



POLITICAL PRISONER PROFILE

DHONDUP WANGCHEN



- Nationality:** Tibetan
Born: 17 October 1974 in Bayen, Tsoshar, Tibet
Occupation: Film-maker
Arrested: 26 March 2008 for documenting Tibetans' views
Charges: "Inciting separatism", "subversion of state power"
Sentence: Six years in prison
Location: Xichuan Prison in Xining, Qinghai province

On 28 December 2009, following a trial behind closed doors, Dhondup Wangchen was given to a six-year prison sentence for conducting interviews to make a documentary. The resulting film, *Leaving Fear Behind*, follows Dhondup's journey around Tibet in early 2008 where he interviewed Tibetans, asking them for their thoughts and views on the upcoming Olympic Games, the Dalai Lama and Chinese government policies in Tibet. **Please take action for his release.**

The worst fear of any prisoner is to be forgotten.

Background information

One of ten children, Dhondup was born on 17 October 1974 into a farming family in Bayen in the Tsoshar region of Amdo. Whilst growing up, Dhondup received no formal education, but can now read and write a little. In 1993 he made the arduous journey out of Tibet to India, travelling on foot to receive a teaching by the Dalai Lama. He returned to Tibet motivated to work for the benefit of the Tibetan people.



2007: Film project begins In the autumn 2007, with his friend Jigme Gyatso, Dhondup began work to document the views of Tibetans living in Tibet. Both men understood the risk they were taking, however they were determined that the unheard voices of ordinary Tibetans should reach the world stage. In Dhondup Wangchen's own words, *"At a time of great difficulty and a feeling of helplessness, [the idea of our film is to] get some meaningful response and results. It is very difficult [for Tibetans] to go to Beijing and speak out there. So that is why we decided to show the real feelings of Tibetans inside Tibet through this film."*

26 March 2008: Arrested In March 2008, shortly before Dhondup and Jigme Gyatso were arrested, footage of the film was smuggled out of Tibet. In October 2008, Jigme was released without charge in, however he continues to be strictly monitored by the Chinese authorities. Dhondup was held in



detention for over 20 months until his trial, during which time he was tortured. It also emerged he contracted Hepatitis B and did not receive medical treatment.

28 December 2009: Sentenced Dhondup's trial was carried out behind closed doors. The lawyer appointed by his family was only allowed to meet Dhondup once before being forced to stop representing him by the Chinese authorities. Dhondup was handed a six year prison sentence for "inciting separatism" and "subversion of state power". The dire lack of due legal process and the extreme sentence meted out for what were tenuous charges again shows the complete disregard the Chinese government has for meaningful legal reform and civil rights.

Dhondup formally appealed the sentence and in February 2010 was due to meet Chinese lawyer Chang Boyang to go over proceedings. However the Chinese authorities did not allow the meeting and Chang Boyang was threatened with the closure of his law firm if he did not drop the case.

6 April 2010: Transferred to labour camp Following the unsuccessful appeal, Dhondup was transferred to Xichuan Prison, in Qinghai province, a notorious labour camp, known for its harsh living and working conditions.

October 2010: Serious health concerns Reports were received indicating Dhondup may be suffering from a heart problem. The conditions of the labour camp and the forced labour (up to 17 hours a day) are likely to have contributed to his overall ill-health. Dhondup is only allowed one visit a month from his sister. His wife, Lhamo Tso, who lives in exile, has had no direct contact with him since his detention in March 2008.

June 2011: Removed from hard labour Dhondup was removed from hard labour duties at Xichuan Prison. The reason is not known, but Lhamo Tso believes the campaigning and high-profile nature of Dhondup's case may have had an impact. He still has work duties, but these are believed to be less strenuous and for shorter hours.



Current concerns

Dhondup is currently in Xichuan Prison, which is known for its harsh conditions. He continues to suffer from ill health with a suspected heart condition and severe headaches that are believed to be migraines. He also has Hepatitis B which he is thought to have contracted whilst in detention. There is no evidence he is receiving any medical attention for these conditions.

Dhondup is only allowed one visit a month from his sister (who lives in Tibet), but this is not always facilitated. Since his detention, he has not been allowed any direct contact through letters or telephone with his wife and children who live in exile. Parcels sent by his family in exile have been returned unopened.

Lhamo Tso: campaigning for her husband's release



Dhondup's wife Lhamo Tso, who lives with their four children in Dharamsala, India, continues to appeal to China and the international community for her husband's release. In January 2010, following news of Dhondup's sentence, Lhamo Tso said, *"My husband is not a criminal; he just tried to show the truth."*

On 19 May 2010, on hearing the news of her husband's failed appeal and transfer to a labour camp, she said, *"We are absolutely desperate now ... China has made it clear that it is impossible for us to work inside their legal system. Therefore I appeal to foreign governments to intervene to secure the immediate and unconditional release of Dhondup Wangchen, who did nothing more than exercise his right to freedom of expression."*

Lhamo Tso is gravely concerned for Dhondup's health and is asking that an independent doctor can conduct a thorough medical examination and follow up with relevant treatment. She also wants to have direct contact with her husband through letters or phone calls. Her final plea is for the Chinese government to grant Dhondup early release through medical parole.

TAKE ACTION

1. Write to your MP, and ask they request the Foreign Office to urgently look into Dhondup's case, and in particular to make enquiries to the Chinese government regarding his health, that he be allowed any required medical treatment, regular visits from his sister, correspondence with his family in India, and that he be given parole on compassionate grounds.

Go to www.writetothem.com to find your MPs contact details.

2. Write to the Chinese Ambassador, asking the Chinese government:

- **To grant access for an independent doctor to visit Dhondup**, conduct a medical examination, facilitate any required medical treatment and ensure a report on Dhondup's health is sent to his family in Tibet and his wife in India.
- **To permit Dhondup to have direct contact with his wife and children through letters and phone calls** and ensure he receives regular visits from his sister that are not subject to unexplained summary cancellations. These family access requests are allowed for under the Chinese Constitution.
- **That Dhondup is given "medical parole", is released** and allowed to join his family in India. (Dhondup has now served three and a half years of his six-year sentence.)

Address: Ambassador Liu Xiaoming, Chinese Embassy, 49-51 Portland Place, London W1B 1JL. **Email:** ambassador@chinese-embassy.org.uk

Note: The Embassy occasionally disables this email address (so your email is returned). If that is the case please try political@chinese-embassy.org.uk and/or press@chinese-embassy.org.uk.

3. Write to Dhondup in prison. Letters give political prisoners a source of strength and encouragement. Letter-writing campaigns can result in better conditions and in some instances reduced sentences. Include Dhondup's name in Tibetan: Dhondup Wangchen and in Chinese: Dangzhi Xiangqian.

Address: Dhondup Wangchen, Xichuan Prison, 108 Xichuan South Road, Xining City, Qinghai Province 810029, People's Republic of China

For further advice and for text to include in Tibetan and Chinese scripts go to www.tibetsociety.com/dhondupwangchen.

4. Screen *Leaving Fear Behind* in your local community. Tibet Society has produced DVDs of *Leaving Fear Behind* and *Behind the Sea*, a short film about Lhamo Tso for use as a campaign tool to raise awareness of Dhondup's case.

Cost: £2.00 (to cover postage and production). **Contact 020 7272 1414, info@tibetsociety.com or order online at <http://bit.ly/TS-LFB>.**

Further information: www.tibetsociety.com/dhondupwangchen

Watch *Leaving Fear Behind* online: www.bit.ly/LFB-YT

***Leaving Fear Behind* website:** www.leavingfearbehind.com

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