

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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China: Disclose the whereabouts of two Tibetans who attempted self-immolation

The Chinese government must immediately inform the families of Wangchuk Tseten and Pema Gyaltzen of their whereabouts, or, if they are no longer alive, return the bodies of the deceased individuals to their family members. Both individuals were taken away by police after attempting self-immolations.

Amnesty International also urges the government to stop harassing, intimidating, attacking and arbitrarily detaining Wangchuk Tseten and Pema Gyaltzen's family members and others accused of being involved with the self-immolations.

Wangchuk Tseten set himself on fire on 15 April 2017 in Ganzi, a town in Ganzi (Tibetan: Kardze) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province in western China, according to reports from overseas Tibetan NGOs and the media. Voice of America reported on 19 April that the authorities summoned several local residents for questioning in relation to the self-immolation.

Less than one month earlier, Pema Gyaltzen set himself on fire on 18 March 2017, also in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. According to Tibetan sources, he was believed to be alive when he was taken away by the police. International Campaign for Tibet reported that his relatives were detained and beaten when they approached the local authorities asking about his whereabouts and whether he was still alive. Tibetan onlookers were also detained. Communications in the area were completely blocked after the self-immolation. Links to the area via internet and mobile phone were cut, and travel has been severely restricted.

Lobsang Kunchok, a Tibetan monk who survived after attempting self-immolation in 2011 was held incommunicado in prison until his recent release on 28 March 2017, according to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. The incommunicado detention of survivors of self-immolation and their sentencing without open trials is in violation of international human rights law and standards.

In past cases, the Chinese authorities have immediately seized the body of people who have self-immolated, and have not returned the remains of the deceased to their family members.

Chinese authorities have also punished individuals allegedly associated with those who self-immolate. Chanting for self-immolators or expressing condolences to their families are "illegal activities related to the independence of Tibet", according to a notice issued by the government of a Tibetan-populated area of Tongren County in Qinghai Province, in western China. Amnesty International has documented cases of imprisonment of people in connection to the self-immolation of others, including Dolma Tsao was charged with "intentional homicide" and sentenced to three years'

imprisonment in 2014, for lifting the charred body of her neighbour into a vehicle after he set himself on fire.

For those detained in relation to the self-immolation of Wangchuk Tseten and Pema Gyaltzen, the Chinese government should not imprison them solely for witnessing the event, or for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and religion and belief.

With the self-immolation of Wangchuk Tseten and Pema Gyaltzen, at least 148 Tibetans have set themselves on fire since February 2009 in Tibetan-populated areas in China in protest against repressive policies by the authorities.

Amnesty International calls on the Chinese government to address the underlying causes of the self-immolation protests, to end socioeconomic discrimination and legal and policy restrictions that infringe human rights, and to commit to a comprehensive review of the human rights situation across Tibetan-populated areas.