



# STAND UP FOR TIBET

Tibet Lobby 2019

## Background to Ask 2: Urge China to respect Tibetans' right to freedom of expression

Call on the UK government to urge China to respect Tibetans' right to freedom of expression and release Tibet's political prisoners, raising the specific cases of Lomig, Tashi Wangchuk and Yeshe Choedron

### Background – Freedom of expression in Tibet

While the right to freedom of expression and belief is a basic human right and the Chinese government pays lip service to free speech in their constitution, Tibetans continue to be thrown into prison for expressing inconvenient opinions or actions.

Tibet is one of the most repressive places in the world – according to the NGO Freedom House, only Syria currently has fewer civil liberties or political freedoms. Tibetans who speak out against China's military occupation, protest human rights abuses or even express their culture in a way that displeases the authorities risk arrest, torture and long prison sentences.

While the right to freedom of expression has always been sharply curtailed under existing laws and policies, China has passed numerous laws in recent years in an effort to further undermine this right. Legislation passed under the guise of combating terrorism has helped justify increased repression by conflating distinct religious and ethnic identities with 'separatism' and threats to 'national security', resulting in the imprisonment of Tibetans exercising their right to freedom of expression. The Anti-espionage Law, Criminal Law Amendment, National Security Law, Anti-terrorism Law and Cyber Security Law all present serious threats to the protection of human rights and help justify even mild expressions of religious identity and culture in Tibet.

The UK government must use its influence to push for the China to respect international law and guarantee the right of Tibetans to exercise their right to freedom of expression and belief. The UK government should push for the release of Tibet's political prisoners who have been sentenced for peacefully exercising this right.

We have highlighted four cases that we believe the Prime Minister must raise directly with President Xi and that the UK government should raise at the United Nations.

## Case studies

**Lomig** is a monk from eastern Tibet. He was arrested after writing articles criticising China's policies in Tibet. He was found guilty of "inciting separatism" and is currently serving seven and a half years in prison.

**Tashi Wangchuk** was arrested in January 2016, shortly after carrying out an interview with the New York Times about his attempts to ensure that all Tibetan children have access to Tibetan language classes in their schools. Despite repeatedly emphasising that his language advocacy was non-political, Tashi Wangchuk was charged with "inciting separatism" and on 22 May 2018 he was sentenced to five years behind bars.

**Yeshe Choedron** is a retired doctor. She was arrested in 2008 after participating in protests in Lhasa that year. She was found guilty of "espionage" and sentenced to 15 years in prison. Yeshe Choedron is a mother and has not seen her children since 2008. Local sources have recommended that she be granted medical parole due to her poor health.

## All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet (APPGT) exists "to put pressure on Her Majesty's Government to encourage negotiations between the Chinese Government and representatives of the Tibetan Government in exile, whilst recognising that Tibet is an occupied country which had independent links with Britain."

A key way in which the UK government can be urged to respect Tibetans' right to freedom of expression is through MPs joining the APPGT. Throughout 2018, the APPGT has consistently raised the issue of freedom of expression in Tibet. The group strongly believes that the human rights situation in Tibet must not evade the international spotlight. By joining the group, MPs can help foster a strong parliamentary voice that speaks out on human rights issues in Tibet and can continue this crucial work in 2019.

## Further recommendations

- The UK government to urge the Chinese authorities to take immediate steps to end the severely restricted access to information in and on Tibet by ending digital surveillance, ceasing internet censorship, and decriminalising acts of sharing human rights-related information.
- The UK government should urge China to end its wide use of practices such as enforced disappearances and detaining Tibetans without charge.
- MPs should join the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Tibet and add their voice to a committed group of MPs who consistently call on China to respect Tibetans' right to freedom of expression.