



DAY OF THE
IMPRISONED
WRITER

pen
INTERNATIONAL

**PEN INTERNATIONAL
WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE**

**DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER
15 NOVEMBER 2013**

**Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang
China - Tibet**

**Internet writer and editor of the Tibetan language website
*Chomei (The Lamp)***



Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang is a Tibetan internet writer and co-founder/editor of the Tibetan language website Chomei (The Lamp) www.tibetcm.com, convicted of “disclosing state secrets” on 12 November 2009, currently serving a 15-year prison sentence. On the basis of the available evidence, PEN International believes that he is very likely to be imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression and is therefore calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang, born in 1970, is an internet writer and co-founder/editor of the Tibetan language website Chomei (The Lamp) www.tibetcm.com, which promotes Tibetan culture and literature. The website was created by Gopey Tsang and leading Tibetan poet Kyab-chen De-drol in 2005, featuring both classical and contemporary Tibetan writing, and was the first ever Tibetan literary website. It provides a platform for contemporary Tibetan language writers to voice their concerns, experience and opinion in poetry and fiction, and as such has been closely monitored by the Chinese authorities. It is reported that the website was shut down several times during 2007 and 2008. At the time of his arrest Gopey Tsang was working as an environmental officer for the Chinese government. According to his family, he was deeply concerned about the issue of environmental protection, and worked tirelessly in his spare time to document environmental degradation in the grasslands.

Gopey Tsang was arrested by Chinese security officials at his home in the town of Nyul-ra, Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province on 26 February 2009. At the time of his arrest, his house was searched and his computer confiscated. He was held incommunicado at an undisclosed location until 12 November 2009, when he was sentenced to a 15-year prison sentence for "disclosing state secrets" at the Intermediate People's Court of Kanlho, in a closed hearing. As a result of the political sensitivity, lack of due process and general obscurity surrounding cases concerning "state secrets", the precise reason for his arrest and the harsh sentence against him is still not known. His family was not told of his whereabouts until they were summoned to court to hear the verdict, and no lawyer has been willing to provide him with legal assistance to appeal. Gopey Tsang's case remains shrouded in secrecy, and his sentence is not due to expire until 2024.

Gopey Tsang served four years of his sentence in Dingxi prison, Lanzhou, Gansu Province before being transferred in August 2013 to a new prison nearby where conditions are harsher and there are serious concerns for his health. His family is allowed to visit him once every two months, and they report being only permitted to speak to him in Chinese via intercom behind a glass screen. The intercom is computer operated and switches off after the allocated 30 minutes. They are not allowed to speak to each other in Tibetan, which is extremely difficult and disconcerting for many of his nomadic family members who do not understand Chinese. In particular his mother is said to be extremely distressed about the fact that she is unable to communicate with him during prison visits.

In 1995 Gopey Tsang was detained for two months by Public Security Bureau officials on unknown charges. He was reportedly ill-treated during his detention, which heightens current concerns for his well-being.

Background

In March 2008 the Chinese authorities launched a crackdown in the Tibet Autonomous Region following the staging of anti-government protests in Lhasa and other areas. In the wake of this, Tibetan writers and artists have been increasingly at risk for writing critical articles, poems and books, and composing songs. Since 2008, at least 40 Tibetan writers, journalists and singers have been arrested by the Chinese government for reporting and commenting on the situation inside Tibet. Many are serving lengthy sentences, and reports of torture are widespread. In addition, there have been a growing number of self-immolation protests to protest restrictive Chinese policies in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Since February 2009, the total number of self-immolation protests has reached 123, 92 of whom have died.

The use of national security legislation to silence legitimate commentary on sensitive issues, including environmental concerns, is of serious concern in a number of PEN's cases in Tibet. For example, Tibetan scholar, Dolma Kyab, was imprisoned for "endangering national security" in March 2005 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for "espionage". Dolma Kyab was tried in a closed court and no information was given to explain his conviction, although it appears that the charges are centred on his research and writings. Dolma Kyab does not use or advocate violence, and [writes on topics](#) that are clearly in the public interest and therefore do not pose a [legitimate threat](#) to national security, notably the issue of [relocation](#) of Tibetan nomadic communities. Between 2006-2012, more than two-thirds of the indigenous population in the TAR were moved into

new housing under a programme called the 'comfortable housing campaign'. Alongside this, relocation programmes in the eastern Tibetan plateau have moved over 600,000 nomadic herders off their land and into government-constructed towns that have few or no employment opportunities. These policies have had disastrous socioeconomic effects on their communities, and there are also fears about the environmental impact caused by the ending of the herders' traditional grassland management.

A [resolution](#) calling for the release of writers in Tibet as well as an investigation into the reasons for the growing number of self-immolation protests, was passed by the Assembly of Delegates of PEN International during its 79th World Congress, 9-12 September 2013. The resolution also called for the preservation of the Tibetan language and culture, and for restrictions on the practice of Tibetan Buddhism to be lifted.

Please send appeals:

- Seeking information about the precise reasons for the imprisonment of Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang, internet writer and co-founder/editor of the Tibetan language website *Chiai*;
- Calling for his immediate and unconditional release if he is held . as PEN International believes is very likely to be the case . solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Reminding the Chinese authorities that Article 35 of the constitution of the People's Republic of China provides for freedom of speech and that as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides for freedom of legitimate expression, the right not to be arbitrarily detained and the right to a fair trial, they are obliged to refrain from acts that would defeat or undermine the treaty's objective and purpose;
- Reminding the Chinese authorities that restrictions on freedom of expression based on national security are not legitimate unless their genuine purpose and demonstrable effect is to protect its territorial integrity against the use or threat of force;
- Seeking assurances that Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang has access to all necessary medical care whilst detained and is not ill-treated;
- Urging the Chinese authorities to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights without delay.

Send appeals to:

His Excellency Xi Jinping
President of the People's Republic of China
State Council
Beijing 100032
P.R. China

CC. Tibet Autonomous Region Party
Secretary
Chen Quanguo
Tibet Autonomous Regional Office, No.1
Kangqiangdonglu,
Lhasa,
Tibet 850000
People's Republic of China

Please note that there are no fax numbers for the Chinese authorities. The WiPC recommends that you copy your appeal to the Chinese embassy in your country asking them to forward it and welcoming any comments.

A letter or petition signed by an eminent member of your Centre may give make it more likely for your appeal to be considered. Similarly if your appeal is published in your local press and copied to the Chinese ambassador, this too may have greater impact.

See this useful link to find the contact details of the Chinese embassy in your country [Chinese embassies abroad](#)

PUBLICITY

PEN members are encouraged to:

- Publish articles and opinion pieces in your national or local press highlighting the situation in Tibet Autonomous Region.
- Organise public events, stage readings, press conferences or demonstrations.
- Share information about Tibet and your campaigning activities for Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang via social media

Remember to let us know about your activities and to send us reports about them so that we can share them with other centres.

SOLIDARITY

You are encouraged to elect Kunchok Tsephel Gopey Tsang as an honorary member of your centre and by doing so provide long term support and advocacy for him and his family. For details of the PEN International Honorary Membership scheme, read the [PEN WiPC Guide to Defending Writers Under Attack](#) (Part V, pgs 15-20). Please let us know if you do so and we will ensure that your Centre is networked with others working on his case.

For further information please contact Cathy McCann at International PEN Writers in Prison Committee, Brownlow House, 50/51 High Holborn, London WC1V 6ER, Tel.+ 44 (0) 20 7405 0338, Fax: +44 (0) 20 7405 0339, email: cathy.mccann@pen-international.org