

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

ASA 17/7641/2017

Date: 27 December 2017

Amnesty International welcomes the reunion of former prisoner of conscience Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen with his family abroad

Amnesty International welcomes Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen's reunion with his family in the United States on 25 December, almost ten years after he was first detained in China for making an independent documentary about the views of ordinary Tibetans ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Dhondup Wangchen has left the Tibetan-populated area in China's Qinghai province to escape the authorities' harassment. In the United States Dhondup Wangchen is joining his wife, Lhamo Tso, who had been campaigning tirelessly for his release, and their children, who were granted political asylum there in 2012.

Amnesty International also reiterates its call for the Chinese government to release all prisoners of conscience in the Tibetan-populated areas and throughout China.

Dhondup Wangchen was detained in March 2008, held incommunicado for more than a year, and sentenced to six years' imprisonment in a secret trial held in late 2009 for "inciting subversion of state power".¹ During his detention and imprisonment he was tortured and otherwise ill-treated, held for about six months in solitary confinement and denied medical treatment.

Amnesty International considered him a prisoner of conscience during his incarceration, imprisoned solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International USA chose him as a member of Amnesty International's team of human rights defenders in 2010.

After he was released from prison in critical health condition in June 2014, the authorities maintained tight surveillance on Dhondup Wangchen, closely monitoring his movements and communications.

In 2007 he started to film interviews in China's Tibetan-populated areas with ordinary Tibetans, who spoke about their lives, their views on the Dalai Lama and their criticism of Chinese government policies in the Tibetan-populated areas. The footage was smuggled out of China to Switzerland, where his cousin edited it down to a 25-minute documentary *Leaving Fear Behind*. The film was first screened to foreign journalists in Beijing two days before the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

Ethnic Tibetans continue to face discrimination and restrictions on their rights to freedom of religious belief, expression, association and peaceful assembly. Overly

¹ Amnesty International, *China must release Tibetan filmmaker*, (Press release, 7 January 2010).

broad and vague charges of “separatism” and “subverting state power” continue to be used to prosecute Tibetans who peacefully exercise their human rights and they can face arbitrary detention, unfair trials and torture and other ill-treatment.

Tibetan monk Lobsang Drakpa was reported to be sentenced to three years imprisonment in 2016 for staging a solo protest shouting slogans such as “Freedom for Tibet” and “Long live the Dalai Lama”.² Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk has been in pre-trial detention since January 2016, without access to his family, after an interview with The New York Times in 2015 concerning Chinese policies which curtail expressions of Tibetan culture and Tibetan language education in schools.³

² Amnesty International, *China: Tibetan monk imprisoned after protest: Lobsang Drakpa* (Index: ASA 17/4802/2016).

³ Amnesty International, *China: Further Information: Tibetan activist remains arbitrarily detained: Tashi Wangchuk* (Index: ASA 17/5901/2017)