



Tibet Society Newsletter

January 2019

“If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito”
His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

News of the Tibet Society, what’s happening in Tibet and the Tibetan Exile world, and news of His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Parliamentary Internship: A First!

Thupten reports on his experience as our first Parliamentary intern



*Thupten with
Chris Law MP*

I was very fortunate to be selected to be the first Tibetan to intern for a UK MP. The internship was first of its kind, organised by

the Tibet Society with support from MPs from the All Party-Parliamentary Group on Tibet. The internship was for the duration of two months — 6 weeks at the House of Commons and 2 weeks in the MP’s constituency office in Dundee.

Fortunately, I had Chris Law as my MP and he made sure to give me his personal attention and listened to my views regarding Tibet and range of other issues. Prior to the start of my internship, Chris kindly send me the book *How to become a MP* by Paul Flynn which was an excellent introduction to the UK parliamentary process and the life of an MP. With a brief background and a realist reading of international politics, I was very excited to

observe the many theories I had learnt during my degrees in action. Throughout the internship, Chris gave me a meticulous induction into the workings of an MP’s office and provided me with ample opportunity to take part in many of his meetings with different diplomats, national and international NGOs and the Press.

Chris is a fierce champion of human rights and national self determination and he gave me free rein to submit any written questions or to propose Early Day Motions on different issues. I wrote some written questions for the FCO on Tibet and an EDM on Tibet. Chris chairs various committees, including the International Development Select Committee, and was also involved with the Westminster Endowment for Democracy’s projects in Ukraine in light of its ongoing crisis. I had access to a number of reports by NGOs and the media and helped prepare briefings for his meetings in the Committees as well as press briefings.

During the second leg of my internship, I was stationed in Chris’s constituency in Dundee. I attended

some of the constituency surgeries and gained invaluable experience on managing constituency casework. It gave me an insight into how democratic representation can give voice to the constituents and have their concerns acted upon. It was also very inspiring to see the SNP activists at work and to hear and learn from their campaign experiences.

This was definitely one of the best internships I ever had. The experience gave me an invaluable insight into the workings of a highly developed democratic institution and the possibilities of positive changes that could be achieved through democratic representation – despite the usual cynicism surrounding politics. I currently work for a Tibetan NGO in the UK and I feel privileged to be able to draw from the skills I gained through this internship.

I would like to thank Tibet Society and Chris Law for this wonderful opportunity and highly recommend any young Tibetans to apply for this internship. I am hopeful that more such opportunities would be available for Tibetans in the future.

Society Campaigns News



Google Campaign. See page 2 for news of our Protest on 18 Jan: Internet Freedom Day



Tashi Wangchuk is still in Prison! News of our Campaign to free him is on page 4



We’re lobbying governments to petition the Human Rights Council, see page 3

See page 3 for news of what’s happening in Tibet and worldwide!

Campaigning for Tibet and Human Rights

Stop Google Censorship

To mark Internet Freedom Day on 18 January, Tibet Society joined a coalition of Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur and human



rights groups for a [protest](#) outside Google offices in London and around the world, attracting global media attention. Protests were also held in the United States, Canada, India, Mexico, Chile, Argentina, Sweden, Switzerland, and Denmark.

This [demonstration](#) was part of a wider campaign calling on Google to scrap its controversial plans to develop a censored search engine in China, *Project Dragonfly*.

If *Dragonfly* goes ahead, Google will create a search engine that complies with the ruling Chinese Communist Party's internet censorship laws; this would facilitate state surveillance in China by linking users' search history with their telephone numbers.

A Google employee who wanted to remain anonymous told Tibet Society, "It's a good cause. Keep going." Significant opposition to *Project Dragonfly* has been reported from within Google. Thousands of staff members have circulated letters expressing their concerns, leaked information to the press and in some cases resigned in protest.

Gloria Montgomery, Director of the Tibet Society, said: "Our conversations with Google employees in London today reinforced just how many of its staff members vehemently oppose *Project Dragonfly* [...] Google's executives must urgently listen to its employees' concerns."

The campaign is ongoing; over 54,000 people have signed a SumOfUs petition addressed to Google CEO Sundar Pichai, calling on him to halt *Project Dragonfly* and commit the company to a free and open Internet. Sondhya Gupta, Senior Campaigner at SumOfUs, said, "*Project Dragonfly* would normalise tech giants'

complicity in human rights abuses: Google must cancel it immediately."

The campaign continues. We have all committed to continue to demonstrate "until Google executives confirm that *Project Dragonfly* has been cancelled, once and for all".

Lobbying the UN

Tibet Society UK has joined over three dozen organisations to launch a call on governments to adopt a resolution addressing human rights in China, with particular focus on Tibet, Uyghur and other ethnic minority regions. This is the first time in over a decade that an organised effort has been made to use the Human Rights Council to seek access and lay the groundwork for accountability for violations in the country.

Extracts from the [letter](#): "**At the upcoming session of the Human Rights Council, States should pass a resolution to address human rights violations in the People's Republic of China.** The past year was marked by vitally important monitoring and review of China's human rights situation by the United Nations human rights system. The upcoming session of the UN Human Rights Council provides a key opportunity to reinforce the issues raised over the last year, and express collective concern about worsening rights abuse in China and the government's failure to follow through on its obligations and commitments.

"Considerable information has been available in the last year for governments to deepen their understanding of the situation in the country [...] nonetheless, the Chinese state, at the direction of the Chinese Communist Party, continues to suppress dissent and undermine efforts to hold it accountable to its obligations under international agreements.

"Millions in the country face dire abuses of their fundamental human rights – be they members of ethnic groups, practitioners of Islam, Tibetan Buddhism or Christianity, human rights defenders, feminists, petitioners, lawyers, journalists, professors or students. Uyghurs and Tibetans are particularly targeted with discriminatory policies and practices. Furthermore, these abuses increasingly affect individuals and communities beyond China's borders.

"In light of this, the international community must push with one voice for change. We urge your government to support and adopt a resolution on the human rights situation in China.

"In so doing, you will demonstrate your commitment to supporting the Chinese, Tibetan and Uyghur human rights communities – those most central to sustainable change, and yet those most vulnerable in the struggle for it. You will also send a clear message to the Chinese government that such abuses cannot be tolerated or ignored, and that the international community will defend the universality of human rights."

Hikvision and Tibet

East Turkestan — now known as Xinjiang under Chinese rule — is north of Tibet and home to the Uyghurs, a



Turkish Muslim ethnic group who are being subjected to severe human rights abuses by their Chinese

regime. A [parliamentary debate](#) *Human Rights in Xinjiang* Karen took place in Westminster Hall on 29 January; this followed an Early Day Motion [Human Rights in Xinjiang](#) tabled on 31 October 2018 expressing concern at the reports of the mass internment of over one million Uyghurs. Karen Lee MP made an [intervention](#) (at 15.20pm) at the debate: *Hikvision, one of the world's biggest CCTV companies, provides equipment for the massive prison camps in Xinjiang and has been used in Tibet to develop an extremely intrusive police and security apparatus.*

Hikvision uses facial recognition technology which can distinguish entire 'ethnic' populations from Chinese and puts Tibetans and Uyghurs at serious risk. While the company is now subject to bans by the US and Australian governments, Hikvision was revealed to be Britain's biggest supplier of CCTV equipment in 2016.

Is the Minister aware of whether any UK government agencies purchase surveillance equipment from Hikvision, and whether questions are being raised about the security implications of its unfettered access to the UK?

Does the Minister share my concerns?

Tibet News



Worshipping Xi Jinping

Tibetans living in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) are now required to worship and make offerings to images of President Xi Jinping and other Chinese leaders — and not the Buddhist images and icons as they do at present. The International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) has [reported](#) that families being resettled into new housing find altars and images of Chinese leaders already installed and waiting for them in their new homes. These families are complying rather than risk losing the government subsidies they have to rely on for their livelihood — they have lost their income from the land when they were moved from it to the settlements.

Living in Luxury?

Recent satellite imagery showing the dramatic modernisation and infrastructure boom in Lhasa city has been analysed in a new ICT [report](#) which says the images reveal an extravagant luxury hotel adjacent to one of China's most notorious “black site” prison facilities, Gutsa, which also appears to have undergone renovations to increase its holding capacity. The Chinese government has denied the existence of such facilities and claims they hold no political prisoners. But the luxury five-star British Inter Continental Lhasa Paradise hotel, with its massive pyramidal structures, towers over Gutsa in the middle of Lhasa.

Appeal for Anya Sengdra

Tibetans living in Kyangche Township in Golok in Amdo have appealed for the release of Anya Sengdra, 47, who has been in detention for five months, accused of “provoking trouble”. They have sent a letter which rejects the government's allegations about him. His detention period was extended and there is concern for his health as it is reported to be poor. Anya Sengdra has been an anti-corruption activist since 2014. “Provoking trouble” is increasingly used as a reason to detain people under Article 293 of Chinese Criminal Law, particularly to persecute and launch reprisals against human



rights defenders and other activists critical of government policies and practices.

Monk Released

Choekyi, 42, a Tibetan monk from Phugugon monastery in Serta County, Sichuan Province was released from prison on January 18 in very poor health. His charge was carrying out “splittist” activities: he had made monks robes on HH the Dalai Lama's 80th birthday and posted photos on *WeChat*, the Chinese social media platform, that were deemed political. He was arrested on June 19, 2015 and charged with “separatist activities” and then given a four year sentence. Choekyi was suffering from a kidney ailment before his detention, this has been exacerbated by the forced labour he was subjected to while in prison. The case has attracted international attention and calls to the Chinese government to release him and provide medical attention.



New HRW Report

Human Rights Watch, the global non-government human rights monitor, has released its *World Report 2019* saying, “Authorities in Tibetan areas continue to severely restrict religious freedom, speech, movement, and assembly, and fail to redress popular concerns about mining and land grabs by local officials, which often involve intimidation and arbitrary violence by security forces. Authorities intensified surveillance of online and phone communications.”

Confucius Closure

The University of Massachusetts in Boston, United States, has closed its Confucius Institute — it is the 13th academic institution in the US to do so. Confucius Institutes are funded by Beijing and there is concern that they threaten academic freedom and free speech by silencing discussion on political and human rights issues sensitive to China — including Tibet, Taiwan and the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989.

Private Donation

A donation of US\$90,000 for the benefit of elderly Tibetans living in exile has been made by an 82-year-old Tibetan

man living in the United States. Tenzin Wangyal, who was born in Minyak in the Kham region of Tibet, has been inspired to make the donation by HH the Dalai Lama's teachings that people should offer care and support for elderly people.

Tibet Court Report

25 people from the Tibet Autonomous Region were sentenced last year for “inciting separatism or financing crimes which jeopardised national security”. A report from Tibet's High People's Court said that they had “dealt with more than 30,000 cases”. The report in China's *Global Times* also said Tibet had “launched a crackdown on gang crimes, with 360 people in 268 cases found guilty”.

Military Readiness

China's President Xi Jinping is reported in the media as having ordered the Chinese army to be “battle ready”, saying that China faces “increased risks and challenges”. This comes in the wake of increased tensions between China and both Taiwan and the United States, and on the India—Tibet border China is reported as deploying high-altitude combat equipment including new vehicle-mounted howitzers.

Support from Hong Kong

The traditional annual January 1 demonstration in Hong Kong saw over 3,000 people on the streets to protest against the administration, reported the *South China Morning Post*. They said that both pro-independence activists and supporters of the “one country, two systems” principle took part and that some of the demonstrators used the event to call for the independence of Tibet.

Activists Detained

Tibetan activists are being detained at Qinghai Lake. Chinese people are fishing the lake illegally; if they are detained they are usually subsequently released. Tibetans who prevent the poaching are being detained and accused of “bad behaviour”. The fish in Qinghai Lake, also called Kokonor, are a protected species, and fishing is punishable by law. RFA's local source says the Tibetans want to prevent fishing because the lake is sacred and have stepped up monitoring it as fishing has increased. They are often held in detention for days.



Tibet Society News and Campaigns

MPs Call for Tashi Wangchuk's Release

Chris Law MP tabled an Early Day Motion on 25 January: *That this House is dismayed by the continued imprisonment of Tibetan language advocate, Tashi Wangchuk [...] deplores the absence of due process by the Chinese authorities in dealing with Mr Wangchuk's case; denounces the use of separatism-related charges as a means of criminalising the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and the defence of cultural rights, and of targeting human rights activities; is concerned about Mr Wangchuk's current health and well-being; concurs with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Opinion 69/2017 on China that there was no legal basis invoked to justify the arrest and detention of Mr. Wangchuk [...] and to urge the Chinese Government to immediately and unconditionally release him.* Twenty five MPs signed the EDM.

Chris also submitted a written question on the third anniversary of Wangchuk's imprisonment: *To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what representations he has made since the UN Universal Periodic Review in November 2018 on the release of Tibetan human rights defender Tashi Wangchuk.* (212635).

Mark Field, Minister of State (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) answered: *We remain concerned at the handling of the case of Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk; his case raises serious concerns about due process and transparency of justice in China. A UK diplomat attempted to attend his trial in January 2018 and the FCO issued a tweet following his sentencing. We most recently raised his case during China's Universal Periodic Review in November 2018.*



Tashi Wangchuk now wishes to file a second appeal against his sentence – his first, in August last year, was unsuccessful – but his lawyer has been [denied access to visit](#) him in prison. His lawyer has reported that he was tortured, interrogated, and repeatedly beaten in prison and that his interrogators threatened to harm his family. His case has attracted international interest and condemnation, appearing in the media worldwide.

Lobby your MP!

4–10 March is lobby week! You *can* make a difference — give or send the postcard to [your MP](#) (available from Tibet Society) or write to her/him using the text from the postcard.

Tibet Society, along with Free Tibet and the Tibetan Community are working together on a joint government lobby. Our Tibet Lobby 2019 Ask is: **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**

Our annual wreath laying ceremony outside the House of Commons will take place at 12 noon on Tuesday 5 March — do join us there if you can and we'll be giving out the postcards.

As my MP, please take action for Tibet:

1 Call on the government to urge China to grant full and immediate access to Tibet to independent observers, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. According to the organisation Freedom House, Tibet is the second least free place in the world, behind only Syria. However, despite many requests by successive UN High Commissioners for Human Rights, no visit has taken place since 2005. By denying access to observers, the Chinese government is able to maintain its repression in Tibet, which includes enforced disappearances, torture and police and military violence.

2 Call on the 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.

Under Chinese rule, freedom of expression and belief are virtually non-existent in Tibet. In the past decade alone, we have recorded hundreds of cases of Tibetans

being arrested and imprisoned for peacefully protesting, expressing their culture through music or writing, or practicing their religion. These cases include:

- Lomig – sentenced to 7.5 years in prison for writing articles criticising Chinese rule in Tibet.
- Tashi Wangchuk – imprisoned for 5 years for campaigning for Tibetan language rights.
- Yeshe Choedrom – imprisoned for 15 years after attending a protest in 2008.

3 Join the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet To find out more about Tibet, and to take practical action to support its people, please consider joining the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet in Westminster. For full details, please email: advocacy@tibetsociety.com



A Date for Your Diary!

10 March is Uprising Day. We are gathering at 12.30 in Westminster — come and join the Tibetan community and supporters at the rally and show your support for Tibet.



Tibet Society wishes all Society members and Tibet supporters a very happy Losar! 5 February is Losar — the Tibetan New Year

Losar Tashi Delek! Tibet Society wishes you health and prosperity in 2146, the year of the Earth Pig

The Tibet Society, the world's first Tibet support group, was founded in 1959. The Society seeks justice for Tibet through parliamentary lobbying, campaigns and actions.

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