

## An Interview with Golog Jigme Gyatso

Tibet Watch Thematic Report  
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## Introduction

Tibetan monk and human rights activist Golog Jigme is now an exile. A perilous 20-month journey across the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayan mountains brought him to safety in May 2014. He had endured six years of constant surveillance by the Chinese state, been imprisoned three times and experienced torture so brutal it almost killed him. His crime? Making a 25 minute documentary film about the Chinese treatment of the Tibetan people at a time when the eyes of the world were focused on the 2008 Beijing Olympics – the same Olympics the Chinese had been awarded on the premise that it would improve the human rights situation in the country.

A man of great courage and passion for Tibet, Golog Jigme had previously been involved in many causes, including Tibetan language, environment, protection of wild animals and helping the victims of disasters. In April 2010 he joined the relief team when a devastating earthquake hit Jyekundo (Ch: Yushu) County in eastern Tibet. He is recognised by the International Tibet Network as a ‘Tibetan Hero’<sup>1</sup> and also listed by Reporters Without Borders as one of their ‘100 Information Heroes’<sup>2</sup>.

In 2007 Golog Jigme and his fellow film-maker, Dhondup Wangchen, took the brave decision to use the increased interest in human rights in China that the Olympics had generated to make a film. The 25 minute documentary – entitled *Leaving Fear Behind* – was based on 35 hours of interview footage of 108 ordinary Tibetans talking about their lives and their country. The film documented their suffering and oppression but also their hopes and desires. The aim was simply to show the world something that Chinese censorship has always kept hidden – the real thoughts and feelings of Tibetans in Tibet.

The pair were to pay a high price for producing the film. *Leaving Fear Behind* was first shown in Beijing on 6 August 2008, two days before the start of the Olympics. Dhondup Wangchen and Golog Jigme had already been detained in March 2008, just days after the film footage had been smuggled out of the country. On 28 December 2009, Dhondup Wangchen was sentenced to six years in prison for “subversion of state power”. He remained in prison until 5 June 2014, when he was finally released.

Golog Jigme was initially arrested on 23 March 2008. For assisting in the making of a film about the views of his fellow Tibetans, his most basic human rights were violated. Over the next few years he was to suffer the denial of his freedom of speech, be held incommunicado and without trial or charge and be severely tortured over a prolonged period. He was denied medical treatment and held in conditions that amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Despite everything he has been through, Golog Jigme is known as someone who doesn’t normally like to talk about his own suffering:

“In fact, he would always worry about his friends’ safety and well-being, he would never talk much about his own sufferings. He has an optimistic personality, his voice is bright and clear, his round face is always smiling. Meeting him doesn’t actually reveal who he really is, it is impossible to imagine that this courageous person was tortured and nearly died.”<sup>3</sup>

Tibet Watch is very grateful to Golog Jigme for sharing his experiences with us.<sup>4</sup> This is his story of the appalling treatment he suffered at the hands of the Chinese government.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://freetibetanheroes.org/portfolio-items/jigme-gyatsogolog-jigme/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://heroes.rsf.org/en/jigme-gyatso/>

<sup>3</sup> Woesser, written on 11 October 2012, translated and published by High Peaks Pure Earth <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/remembering-the-missing-monk-golog-jigme-by-woesser/>

<sup>4</sup> The main section of this report is compiled from the transcripts of interviews with Golog Jigme carried out by Tibet Watch researchers in Dharamsala, India, during May and June 2014. The transcripts have been translated from Tibetan by the Tibet Watch research team.

## Timeline

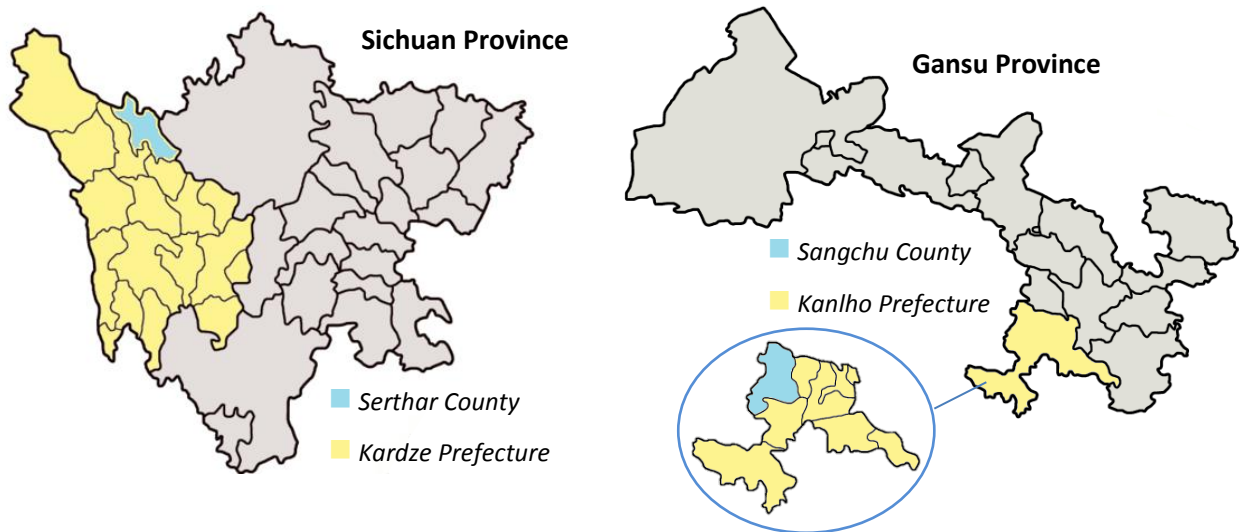
13 July 2001	China is awarded the 2008 Olympic Games.
October 2007 - March 2008	Dhondup Wangchen and Golog Jigme film <i>Leaving Fear Behind</i> .
10 March 2008	Protests erupt in Lhasa and spread across the plateau. The film cassettes for <i>Leaving Fear Behind</i> are sent out of the country.
23 March 2008	Golog Jigme is arrested.
Events of Golog's Jigme's first arrest, from 23 March to 12 May 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initially taken to Sangchu County police station, where he is beaten and interrogated for two nights and one day</li> <li>Transferred to Manker prison, where he remains overnight and his monk's robes are forcibly removed</li> <li>Transferred to Kachu prison, where he is tortured and interrogated for two days and one night</li> <li>Transferred back to Sangchu County police station, where he remains overnight</li> <li>Transferred to a hotel, name and location unknown, where he remains for five days</li> <li>Transferred to a torture centre, 3km from Kachu military hospital</li> </ul>
12 May 2008	Golog Jigme is released.
6 August 2008	<i>Leaving Fear Behind</i> is screened for the first time in Beijing.
10 April 2009	Golog Jigme is arrested for the second time and held at a police detention centre in Sangchu County.
29 July 2009	Golog Jigme is released.
22 September 2012	Golog Jigme is arrested for the third time.
30 September 2012	Golog Jigme escapes from detention.
28 November 2012	Public Security Bureau of Gansu Province issues an arrest warrant for Golog Jigme on alleged murder charges
18 May 2014	Golog Jigme arrives at the Tibetan Reception Centre in Dharamsala, India

## Golog Jigme's Story

### Background

I have several names. People call me Golog Jigme and Golog Jigme Gyatso. My birth name is Lotsa and my monk's name is Jigme Gyatso. People in my home town also call me Jigme Lotsa, mixing my lay and monk's names. I am 43 years old. I am the third oldest of the five children in our family.

I was born in Serthar County in Sichuan<sup>5</sup>. I became a monk at the age of 15. Under the tutelage of my teachers, I later joined the influential Labrang Tashi Khyil Monastery in Sangchu County in Gansu<sup>6</sup>. Over the years I have witnessed the tightening restrictions and limits imposed by the Chinese government on the number of monks allowed in the monastery and the number of people attending the prayer sessions. Despite these challenges, Jamyang Shepa Rinpoche (Head Lama of the monastery) made special efforts to admit me to the monastery, where I studied until 2008.



*Sichuan Province and Gansu Province in relation to China and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)*

<sup>5</sup> Serthar (Ch: Seda) County, Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province

<sup>6</sup> Sangchu/Labrang (Ch: Xiahe) County, Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province



## First arrest

I was first arrested on 23 March 2008. On that day, I was asked by Golog Lhabzo (Lhabzo means painter in Tibetan) to say some prayers in the house where he paints, which is located near my Labrang Monastery. At first I refused his request, saying that I was in danger and there were many troubles I was related to, but he insisted I come to his studio and do the prayers of Tara.

That morning, I felt that I was in danger of being arrested, that someone was following me and that my mobile phone was being monitored. While doing the prayer, I also told one of my friends that I sensed something was going to happen to me.

Most of the monks who were invited to the prayer at Golog Lhabzo's painting studio had participated in the protests of 14 March 2008 (which the Chinese call the 3.14 protests). When they were leaving for home in the afternoon, after the prayer, I stayed back, fearing police would be waiting for us at the end of the bridge which leads towards our monastery. I told them to go home without me, saying I was staying back to talk to Golog Lhabzo.

After that, I went into Golog Lhabzo's kitchen and watched TV for a while. On the local news channel there was coverage of protests in Sangchu County which were being condemned. After 15 minutes, dozens of standard police officers and Special Police Units (SPU) of Kanlho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (TAP) stormed into the house. They were led by Captain Zhang, the head of the Kanlho TAP police department. Captain Zhang was in plain clothes and the rest of his officers were in uniform. There were more police outside, some in the inner yard, some surrounding the house. They came with different weapons and electronic rods.

Upon entering the house, Captain Zhang reached for his mobile and started to dial a number. Fearing that the phone call was to me – in order to identify me – I switched off my phone immediately. Without the mobile phone ringing to identify me, Captain Zhang walked back and forth in the house several times. Everything went deathly quiet. Golog Lhabzo started arguing with the police saying his house and studio was a registered company and had all the legal papers of a company. He asked what the reason was for the police storming into his home.

In the middle of their argument, I stood up nervously to back up Golog Lhabzo and told them that as security personnel of a country they should treat people with respect. I was told by a police officer that it was none of my business. I replied that it wasn't a matter of one individual's business and you couldn't tame people by intimidating them with weapons. The officer looked at me sternly. I told him not to look at me like that. I asked them to tell us the reason for having all these forces here.

At this point they all went outside and had a look at some photos Captain Zhang had brought along with him. Then they re-entered the house and looked around closely, pointing guns at us. They asked us to take out our phones and lay them down in front of them. I switched on my mobile phone and put it down on the floor.

As soon as Captain Zhang started dialling again, my mobile rang off with a ringtone of Tibetan singer Tamding Tsering's song "I want to go to India". They asked whose phone it was and I admitted it was mine. One policeman tried to take the phone but I snatched it back and held on to it. They started beating me all over my body with their gun butts and electronic rods. I was beaten like you beat leather to soften it.

They put a black cloth over my head and I was dragged outside and put in a vehicle. Later I was told by friends that there were two armoured vehicles and approximately 1,000 armed security personnel in the area; all there to carry out my capture.

They took me to the police station in Sangchu County and started beating me again. I was also beaten on the way and some of my clothes were ripped off. Blood was dripping off the edge of my robe. At the police station, they took away all my belongings, including my mobile phone and wallet.

I found out later that those of my fellow monks who had attended the prayer ritual and left earlier had not been arrested. I believe that many of them would have been arrested if they had stayed with me at the house. There were several other monks in the house who were kept at gunpoint for half an hour after my capture but after that they were released.

I was beaten until 11 p.m. that night and then taken to another part of the police station for interrogation. I was told to kneel down by one of the interrogating officers but I refused, saying I would only do that for my kind parents and teachers, not for people who give harsh orders. I was beaten again.

During the interrogation I was asked why I was there. I told them: "How could I know? You brought me here." They said there were over a thousand monks at Labrang Monastery and that, out of all of them, I alone had been brought to the police station for a special reason. I argued back bitterly that if they had a reason then they should just tell me. What was the point of asking me?

They didn't ask anything specific. They just repeated a few questions such as "Why did you come here?" and "What do you know?" I was interrogated in this manner for the rest of that night, the whole of the next day and the whole of the next night. I was not allowed to sleep. Later in my detention, after I had been tortured, they started asking more specific things. One time they brought a print out of all my phone calls and asked me why I had made so many calls. They were sarcastic, saying that even the secretary of the TAP and county officers do not make so many calls. But all that was ahead of me. At this early stage the questions were just vague and frustrating. On the third day, I was transferred to Manker Prison in the capital of Sangchu County.

In that prison, I spent one night and half a day. Then I was handcuffed and taken into a changing room to put on a prison uniform. It was there that I saw Sangay and Jigme Guri<sup>7</sup>, a senior monk from Labrang Monastery who is also known as Labrang Jigme or Jigme Gyatso. I found three identical uniforms hanging on the walls. One was for me and the other two were for Jigme Guri and Sangay.

At first I struggled to keep my monk's robes but they forcibly took them off me and put on the uniform. There were no shoes for us and we were told to walk barefoot. When I tried to put on my own shoes a policeman slapped my face for disobeying their orders.

The three of us were put into separate police cars and I was taken to Kachu (Ch: Linxia) Prison in Linxia City. I spent that night in Kachu Prison. The next day, I was hung from the ceiling by my handcuffs, which were put through a hook in the ceiling. My toes just touched the cold floor. That day, I was interrogated by two Chinese officials. They couldn't understand Tibetan and my Chinese was not good enough to understand their questions. We had trouble communicating with each other and they started punching and kicking me to entertain themselves. I was hung like this for a whole day.

When it got dark, I was taken down and brought to a hot wood/coal burning stove. My handcuffs were removed and then I was re-handcuffed with the hot chimney of that stove between my arms. The stove and its chimney got hotter and hotter and my arms, chest and both sides of my face got burned and blistered. I kept turning my face, so the middle part (nose, chin and forehead) would not burn. At one point, I couldn't stand the heat any more. So I gave a hard tug to the chimney with my handcuffs. The hot chimney fell down and hit the neck of one of the police officers and burned him. My action made the policemen angry and they started beating me.

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<sup>7</sup> Jigme Guri is also known as Jigme Gyatso or Labrang Jigme. Like, Golog Jigme he is a senior monk from Labrang Monastery and recognised as a 'Tibetan Hero'. (<http://freetibetanheroes.org/jigme-guri>)



That night, I was taken into a freezing cold room with all the windows open. My guards went to sleep with warm clothes on. I couldn't sleep with all the pain of the burns on my chest and, even worse, I became very cold and started to get a fever.

The next day, I was hung by my arms again. In total, I was tortured for two days and one night in Kachu Prison. Then I was taken back to the police station in the capital of Sangchu County. No-one bothered to interrogate me that night so I was able to sleep. The next day I was taken to what seemed to be a hotel room and kept there for five days.<sup>8</sup>

After the hotel stay, I was taken to another place; my head, once again, covered with a black cloth. I could feel the bumpy road and hear several iron gates being opened, one after another. After my release, I went to check out this place and found out it was three kilometres away from Kachu military hospital in Linxia City. I also found out this place was notorious for torturing people with a device called the iron chair (also called the tiger chair).<sup>9</sup>

When the black cloth was taken off my head, I found myself in a big room with an iron chair along with all sorts of torture devices laid out in front of me. They told me to have a look at these devices and I told myself that I was doomed to being beaten that day.

As it started getting dark, some Chinese officials arrived and I recognised the man who had arrested me. Captain Zhang came towards me and hit my neck with a police baton several times. Captain Yu, another police official from Kachu, kicked me a couple of times. Then they all started beating me and slapping me with shoes.

After this, someone said in Chinese to hang me up. I thought it would be like before when they hung me from ceilings hooks, but I couldn't see any hooks or pipes in the room. To my surprise, I was tied to the iron chair, with both legs and hands shackled. Now the weight of my whole body was born by my shackled legs and wrists, without anywhere for my upper or lower body to lean against.

I was hanging from the chair, just above the floor, and they gave me electric shocks as well as kicking me in the head; all the time calling me "separatist" and shouting at me to confess, without telling me what to confess to. The pain of being hung from this iron chair was so great that I could not feel the pain from their beatings and kicking. I saw the time on the watch of a policeman. It was around 9:00 p.m. when I was put onto that chair and I was left there until dawn the next morning. I would guess it was around 7:00 a.m.

Jigme Guri, who was also tortured in the chair, told me later that he couldn't make it to more than three or four minutes without fainting because of the pain. I wished I could have fainted while hanging from the chair, but I didn't. Later I was told by one doctor that it may have been something to do with my bones.

I was removed from that iron chair occasionally, but then faced beatings on the floor. Then they put me back onto the chair again. In total, I was put onto the chair seven times and I sustained scars on my wrists and ankles from the restraints.

I was put onto the chair without any clothes and they tried all sorts of tortures while I was there, like beating my back with tiny metal sticks, kicking me and giving electric shocks to my mouth. The pain the chair caused was too extreme to feel any of the pain caused by the metal sticks and kicking. When they gave me electric shocks, I could feel nothing. I only smelt the burning of my own flesh.

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<sup>8</sup> Chinese security personnel sometimes use hotels to detain prisoners. This practice is denied by the state but well documented by NGOs and also noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture following his mission to China in 2005.

<sup>9</sup> The torture that Golog Jigme describes is slightly different to some other accounts of the iron chair or tiger chair. In this case the chair seems to have been used as a vertical frame from which to hang the prisoner – several times facing in towards the chair and at least once facing outwards.

There were around 16 or 17 policemen there to force me onto the chair whenever I struggled. Once, they hung me forward from the chair. This made me feel that my chest was going to split into two and all my intestines were going to fall onto the floor. I became very dizzy and could not see properly. I thought I was hung in this position for four or five hours, but I was told later that this would have been impossible because I would be dead by then. But I am quite sure I was in this position for almost two hours.

I remember I heard someone saying in Chinese that it kills people if they are kept in that position for too long and that I was to be taken off the chair. I found out this was an older policeman. If this older man hadn't come to remind them, they would definitely have killed me from hanging me in that position.

During all my time under arrest, this was the worst form of torture I suffered. One of my ribs was broken and my joints suffered very badly. Whenever I remember that chair I feel scared, even to this day. I felt like it would be better to die than survive being tortured on that chair. I was kept on the chair days and nights. At one point, my feet got swollen and, to my horror, all my toenails fell off.

Besides the iron chair, the pain of thirst was the second worst torture. Due to the blood loss from my body, I felt like I was dying from thirst, but was only given a very small amount of water. Over time, I got used to hunger and sleep deprivation, but never to being thirsty.

I sustained various injuries during my detention and torture, including injuries to my backbone, eyes, hands and feet. Some of my ribs were broken and my knee joints were dislocated. On one occasion they said I would have been lucky to freeze to death. They were implying that it would have been better to die to escape the hell of their torture. The only Tibetan phrase that the police seemed able to speak was "Cho Soje" which translates as "kill you".

During the interrogations, they used to ask, "What did you do? With whom do you have connections?" They would display several photographs of Tibetans and ask who they were and what they were doing. When my answers didn't satisfy them, the officer would clap and the rest of them would blindly start hitting and kicking me. It felt like something out of a gangster film. This sort of torture became routine.

I was detained and tortured from 23 March 2008 until 12 May 2008. I still vividly remember my date of release on 12 May as it was the day when the Wenchuan earthquake<sup>10</sup> happened.

I believe my release was solely due to international pressure even though they pretended otherwise. China's violent reaction to the non-violent protests of the Tibetan people was attracting new levels of sympathy and attention. And as they approached the Olympic Games they were increasingly aware of the gaze of the world.

## Second arrest

I was arrested again in 2009 on 10 April. I was with my friends in a restaurant when they came to take me. I was kept in captivity for approximately four months in a police detention centre in Sangchu County.

The main reason for my second arrest was my involvement in the dissemination of information about the protests in Tibet in China's brutal response. They learnt that I spoke to some international media, including Radio Free Asia, and told them that "all of Tibet is controlled in a crackdown by the Chinese". I told them during the interrogation that even civilians are under surveillance by China's armed forces, with tanks everywhere threatening ordinary Tibetans in many cities and areas, including Sangchu. I asked them: "Isn't it true? If it's not a crackdown, then what is it?" They did not answer me.

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<sup>10</sup> A magnitude 7.9 earthquake in Sichuan Province which, according to BBC news reports, left 87,150 dead or missing, 370,000 injured and 4,800,000 homeless.

The other accusations against me included involvement in activities that “endangered national unity”; having a connection to “splittist groups”, which refers to HH the Dalai Lama; and membership of “terrorist groups”, which is a reference to the Tibetan Youth Congress. They told me that I had a way out if I confessed to connections with these activities and groups.

I told them some things. I told them about my work on the documentary *Leaving Fear Behind* and the dissemination of information to the media outside of Tibet. These are things I did. But the accusations of involvement in other activities and being a member of the Tibetan Youth Congress were untrue so I did not admit to them. I was also asked to revile HH the Dalai Lama. But this is unacceptable.

During this time in detention, they beat me with electric batons but didn't torture me that much compared to the previous time. Once again, I benefited from international attention. Early in my detention there was a period of five days when I was not fed food or water but suddenly they started feeding me again. I wasn't aware of the reason at the time but later I came to know that it was because of the constant efforts of international human rights groups and especially Reporters Without Borders.

Eventually I was released, on 29 July 2009, but they kept watching me. At least two security personnel were always following me and all my phone calls were tapped. Every week I had to report to the county police about my daily activities and I had to get their permission if I needed to go anywhere outside of Kanlho TAP.

### Third arrest and escape from detention

I was arrested once again on 22 September 2012.

It is also reported that Golog Jigme's residence within Labrang Monastery was razed by a Chinese work unit early in September. His was the only building in the monastery complex that was destroyed and he was obliged to take temporary refuge with one of his fellow monks. On 20 September he received an invitation to visit a family in Lanzhou, the capital city of Gansu Province, to perform Buddhist rites. On 21 September he travelled to Tsoe (Ch: Hezuo) County to submit paperwork and obtain travel permission from the prefecture level authorities. He stayed overnight in Tsoe County and disappeared the next day while on his way home to Labrang Monastery.<sup>11</sup>

This time my hands and feet were chained but they didn't torture me. Instead they lectured me on how disloyal I had been to China and they also tried to make out that I was a criminal. They accused me of inciting people to set themselves on fire and being responsible for all the self-immolations that had taken place across Tibet.

Then suddenly they announced that after the national day of the People's Republic of China, which takes place on 1 October each year, I would be taken to one of the military hospitals in Lhanzhou where I would receive a medical check-up to ensure that I was free from any illness. If any illness was found, I was told that I might receive the necessary injections. Despite my expressing reservations about the need to visit a hospital so far away they were insistent.

However, I had information from other sources and I already knew that the medical check-up was fake. They were planning to kill me with one of those injections.

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<sup>11</sup> Woeser, 11 October 2012, translated and published by High Peaks Pure Earth  
<http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/remembering-the-missing-monk-golog-jigme-by-woeser/>

After learning of their plan, I decided to escape on 30 September. Of the two guards, one had to leave early for an urgent matter and the other went to sleep at midnight. After praying to His Holiness I was able to free myself from my chains. I noticed that the other guards were busy playing Mahjong [a dice game] and I took my chance. As I proceeded towards the main gate, I was lucky enough to find it open. At once, I ran out of the gate.

For two months I ran and hid across the mountains, after which I was shocked to find out that the Chinese government had accused me of murder. They had announced a reward of 200,000 yuan to anyone with information on my whereabouts.

The Chinese government never made any such accusation when I was in their custody and I certainly never had any intention of killing anyone. I thought of protesting this false allegation by setting myself on fire before one of the police stations in either Gansu or Sichuan. However, after careful consideration, I decided not to proceed with this act. I thought that, perhaps, they were ashamed of my escape and were trying to cover it up with these charges. If I set myself on fire they would only continue to defame me by making such unimaginable allegations. But if I were to live I could continue to be of service to the Tibetan cause and so I changed my mind.

After I escaped I went into hiding, no longer wearing my monk's robes and dressing in common clothes. Those days were not easy, particularly during the first few months, because of the many injuries my body had suffered. I felt as if my body was a crushed and dysfunctional motorcycle. Even to this day I continue to have severe pain in my backbone and ribs and my knee dislocates whenever my body gets cold. I am now part of the evidence of how the Chinese are torturing and oppressing the Tibetans under their regime.

I cannot speak of the places I hid during my journey to India. I can tell you that I hid through mountains, rivers, forests and remote areas. For one year and eight months I hid and ran. There were huge financial costs to my escape and I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped me escape from every danger and assisted my coming into exile.

### **My story: one of thousands**

To survive the torture, I thought about the thousands and thousands of our forefathers who were killed for Tibet. I feel immense pride in their memory and I was determined to carry forward their legacy and be the true next generation. I also felt stronger when they reviled HH the Dalai Lama.

At no time during my three detentions did I ever receive a visit from a lawyer or any medical treatment. The Chinese authorities did not treat me in accordance with their own law. Nor were my family or monastery informed of my whereabouts. They knew I had disappeared, but nothing more. The authorities consider us Tibetans worse than animals. They do not value us as humans. Once you enter the torture centre, you feel your life is over. Death awaits you. So whether we confess or not, we are their victim. These things helped me to keep strong.

During that first year, 2008, the Chinese authorities cracked down on the Tibetan protests, using them as an opportunity to violently control the people. They believed that if this time they were able to stamp out the protest with an iron-fist, such "counter revolutionary" activity would not occur again. They had made up their minds to massacre Tibetans without sympathy.

The Chinese were absolutely unprepared for the widespread mass uprising across the nation as well as the international support and attention the events would bring. I felt certain that the continuous torture and beatings I suffered were a sign that the authorities were incredibly anxious about both the mass movement and the international attention.

However, as the days passed, their hard-line approach changed and my treatment and food provision improved. I even received a visit from the Beijing Police Bureau who came to check on my condition. When I think about it now, I realise that this happened as a result of the international attention on China, including the outside pressure coming from governments, NGOs and human rights groups. Moreover, the improvement was not exclusive to me; several other political prisoners who were there at the same time also benefitted.

The voice, support and activities of outside media and human rights groups are really helpful to those who are imprisoned or in detention in Tibet. When someone is involved in political issues, environmental preservation, human rights activities or the protection of animals, there is always a risk of arrest. This situation will not change whether the outside world remains silent or not. But once a person is in prison and their case is publicised, the Chinese government is answerable.

Now I have left Tibet I feel blessed and happy. I received a blessing from HH the Dalai Lama and a very warm welcome from groups and individuals in India. On the other hand, my body has arrived in a land of freedom but my heart feels greater anxiety because in Tibet I could at least involve myself in activities to revolt against injustice but here the feeling of helplessness surrounds me. This pains me. My biggest hope is that a day will come for me to safely return to Tibet. In the meantime, my future plan is to be a voice for Tibetans inside Tibet, to bring their aspirations and difficulties to the world stage and make sure that governments, NGOs and individuals hear it.

## The Beijing Olympics and human rights: a promise betrayed

“The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of man, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.”

*Fundamental Principles of Olympism, paragraph 2, Olympic Charter*

China’s bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing provoked immediate concerns over its human rights record. In the year of its bid, 2001, Amnesty International reported:

“Torture and ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners is widespread and systemic in China. Such abuses have been reported in the full range of state institutions, from police stations, detention centres, prisons, to administrative 're-education through labour' camps...”<sup>12</sup>

China’s Olympic bid committee were quick to suggest that hosting the games would lead to progress on human rights.

“We are confident that the Games coming to China [will] not only promote our economy but also enhance all social conditions, including education, health and human rights.”<sup>13</sup>

By allowing Beijing to host the Games you will help the development of human rights.”<sup>14</sup>

These assurances were accepted by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and Beijing was awarded the 2008 games on 13 July 2001. IOC president Jacques Rogge told the BBC’s Hardtalk programme, on 24 April 2002, “We are convinced that the Olympic Games will improve the human rights record in China.” He also said in 2001 that if evidence of serious violations of human rights standards were uncovered then the IOC would be forced to take “appropriate action”.

The reality was quite different. As Golog Jigme and Dhondup Wangchen highlighted in their film *Leaving Fear Behind*, human rights abuses in China – and specifically in Chinese-occupied Tibet – worsened in the run up to the 2008 Games.

“The situation is very dangerous. China was awarded the Games on the condition that the situation in China and Tibet would improve. They made promises to the whole world to grant freedoms, democracy and other basic human rights. They were only awarded the Games because they made those promises. However, after they were awarded the Games there has been no greater freedoms or democracy and repression is getting stronger and stronger.”<sup>15</sup>

The UN Committee Against Torture observed in its 2008 report on China:

“...the Committee remains deeply concerned about the continued allegations, corroborated by numerous Chinese legal sources, of routine and widespread use of torture and ill-treatment of suspects in police custody, especially to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings.”<sup>16</sup>

Five years on from the Beijing Games, Amnesty International reported on China:

“The use of torture to extract confessions remained widespread.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Torture - A Growing Scourge in China*, Amnesty International, 12 February 2001 (AI index ASA 17/004/2001)

<sup>13</sup> Wang Wei, head of the Chinese Olympic bid committee, quoted in the Daily Telegraph: “*Beijing Olympics; Human rights abuses getting worse*”, 29 July 2008

<sup>14</sup> Liu Jingmin, vice president of the Beijing 2008 bid committee, quoted in Agence France Presse interview, April 2001

<sup>15</sup> Participant in *Leaving Fear Behind*

<sup>16</sup> CAT/C/CHN/CO/4: Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture: China, 12 December 2008, p.3

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International Annual Report 2013: China: Justice system (<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/china/report-2013#section-29-8>)



China claims it is “continuously improving and perfecting its laws in order to prevent and suppress unlawful acts by individual judicial officials, such as the extraction of confessions under torture in the process of collecting evidence in a case”.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Article 54 of China’s amended Criminal Procedure Law, which came into force on 1 January 2013, states that “confessions by a suspect or a defendant obtained through torture and extortion and other illegal means ... should be excluded”.

However, there has always been a difference between policy and practice in the Chinese justice system. The complete lack of substance behind these recent legislative changes is exposed by the harrowing testimony of Golog Jigme - imprisoned without trial or legal representation, tortured and almost killed, simply for making a film presenting a different view to that in the Chinese Olympic propaganda.

Furthermore, as Golog Jigme himself points out, his case is far from unique. China continues to torture and kill its Tibetan critics with effective impunity. In a recent report on repression in Driru County, Tibet Watch documented how the body of Ngawang Jamyang, a senior and highly-respected monk from Tarmoe Monastery, was returned to his family in December 2013 following his earlier arrest in November 2013. In good health when arrested, the condition of Ngawang Jamyang's body apparently "made clear" that he had been tortured.<sup>19</sup>

The same report also documented the fatal torture of Kunchok Drakpa, who was arrested in December 2013. A villager from Driru township, he was an advocate of protecting the environment and had spoken out against Chinese mining. His body – which bore signs of severe beatings and torture – was returned to his family later the same month. They were threatened and told not to discuss his death with anyone.<sup>20</sup>

As China’s military and economic might have grown more powerful and its grip on the economies of the world has tightened, governments and political leaders have shown an increasing tendency to bow to Chinese pressure and ignore the plight of the Tibetan people. And yet, in the face of such fearsome Chinese state power and the widespread averting of eyes by other nations, peaceful monks, film-makers and refugees continue to keep hope alive by speaking their truth.

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<sup>18</sup> A/HRC/WG.6/17/CHN/1: National report submitted in accordance with paragraph 5 of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 16/21: China, Human Rights Council - Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, 5 August 2013, pp.11-12

<sup>19</sup> *Driru County: The New Hub Of Tibetan Resistance*, Tibet Watch, April 2014, p.12

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*