



BOTH IMAGES: LARRY STANLEY (WWW.MONTANA-PHOTOGRAPHER.COM)

# Stop the Torture in Tibet

**Bangri Rinpoche** and **Nyima Choedron**, a couple who founded and ran the Gyatso Children's Home in Lhasa, are currently serving sentences in prison for political offences including "splittism" and "endangering state security".

Bangri Rinpoche (also known as Jigme Tenzin Rinpoche) and his partner Nyima Choedron, a 37 year old former nun, were initially arrested in August 1999. In September 2000 the Lhasa Intermediate People's Court sentenced Nyima to 10 years and her husband to 15 years' imprisonment. Both were transferred to Drapchi Prison. In 2002 Nyima received a sentence reduction of 18 months for expressing "repentance" and in 2003 she received a further one-year reduction (reason unknown). She is now due for release in February 2007. There has been no news of any reductions for Bangri Rinpoche who, if serves his full sentence, will not be released until 2014.

The Chinese authorities confirmed, during a session of human rights dialogue with a Western government in 2003, that Nyima Choedron was tried and convicted on 26 September 2000 for "splitting the state" and that there was concern for her poor eyesight. These confirmations verified earlier reports that the couple had been convicted for political offences, which included "endangering state security". However, there has been no specific confirmation of the charges against Rinpoche. One report indicated that he sustained injuries from beatings at the time of his initial detention.

Though the exact circumstances leading to their arrests in 1999 remain unclear, there has been much speculation both inside and outside Tibet. Initial reports suggested a connection with Tashi Tsering, who staged a protest in Lhasa's Potala Square during the National Minority Games by trying to lower the Chinese flag and attempting to blow himself up. (Tashi later died in prison following severe maltreatment.) The couple were arrested shortly afterwards and it has been suggested that Tashi was involved in planning a new building at the Children's Home.

Free Tibet Campaign's *Stop the Torture in Tibet* initiative will highlight persistent torture and maltreatment in Tibet's prisons, detention centres and labour camps. Since 2002 China has released at least 14 political prisoners early as a result of pressure from governments and individuals worldwide, thereby demonstrating sensitivity to international criticism of its human rights record. By highlighting individual political prisoners who have experienced torture, we aim to both contribute to their early release from prison and to bring to an end the practice of torture in Tibet.

## Bangri Rinpoche and Nyima Choedron

Further speculation revolved around issues such as a quarrel with a construction company, financial irregularities and influential opponents to Rinpoche and Gyatso Children's Home, which had received funding from overseas. None of this speculation has been confirmed.

At least five other staff members of the home were also detained in August 1999. One of the staff, Gelek Nyima, apparently served a 're-education through labour' sentence. It is unclear whether all the members of staff have been released.

The Gyatso Children's Home was closed following the arrests in 1999. Some of the children were interrogated by police before being sent back to the areas where they had come from. The rest took to the streets of Lhasa to beg for food.

Former political prisoner Ngawang Sangdrol recalled seeing Nyima Choedron in Drapchi Prison, referring to her as an educated person who could speak English. Ngawang Sangdrol said, "Despite the pain

<b>Names:</b>	Bangri Rinpoche (also known as Jigme Tenzin Rinpoche) and Nyima Choedron
<b>Ages:</b>	Bangri Rinpoche unknown Nyima Choedron approx 37 yrs
<b>From:</b>	Lhasa
<b>Arrested:</b>	August 1999
<b>Reason:</b>	"Endangering state security" and "splittism" (charges not confirmed for Rinpoche)
<b>Sentences:</b>	Bangri Rinpoche 15 yrs Nyima Choedron 10 yrs (reduced to 7½ yrs)
<b>Expected Release:</b>	Bangri Rinpoche August 2014 Nyima Choedron 26 February 2007
<b>Prison:</b>	Drapchi Prison

Nyima feels on account of her poor eyesight, she is forced to knit for long hours and meet her work quota." She also reported that Nyima Choedron was held in solitary confinement during her first year in Drapchi Prison.

(Sources: *Tibet Information Network*, *Kate Saunders*.)



### ActionActionActionActionAction

Write to the authorities below requesting:

- The immediate release of Bangri Rinpoche and Nyima Choedron.
- That Nyima Choedron receives urgent medical attention and that her workload is reduced because of her poor eyesight.
- A commitment that the torture and maltreatment of all prisoners arrested for "counter-revolutionary" offences or "endangering state security" in Tibet will cease. (China does not recognise the expression "political prisoners".)
- An independent investigation into prison conditions in Drapchi and into reports that prisoners have been tortured in detention, with the investigation's findings to be made public.

#### Addresses

1. *Governor of Drapchi Prison*

**Name:** Jianyuzhuang  
**Address:** Xizang Zizhiqu Di Yi Jianyu Lasashi 850003  
People's Republic of China  
**Salutation:** Dear Governor

2. *Minister of Justice*

**Name:** Zhang Fusen Buzhang  
**Address:** Sifabu (Ministry of Justice) 10 Chaoyangmen Nandajie Chaoyang Qu Beijingshi 100020  
People's Republic of China  
**Email:** minister@legalinfo.gov.cn  
**Fax:** + 86 10 6520 5236 or +86 10 6529 2345 (c/o Ministry of Communications)  
**Salutation:** Dear Minister