

Written Statement of Venerable Golog Jigme
Congressional–Executive Commission on China Hearing
“China’s Pervasive Use of Torture”

April 14, 2016

I would like to first thank the CECC, particularly Chairman Smith and Co-Chairman Rubio, for holding this important hearing today, and for inviting me to participate. As a survivor of torture inflicted by Chinese public security officers, and now as a human rights advocate living in exile in Switzerland, I believe that it is essential for the U.S. and other governments, as well as the UN and other entities, to understand what actually happens inside Chinese detention facilities from someone who has experienced it, and to understand the human rights situation in Tibet today. Not only behind bars, but beyond the prison walls, my Tibetan brothers and sisters are suffering. I urge the CECC and the U.S. Congress to continue to pay attention to the situation inside Tibet. For the future of Tibet, it is very important to break the “lockdown” that the Chinese government has imposed around the Tibetan people. As human beings, we Tibetans have the right to peacefully express our views without fear of being arrested or tortured. We have the right to freedom of movement and to freedom of religion, and China should be held accountable for denying us these basic freedoms, and subjecting us to arbitrary detention and torture when we try to exercise these basic human rights. It is my profound hope that the CECC and Congress will continue to pay attention to the suffering of Tibetans.

My Story (in brief)

My name is Golog Jigme, and I am also known as Jigme Gyatso. I was born into a Tibetan nomadic family in eastern Tibet, and when I was a teenager joined the Labrang Monastery in Kanlho, Amdo (Gansu province). I was involved in various social causes while at Labrang, including teaching children about Tibetan culture and promoting the Tibetan language, and I was engaged in social welfare work, such as relief efforts following the Yushu earthquake in 2010.

In 2008, I worked with the filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen to interview a wide range of Tibetans — including nomads, elders, monks and people in remote areas — about their thoughts and feelings before the Beijing Olympics, which became the documentary film “Leaving Fear Behind.” We wanted the world outside Tibet to understand the reality of what was happening in Tibet; and for people to hear the voices of Tibetans themselves, discussing their feelings and experiences.

As a result of this work, Dhondup Wangchen was imprisoned for six years. I was detained three times during the period from 2008 to 2012. While in Chinese custody for seven months in 2008, I was severely tortured. Chinese officials accused me of shooting the film “Leaving Fear Behind” and of being a member of the Tibetan Youth Congress, and they also accused me of not denouncing His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In April 2009, I was detained again, and accused of disclosing State secrets. I was held for several months, and was subjected to severe beatings, but not tortured brutally like during my first detention in 2008.

In September 2012, I was detained yet again but managed to escape from the detention facility. Chinese security officers had accused me of being the main instigator of the self-immolations protest across Tibet, among other baseless allegations. After my escape from detention, I went into hiding for more than a year and a half before I escaped to India, in May 2014. I arrived in Switzerland in January 2015, where I have been granted political asylum.

I was never formally arrested. I was given two separate detention warrants (*juliuzheng*), but only after I had been released. During my three detentions, I was never given any document setting forth formal charges against me. I was never given a trial. Neither my monastery nor my family was informed of my whereabouts; I was held incommunicado. I had no access to a lawyer. I never received any medical treatment.

Here I will describe in brief the torture I suffered at the hands of Chinese security officers. If I were to describe everything, it would take a very long time, so I will summarize. At the outset, I would like to emphasize that I am walking proof of Chinese government torture. Today, I still have severe back pain, scars on my wrists and ankles, and other injuries from the torture that still cause pain in my knees, ribs, and eyes. The first incarceration, in 2008, was the most difficult for me because I was brutally tortured. For one month and 22 days I was tortured continuously. I was forced to sit in the “tiger chair” (also known as the “iron chair”) day and night. This was the worst form of torture I experienced during my three detentions. My arms were handcuffed in front of me on a small metal table, and my legs were bent beneath the seat and strapped to the chair with iron cuffs. My joints suffered horribly and at one point my feet became so swollen that all my toenails fell off. I still have scars on my wrists and ankles from when I was turned backwards in the chair and suspended from the ceiling, for hours at a time. I was deprived of sleep and given very little to eat. The pain of thirst was the second worst torture; I was given only a very small amount of water, and felt unbearably thirsty because of blood loss from my body. During the first and second detentions, I was subjected to severe beatings and kicking; some of my ribs were broken and my knee joints were dislocated.

During the third detention in 2012, Chinese security officers told me I would be transferred to Lanzhou City Military Hospital for a medical exam to see if I had any diseases, and that if they

found something I would be given “necessary injections.” I protested the transfer, but they were insistent. It became clear to me that their plan was to kill me in the hospital by injecting me with some kind of drug that would kill me. I was fortunate that I was able to escape before they moved me to the hospital. While I was in hiding, I learned that the Chinese government had issued a warrant for my arrest accusing me of murder, and offered a large sum of money to anyone who could provide information about my whereabouts. I am deeply grateful to the people who risked so much in order to arrange things and help me get out of the country. My safe escape was a collective effort, and the people who gave so much are an ongoing source of inspiration for me.

UN Committee against Torture’s Review of China’s Compliance with the Convention against Torture (November 2015)

As a survivor of torture at the hands of Chinese security officials, I was grateful to have been able to attend the UN Committee against Torture’s review of China in Geneva this past November. But I was shocked that the Chinese government told such lies at the UN. I was glad to be able to tell the Committee my story—the true story of China’s torture record. I was very happy to see the Committee ask tough questions of the Chinese delegation. Moreover, I felt the strength and commitment of the Committee to stand by the truth. It was heartening to watch the Committee hold the Chinese government accountable for torture, arbitrary detention and other human rights abuses in Tibet and China.

It is absurd for Chinese officials to say that torture doesn’t exist in China. I was detained three times and tortured numerous times by Chinese authorities. I was beaten with wooden batons and electronic devices and had my face, eyes and lips burned when I was tied to a hot stove. I was shackled with my hands behind my back and hung from a pipe on the ceiling and I was also physically assaulted by a group of five Chinese officials who trampled all over my body.

Unbelievably, when asked by the Committee about the “tiger chair” used during police interrogations, a Chinese government official said the chair was for the protection and safety of the detainees. I spent days and nights in such a chair; it was horrific torture.

The Chinese delegation also claimed that there were no political prisoners in China. This is absurd. The CECC Political Prisoner Database has over 640 records of Tibetan political prisoners; some NGOs have a much higher number. Regardless, it is laughable for the Chinese government to say that political prisoners do not exist in Tibet and China. Not only were Dhondup Wangchen and I political prisoners, but Shokjang, a popular blogger and my good friend, was recently sentenced to three years in prison for “inciting splittism” – based on nothing other than the peaceful expression of his own views on ethnic policy and other issues of concern

to Tibetans. We are just a few examples of many other political prisoners who have come before us, and of those who are currently serving time in prison or detention facilities, or who have been disappeared, for simply exercising their basic human rights of freedom of expression, religion, movement, among other rights.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the U.S. and the international community for the attention given to my case during my detentions in Tibet. The support and pressure of governments, outside media, the UN and human rights groups do make a difference to those imprisoned or otherwise detained in Tibet.

Recommendations

- I urge the U.S. Congress and the Administration to challenge China's oppressive policies in Tibet and to continue to pay attention to the suffering of the Tibetan people.
- The U.S. government should press China to invite the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture for a follow-up visit to the last one conducted by the Special Rapporteur on Torture, which was over 10 years ago. Unimpeded access to prisons and prisoners in Tibet should be part of the terms of the visit.
- I urge the U.S. government to continue raising the case of Dhondup Wangchen with Chinese officials, and ask that he be allowed to travel internationally in order to be able to reunite with his wife and three children, who now live in the U.S.
- Urge China to release all Tibetans who have been detained or imprisoned for peaceful, nonviolent views and opinions such as Shokjang, the young Tibetan blogger sentenced to three years in prison in February 2016.
- I fully support the CECC's recommendation to Congress and the Administration to press China to respect the right of freedom of movement of Tibetans domestically, and to allow greater access to foreign diplomats, journalists, NGOs and others to the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan autonomous areas, as well as the other recommendations on Tibet contained in the CECC's 2015 Annual Report.