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Tibet: Mass arrest and disappearances of Tibetan monks require urgent international intervention

Paris, 27 May 2011. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) calls for urgent intervention by the United Nations Working Group on Involuntary or Enforced Disappearances into mass arrests and disappearances of ethnic Tibetans following the self-immolation of Phuntsog, a 20-year-old monk on March 16, 2011 in Ngaba in Sichuan province. The incident and the subsequent crackdown by the Chinese authorities are documented in a new report released yesterday by the International Campaign for Tibet (ICT), an FIDH's member organization.

The repression by Chinese authorities continues in the Ngaba area, following the removal by Chinese troops of more than 300 monks from Kirti monastery on April 20-21, and the deaths of two elderly Tibetans trying to protect them. While some individuals detained following the March 16th events have been released, the whereabouts of others cannot be independently verified but are widely believed to still be in detention. The Chinese government has implemented a blanket information blackout in the area that makes it difficult to obtain information about the status or condition of the Tibetans still detained.

According to two monks from Kirti monastery who are now living in India, Losang Khedrup, a 39 year old monk, was arrested on May 6th. The reason for his arrest and his place of detention remain unknown. On May 12th, according to the same sources, Losang Choepel, 19, was arrested at the monastery and taken into detention. His current whereabouts and the reasons for his arrest are also unknown, although exiled monks have said his detention may be due to some answers he gave during 'patriotic education' sessions inside the monastery.

The ICT has learned from other Tibetans in exile that the wife and daughter of one detainee, 60-year old Gerik, were subject to intimidation and beatings after he was taken into custody. According to these sources, Gerik and nine other monks are being accused of involvement with the self-immolation of Phuntsog and he may have been subjected to serious torture while in detention. This is the third time that Gerik has been detained; he was detained on suspicion of distributing leaflets and held for a month in 1998, and again in 2008, under suspicion of speaking about the situation in Tibet.

The Kirti monastery is reportedly now under heavy surveillance and blockaded by armed soldiers and police, who also force monks in the monastery to go through so-called 'Patriotic Religion' re-education sessions. Monks are also reportedly subjected to interrogations and those who did not provide adequate answers are thought to be arrested.

The names of monks not present at the monastery have been made public, with an announcement that they are not permitted to return. The doors of unoccupied cells have been sealed with notices reading 'Not to be opened', and the former occupants are not permitted to enter. The on-going reeducation campaign was supposed to last for three

months but it is repeatedly announced that unless the present behavior of the monks improves, this period will be lengthened.

"The Chinese authorities must cease all forms of arbitrary and illegal arrests and detention of Tibetans and lift the blockade of information in the Ngaba area," said Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH president. "The UN Working Group on Involuntary or Enforced Disappearances should intervene urgently and the Chinese authorities must fully cooperate and respond to its queries," added Ms Belhassen.

Click here to read ICT report. An updated list of Tibetans detained following the March 16 self-immolation incident is available here.

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