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<http://www.rsf.org/china-tibetan-filmmaker-freed-assistant-06-06-2014,46405.html>

Asia - China

Release

## Tibetan filmmaker freed, assistant describes detention and escape

6 June 2014

Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that **Dhondup Wangchen**, the Tibetan filmmaker who was arrested in 2008 for making the documentary *Leaving Fear Behind*, was released yesterday on completing a six-year jail sentence.

His release came three weeks after [Jigme Gyatso](#), the Tibetan monk who helped him make the documentary, arrived in Dharamsala, in northern India, after escaping from detention in Tibet.

*"We are extremely relieved by Wangchen's release and hope he will now get the necessary medical treatment that was cruelly lacking in prison,"* Reporters Without Borders said.

*"His state of health and his first statements after his release constitute new evidence of the mistreatment of prisoners of opinion. Gyatso also said he was tortured. We hope the authorities will not now place Wangchen under surveillance."*

Wangchen was convicted of subversion over "*Leaving Fear Behind*," a 25-minute documentary in which 108 Tibetan interviewees describe what it is like to live under Chinese occupation. Screened clandestinely in Beijing while the 2008 Olympic Games were getting under way, it received the Committee to Protect Journalists' International Press Freedom Prize in 2012.

Held in Xining prison (in Qinghai province), Wangchen received no medical treatment for his hepatitis B while detained. After his release, he told relatives: "I feel that everything inside me is in a sea of tears. I hope to recover my health soon (...) and I want to be reunited with my family."

He also voiced gratitude for all the [support](#) he received while in prison. His wife, Lhama Tso, now a political refugee in the United States, said: "Six years of injustice and painful counting the days ended today."

### Escape after torture

Gyatso, the monk who help Wangchen make the documentary, arrived in Dharamsala on 19 May after escaping from a detention centre in Gansu province and spending 20 months crossing Tibetan mountains and forests to reach northern India, where he is now safe.

He described his detention and escape at a press conference at Dharamsala's Tibet Hotel on 28 May. He said that he was tortured, beaten and left hanging from a ceiling for 10 hours, that several of his ribs were broken and that he sustained serious injuries to his knees and back.

Originally detained for seven months in 2008, he was arrested again and tortured in 2009, and was detained yet again in 2012, following which his relatives ceased to receive any news of him.

After his arrest in 2012, he decided to escape on being told that the prison authorities planned to kill him with fake medicine during a hospital visit. He succeeded in freeing himself from his chains and managed to walk out through the prison's main gate while it was open and the guards were not looking. In reaction to his escape, the Chinese authorities accused him of murder and put a price of 200,000 yuan (23,500 euros) on his head.

Gyatso was one of the [100 "information heroes"](#) that Reporters Without Borders profiled this year for World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

These accounts of torture give the lie to the Chinese government's claims that it has banned all use of torture in its detentions centres and works camps. Reports by Amnesty International and Christian Action for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT) confirm that the ban on torture is being ignored.

An Amnesty International report issued last month said China and North Korea were among the Asia-Pacific region's "worse culprits." China signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in October 1998 but has yet to ratify it.

China is ranked 175th out of 180 countries in the 2014 Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#).

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