



2nd GENEVA SUMMIT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRACY

March 8-9, 2010

Testimony of Ms. Phuntsog Nyidron SANASHIGA, former Tibetan political prisoner and recipient of Reebok Human Rights Award in 1995

Session: Rising Powers, Rising Rights Compliance? Case Study of China

My name is Phuntsok Nyidron. I was born in Phenpo, a small village near Lhasa, the capital of Tibet to an ordinary peasant family in 1970. I didn't have the opportunity to go to school as I belonged to a family blacklisted by the Chinese authority during Cultural Revolution of 1966 - 76. With consent of my parents, I enrolled in Neo-Chung Ri Nunnery at the age of 17.

I am happy and honoured to be here today before this global gathering to testify about the ordeal of 15 years of imprisonment I endured under Chinese communist regime in occupied Tibet. In fact my formal sentenced was 17 years.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me express my sincere appreciation to the organizers for giving me this opportunity and extend my solidarity with all political prisoners around the globe. Tibet is still under Chinese communist occupation since 1959.

You may all be wondering how I left Tibet when the Chinese government imposes restriction on dissidents from travelling abroad. Due to support from international communities and governments, on 15 March 2006 the Chinese government allowed me to leave for the United States on medical grounds. I am grateful to the Government of the United States and international communities. I received initial medical treatment in the U.S. for several months and then moved to Switzerland where I was granted political asylum.

Ladies and gentlemen, during the Tibetan New Year in 1989 I together with eight fellow nuns in Lhasa Bakor shouted and distributed leaflets saying "Long live Dalai Lama", "Free Tibet" and "Chinese get out of Tibet". Some elderly Tibetan women praying in Bakor advised us to leave the place, we just escaped from arrest by the Chinese police. I went again with my fellow nun to Lhasa, although the capital was under martial law, to buy construction materials for our nunnery which was under renovation. In Lhasa, we noticed that Tibetan people were burning incense to express their jubilation on the eve of the Nobel Peace Prize award being conferred to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We were extremely delighted to hear this news. On our return to the nunnery we were met half way by our fellow nuns. After sharing this information they were all overjoyed and



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unanimously decided to demonstrate their joy as exhibited by the Tibetan people in Lhasa. On the next day, I together with five nuns left for Lhasa to demonstrate. Since the Chinese police will notice if people entered Bakor in a group, we formed three groups and decided to meet at a Chinese photo shop inside Bakor. We learnt that Chinese police in civil dress had been following us. In order to avoid arrest before protesting, without waiting one group, four of us started shouting “Long Live Dalai Lama” and “Free Tibet”. Within a few minutes, the Peoples Armed Police and the Local Security Police came and arrested us. Another two nuns arrived after and also shouted the same slogans. They were also arrested by the PAP and the Local Security Police. Coincidentally we all met in the Gutsa Prison.

Two prison guards took us individually for interrogation. They asked - who sent you and handover the instigators belonging to the “Dalai clique”. I replied that I acted myself and no one instigated me. I had never met Dalai Lama in my life. The guard again posed the question that my teacher might be behind it. I said that teacher will not misguide his disciples. Then the guard asked who the ring leader was? I took responsibility and thus was given a sentence of 9 years imprisonment.

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to share with you a typical day of beatings and torture in prison. My right arm was forced over my right shoulder and handcuffed to left arm behind my back. A guard then stood on his table and pulled me up several times by holding the handcuffs. After being untied I had no sense of feeling in my hands. At present I still can't hold heavy objects. Besides, my fingers were poked by a shoe sewing machine needle; electric batons were put in my mouth and burning cigarettes stubbed out on my face. Worse they twisted live electric wires on my fingers which made my whole body shake like an epileptic and then I fell unconscious. Guards then threw cold water on face to awaken me. When I regained consciousness I felt nothing but was foaming in my mouth. On that day not a drop of water or food was given.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 1992 we shouted the whole night to demand release of three prison inmates who were put into solitary confinement. When the other prison inmates saw each prisoner being beaten by four Peoples Armed Police, they screamed through windows. The PAP then stopped beating us. A nun's kidney was damaged and another one had her leg broken.

In 1993 along with 13 other political prisoners we secretly recorded songs in the prison that were in praise of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the situation of political prisoners.



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For this recording my sentence was extended by another eight years making my total sentence of 17 years. Through these songs, we also wanted to communicate to our families that our spirits had not been broken. In prison, medical treatment was routinely denied to all political prisoners. For instance, one of my fellow prisoner died in 1995 when the Chinese authorities failed to provide immediate medical care.

The situation became physically and mentally intolerable for us because of the beatings and military drill that the Peoples Armed Police made us performed, we were in complete desperation and then went on hunger strike to end this practice. After four and half days, we stopped the hunger strike as PAP acceded to our demand. However, they failed to keep their promises and restarted beatings after several days.

Ladies and gentlemen, in May 1998 five nuns died from beatings and torture in Drapchi prison. The Chinese authorities have so far failed to provide a full account of how the five nuns died.

We were kept in Drapchi prison where 12 prisoners live in one single room eating, sleeping and sharing one small toilet. Given size of the toilet and number of users, it quickly blocked and no alternative toilet was available unless authority clears it up. Those who needed to go to toilet were forced to keep which was considered worse and harder than police beating. In prison everyone is given one small stool where one has to sit during day time and not permitted to use sleeping bed for rest. My buttock got wounded because of sitting on this stool. I still bear the scars.

Ladies and gentlemen, everyday we were forced to weave woollen sweaters either one small roll of thin wool thread or one big roll of wool thread sitting on this small wooden stool. Family visits were cancelled for anyone who failed to weave their quota. Chinese authorities considers political prisoner as serious criminal. Chinese authority is not giving rights to political prisoner as guaranteed in laws. For example, general prisoners have three family members whereas political prisoner can meet one family member in a month. Sometime authority cancelled monthly meeting of political prisoner without giving reason. Political prisoners are denied of learning certain training skills.

When I came out of Tibet, I heard that Chinese authorities claimed to have provided many rights to prisoners. Prison Law of China promulgated in 1994 “stipulates specifically that prisoners have the right of immunity from corporal punishment and abuses, the right of appeal, the right of communication, right of meeting visiting family



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members and relatives, right to education, . . . , and right to receive medical treatment; they enjoy equal rights with other citizens upon their release after completing their sentence term.”

In this regard, I as former political prisoner can say that Tibetan political prisoners do not enjoy any of the above rights even today. As far as enjoying equal rights after release is concerned, I was not even allowed to return to my nunnery to pursue my religious vocation. In fact, former political prisoners have to hide their background to seek employment or other opportunities in the society.

Ladies and gentlemen, in February 2004, I was suddenly released from prison but remained under constant surveillance with two policemen posted at my home. While at home, the Chinese authorities took me to meet foreign delegations, including the Chairperson of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. However, at the time of these meetings, I had no clear knowledge of who these people were or about their work. I only understood the significance of these visits to me only after coming to the United States.

With regard to my health condition, I am regularly taking painkiller medicine for headache, kidney, knee and hands because of severe torture. Even doctor can not diagnose all my health problems. In particular, I go into depression and can't support hearing shocking news about arrest, detention and torture. I never feel happy for a single day even though I live in free and democratic country. I always tend to think of the situation of my fellow prison inmates and their sufferings.

After all these years in prison, I owe my freedom firstly to the grace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and also to those governments, parliaments, NGOs and UN human rights bodies that have shown concern for the Tibetan political prisoners by putting pressure on the Chinese government. I remain grateful to all of them. Finally given the appalling human rights situation inside Tibet, I earnestly urge you to continue your support for the just cause of Tibetan peoples.

I thank you once again.