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THE TIBET BUREAU
OFFICE OF THE REPRESENTATIVE OF H. H. THE DALAI LAMA

13 July, 1998

By Registered Post &
Electronic Mail

UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial,
summary or arbitrary Executions
Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
Palais des Nations
1211 GENEVA 10

ATTN: Ms. Emma Guerras

Ref: Extrajudicial Killings at Drapchi Prison in Tibet

Dear Ms. Guerras,

Tibet Bureau for UN Affairs would like to express our gratitude to you and Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye for taking up cases in Tibet in the last report to the 54th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. We believe the concern expressed on the situation in Tibet has informed the member of the Commission about the gravity of the situation there. We also take this opportunity to congratulate to Mr. Ndiaye on the assumption of his new post in New York and wish him success in his endeavours.

We are approaching your office today in view of some tragic deaths which took place in early May this year at the Drapchi Prison in Tibet.

Information received from our sources in Tibet and of independent sources now confirm that several Tibetan prisoners were indiscriminately shot dead by the security forces of the Chinese authorities on 1 and 4 May, 1998 at Drapchi Prison, on the outskirts of the Tibetan capital, Lhasa.

The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy based in India who monitors the situation in Tibet put the figure of those shot dead to seven prisoners, including ones who were serving sentences for political reasons.

The extra-judicial killings at Drapchi Prison first occurred on 1 May, 1998 when prisoners showed their displeasure to see an overwhelming numbers of Chinese national flags being hosted in the prison complex where a function was being held to

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The Central Tibetan Administration of H. H. the Dalai Lama with its headquarters in Dharamsala, India has offices in New Delhi, Nepal, Japan, Taiwan, Australia, South Africa, Russia, Hungary, France, United Kingdom and U.S.A.

celebrate the International Labour Day. The prison authorities' plan was to film the event to show a positive image of the prison and to provide evidence to the delegation of EU Trioka Ambassadors (who were to visit the prison three days later) that the political prisoners were being well-treated.

This display of Chinese authority and rule apparently led to a demonstration by the Tibetan prisoners, numbering over 150 who were called to attend the function. As soon as the meeting and filming began, two non-political Tibetan prisoners, **Karma Dawa** and **Karma Sonam** reportedly threw "Free Tibet" leaflets and shouted nationalist slogans. The meeting was suspended and those who participated in the protest, initially around 10 prisoners, including Karma Dawa, were "put into solitary confinement and tortured" sources said.

"We were dismayed and saddened by not seeing a single Tibetan national flag," Karma Sonam and Karma Dawa reportedly answered to prison officials who interrogated them afterwards under harsh and inhuman conditions. The Chinese authorities accused them of instigating the demonstration. Both hail from south-eastern region of Tibet, known to Tibetans as Kham.

The indiscriminate shooting on the prisoners on that day occurred when the Chinese authorities deployed members of the Public Security Bureau (PSB) or police and the People's Armed Police (Ch: Wu Jing).

Karma Dawa (aka Kardar) died in prison. The cause of his death is not known. The words "Free Tibet" were found inscribed on his body. There were fear amongst the prisoners at Drapchi that he and Karma Sonam may face execution because of their role in this prison demonstration. Karma Dawa was serving a prison sentence of 13 years for non-political reasons.

The second identified prisoner who died after shooting was 24-year-old **Lobsang Choephel (Tenzin Choephel was his lay-name)**, a monk from Khangmar Monastery in Dhamshung district under Lhasa prefecture. His body was secretly cremated near Chupsang Hermitage where the Chinese authorities told his 74-year-old father that his son had "committed suicide" and gave him 700 *yuan* (approximately 75.00 \$) as "compensation". In reality he died after being shot on 1 May at Drapchi Prison sources said. Lobsang Choephel was detained on 15 April 1995 (or on 9 September 1995) after staging a demonstration in central Lhasa, shouting "Free Tibet", along with three colleagues from his monastery.

The third prisoner who died after the 1 May demonstration at Drapchi Prison was an unidentified nun from Phenpo Jhopo who succumbed to severe torture and degrading treatment as consequence of her involvement in the demonstration. Another nun, Choekyi Wangmo, aged 21, from Phenpo Sharbum was also severely tortured. Her physical condition remains unknown.

The demonstration on **4 May, 1998** occurred when the prison officials called another meeting of the prisoners in connection with the observance of "Youth Day" at Drapchi Prison. A letter from Tibet says that representatives from eight prisoner accommodation blocks, including 60 monks from block 5, which houses monks who have been involved in previous demonstrations, to the function. In all, over 500 prisoners were reportedly called to the meeting, including a number of nuns, some elderly and some much younger.

Once again as the camera crews were about to start filming, the prisoners at the meeting suddenly started shouting "Free Tibet" slogans. "The voices of protest echoed throughout the prison complex", the letter says. According to other sources, the shouting was so vociferous that members of the security personnel fired into the crowd of prisoners. **One monk was instantly killed (unidentified)**. He becomes the fourth prisoner who died. **Another monk (unidentified)** was hit in the chest - his chances of survival seem slim.

The demonstration was reportedly led by 27-year-old Gyaltzen Dolkar (aka Dawa), a nun from Gari (Garu) nunnery whose current physical condition is not known. She was born in Maldro Gungkar and was sentenced to four years for taking part in a peaceful demonstration in Lhasa on 22 August, 1990. In 1992, her sentence was extended by an additional eight years on the charges of singing "patriotic songs" from her cell in Drapchi Prison. She is currently serving a total sentence of 12 years.

According to the above mentioned letter from Tibet, the 4 May demonstration also involved non-political prisoners as well, "was a result of the ill-treatment of the prisoners in the prison. It also demonstrates the will and determination of the political prisoners for their protest to be heard outside the prison walls" and their support to the Indefinite Tibetan Hunger Strike which was then taking place in New Delhi.

"Now the situation for the prisoners in Drapchi Prison is critical", the letter says. "All the prisoners involved in the protest are being kept in solitary confinement and are receiving routine torture." There are not enough dark (windowless) solitary confinement cells in Drapchi, the says, so prisoners have been transferred to other prisons where such cells are available.

Sources also say that about 80 political prisoners, including 30 female prisoners, disrupted the meeting by raising slogans. Following the protest, the People's Armed Police surrounded the prison and prison guards open fire on the prisoners.

A nun named **Tashi Lhamo and three unidentified nuns** were shot during the above prison protest. Tashi Lhamo died at "Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)" Military Hospital on 7 June at around 13.50 hours and her dead body was handed over to her relatives. Her prison term of 6 years was about to expire.

The three nuns whose name and details of their deaths remain unknown but witnesses described their dead bodies as "swollen".

Tashi Lhamo and the three unidentified nuns were the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth prisoners who died after the two prison protests at Drapchi Prison.

Gyaltsen Choephel, a 27-year-old political prisoner, was beaten severely when he opposed the Chinese officials reasoning that the above four nuns committed suicide by consuming poison. One source reports that he is currently in the "TAR Military Hospital." He was serving a sentence of 15 years for his involvement in the 5 March, 1988 demonstration in Lhasa.

One prisoner who remains in critical condition at the military hospital is **Ngawang Sungrab**, a 27-year-old monk from Drepung Monastery who was also shot after the protest. He was serving a prison term of 10 years for his involvement in a 1988 demonstration for Tibetan independence.

Three nuns, **Ngawang Sangdrol, Ngawang Choezom, Ngawang Tenzin** were kept in solitary confinement cells at Drapchi Prison after being subjected to severe interrogation sessions and routine ill-treatment. Ngawang Choezom and Ngawang Tenzin were serving 11 and 5 years prison term at the prison respectively. Ngawang Sangdrol is the longest serving female political prisoner in Tibet with 18 years of prison term.

On the whole, the two prison protests at Drapchi Prison resulted in **eight unfortunate deaths (the names of 5 of the prisoners remained unknown) with at 60 prisoners severely injured. 15 of those injured are now in critical physical condition** according to latest reports received from the Tibetan capital. The real number of casualty, of course, remain unknown. Other prisoners involved in the protests are still being interrogated or remain in solitary confinement cells.

Following the protests, the Chinese authorities maintained complete silence on the shooting incidents at Drapchi and the crackdown on prisoners thereafter at Drapchi Prison. On 20 May, during the monthly meeting-day, many Tibetans were not allowed to meet with their relatives in the prison, serving sentences for political reason at the prison.

"The Chinese are surprised by the bravery of the protesters," the letter from Tibet concluded. "The Public Security Bureau (PSB) or Chinese police banned prison officials from returning to their homes for many days to prevent news of the protest from spreading outside the prison walls."

Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports from Tibet said that two monks launched a hunger strike at the Drapchi Prison at the beginning of May 1998 to support the Indefinite Tibetan Hunger Strike in New Delhi. They both died nine days later. The prison authorities totally ignored their hunger strike.

In view of the above grave situation, Tibet Bureau for UN Affairs, would like to appeal to the Special Rapporteur to immediately intervene on behalf those who died and other prisoners who facing severe consequences as a result of their involvement in the Drapchi protests.

We request the Special Rapporteur to seek concrete information from the Chinese authorities on the circumstances of those who were killed and other prisoners who are under critical physical condition.

Sincerely yours,

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