently.

Therefore, I and some others, joined together for a peaceful protest, shouting “Tibet is independent,” and “Long live His Holiness the Dalai Lama.” Within less than two minutes, the Chinese armed police arrived and started beating us. They threw us into vans just like a piece of luggage and took us to detention center. This is where the beatings started.

For the first month, before the sentencing, we were beaten almost every day. The beatings were done with iron rods, water pipes, wet bamboo, and sticks. They also tied our hands together at the back and then pulled them up – tied to the ceiling – this caused so much pain. It felt almost like the arms were coming off. They used various methods and techniques of torture on us. Kicking and slapping were so common place that I don’t even include them in this list.

One example that is most clearly imprinted on my memory is, one day, the Chinese official brought in a very strange looking tool. It looks like the telephone that people have at home. In reality, it turned out to be an electric rod for torture. The official asked me, “do you want to call home ?,” and I told him, “there is no phone in my home.” He said, “I can make it happen” and put the rod in my mouth and turned it on. I felt unbearable pain. This was the first instance of electric rod for me. I was thirteen years old then.

During my time in prison, I have been interrogated, beaten, sentenced, starved, kept in solitary confinement for six months. These are just some of the things that happened to me. Likewise, there are cases of prisoners dying for lack of medical attention, forced labor and use of various torture equipments etc.

Today, I want to tell you that support from international communities has a big impact. For example, in my case, I was sentenced to 23 years imprisonment but by the blessing of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and with the help and support of the US in particular,

international governments and non-governmental organizations and individual supporters, I was only imprisoned for 11 years and was released. Today, I am living in a free country. Like me, former Tibetan political prisoner Tanak Jigme Sangpo, Ngawang Choephel, and Phuntsog Nyidon were also released due to the support from the international communities.

But, there are still many more political prisoners inside Tibet that are suffering just like I did. And even after political prisoners complete their full prison term, they are not able to enjoy any of the small freedoms that are available to other Tibetans outside the prison walls.

For example, upon release, monks and nuns cannot go back to their monasteries and lay people cannot go back to their workplace, or even try to find a new job. If an individual Tibetan hires or helps a former political prisoner, they are subject to interrogation and punishment for giving assistance to former political prisoners. All in all, even when released from prison, life is full of problems for the former political prisoners.

Second, if I were to speak about the human rights condition inside Tibet today, it is getting worse and worse. During more than half a century of occupation by China, large numbers of Tibetans have been killed, and large numbers more have suffered most horrific tortures and the continued destruction of Tibet's unique culture and religious beliefs is taking place. But even then, the Tibetan spirit remains indomitable.

Starting from March 10, 1959, the Tibetan peaceful struggle has gone through many stages as in the demonstrations of 1987, '88, '89 and so on. Moreover, the widespread protests in 2008 that spread across the whole Tibetan plateau is true evidence of Tibetans' distain of the policies of the Chinese communist government not only to the Chinese Government but to the whole world. But sadly the Chinese government did not even give consideration to the will of the Tibetan people but instead used violent force to crackdown on them. In the past year, Tibetans have suffered incredulously but also, they have clearly portrayed their steadfast and brave spirit.

Currently Tibetans, both in Tibet and in exile, have been resorting to a new movement, by setting their own precious life on fire as a special offering for freedom. Tibetans are not afraid to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of freedom and justice, but they hold firm belief that those who uphold peace and truth, will gain the world's support – thus they pursue their truth in a non-violent approach.

Until now, lots of Tibetans have lost their lives and many more have been tortured in prisons. In future also, many more Tibetans could lose their lives and many more could suffer in the prisons. This will continue until the sun of happiness rises in Tibet.

Whenever I hear in the news about a self immolation of a Tibetan, my heart is filled with grief. Whenever I hear of the news of the sentencing of a Tibetan, whether for 5, 10, 15 or life imprisonment, I remember my own difficult years in prison and I can only imagine how much suffering they will face and I feel very very sad. I always pray that not a single

person, Tibetan or anybody, anywhere on this world, have to suffer as much as I did, nor should anyone have to burn themselves alive.

Your full support, I believe, can have big impact, so I would like to call on you to call for the release of Panchen Rinpoche and all Tibetan political prisoners and help them through the hardships that they will face continually after their release.

The problems in Tibet can only be solved if the political issue is solved. If the political issue is solved then everything else can be solved.

So, I, on behalf of the Tibetans' hopes expressed of tears and blood, I would like to call on you again, to give pressure on the Chinese government to have some result oriented support of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's middle way approach.

Thank you,

Ngawang Sangdrol  
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