

Family forced to deny self-immolation was political

[11 January 2017] UPDATE: On 8 December 2016, Tashi Rabten self-immolated in Machu town, eastern Tibet. He shouted slogans including freedom for Tibet, before succumbing to his injuries. His family were detained and interrogated after requesting the return of his body. His wife was forced to sign a document claiming the self-immolation was due to domestic problems and not politically-motivated. At least nine other Tibetans have been detained in relation to the self-immolation.

Family members 'tortured' and denied funeral

[11 January 2017] UPDATE: In the hours following the self-immolation of Tashi Rabten (pictured right), a group of eight Tibetans including Tashi's wife Bhopey (35) and two children Tashi Dolma (daughter, 16) and Tashi Dhondup (son 13), approached the local Public Security Bureau office to claim the body in order to hold traditional funeral rituals for the deceased. Not only were the group denied access to the body, but were detained for questioning.

According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, the group were "severely interrogated". Radio Free Asia (RFA) alleges the family members were beaten and tortured after initially failing to comply with the authorities. All were later released, though Bhopey was kept in for additional questioning and released the next day.

Bhopey was forced to sign a document stating her husband had self-immolated due to domestic discord rather than as a protest against the state. Such tactics have been employed in previous self-immolation cases. According to RFA's sources, all three family members had to sign a document which they did not understand, with their thumb prints, before they were released.

The body of Tashi Rabten was cremated by the authorities against the wishes of the family and denying them traditional Tibetan rituals. The ashes have since been returned to the family.

Further detentions

Following the self-immolation, at least nine other Tibetans have been detained on suspicion of involvement in the protest.

Three young Tibetans, identified as Bhenkho, Tenpa and Dorjee, were detained on suspicion of taking photos and video of the self-immolation. A woman who appeared in one of the videos, Tsezin Lhamo, has also been detained. She was a witness to the protest and is seen to be praying aloud for the Dalai Lama's blessings. Four of Tsezin Lhamo's family members were also detained but have since been released.

There is no further news on the condition or whereabouts of the three young Tibetans or Tsezin Lhamo.

On 11 December, Jamyang Choephel, a 25 year-old monk, was detained by Chinese security personnel. Though the exact reasons for his arrest are not known, it is believed to be in connection with Tashi Rabten's self-immolation. Jamyang is from Ngok Gyalmo Monastery in Gyalmogon (Ch: Jiamaogong) township in Tsoe county, Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. It is understood he is being held at the Machu County Detention Centre.

Further reading: [RFA \(13 Dec\)](#) | [TCHRD \(14 Dec\)](#) | [TCHRD \(26 Dec\)](#)

(Warning: These reports contain graphic images of the self-immolation.)

Family detained after self-immolation in eastern Tibet

[9 December 2016] On 8 December, a Tibetan died after carrying out a self-immolation protest in eastern Tibet. Tashi Rabten shouted slogans calling for freedom for Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama before succumbing to his injuries. Members of Tashi's family have since been detained. It is the first known self-immolation in Tibet since March.

According to Tibetan Centre for Human Rights Democracy (TCHRD), the self-immolator has been identified as Tashi Rabten and that he died from his injuries. It is understood Tashi staged his protest at the same location as that of his cousin, 19-year old Tsering Kyi, who died after self-immolating on 3 March 2012.

TCHRD has reported members of Tashi's family have been detained by the county police, including his wife, two children and other relatives. His family had approached the police requesting the return of Tashi's body. Their current status and well-being is not known.

Tashi's protest took place in the early evening of 8 December 2016 on the main street of Machu (Chinese: Maqu) town, Kanlho (or Gannan) prefecture, Amdo (now part of China's Gansu province). According to witnesses, Tashi shouted slogans calling for freedom for Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama during the protest. TCHRD reported the slogans included "May His Holiness the Dalai Lama live for 10,000 years" and "Let His Holiness return to Tibet". According to Radio Free Asia sources, Tashi also shouted for the release of the Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, and for the freedom of Tibet.

A video of the self-immolation has surfaced on social media. As well as the protest, the video also shows a woman praying for the self-immolator, before police arrive at the scene and quickly retrieve the body.

Tashi Rabten is believed to be 33 years-old and from Dragtho Ruchen Teushul village in Trokho Meya township, Machu county, Kanlho prefecture, Amdo.

This is the third self-immolation to take place in Tibet this year, and the first since 23 March 2016, when Sonam Tso died after setting fire to herself near Sera monastery in Ngaba.

A total of 145 Tibetans have self-immolated in Tibet since 2009. A further Tibetan self-immolated in Beijing in 2012, and seven others in exile. The majority of self-immolators are known to have used their protest to call for freedom for Tibet and the return of the Dalai Lama to Tibet.

Further reading: TCHRD | New York Times | Phayul | RFA | Free Tibet

(Warning: The TCHRD, Phayul & RFA reports contain graphic images of the self-immolation. Free Tibet's report includes the video.)

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