

Beat: Politics

Tibetan nun dies after setting self on fire in anti-China protest

-, 21.06.2013, 04:17 Time

USPA News - A Tibetan nun died last week after she set herself on fire to protest against Chinese rule in Tibet, the Tibetan government-in-exile said on Thursday, raising the number of people who have set themselves on fire in similar protests since to nearly 120. The incident happened at around 5 p.m. local time on June 11 at a religious gathering outside a monastery in Dawu County, which is located in eastern Tibet in western China's Sichuan province. She was taken to a hospital in Kangding where she succumbed to her burn injuries at 8 p.m. on June 14. Free Tibet, a group campaigning for an end to the 'Chinese occupation' of Tibet, said 31-year-old Wangchen Dolma had set herself on fire outside Nyatso monastery, which is currently hosting a major Tibetan Buddhist gathering.

Around 3,000 monks from 60 monasteries are attending the festival, which was prevented from taking place last year by Chinese authorities. The woman's body was cremated soon after she died but her family was not allowed to receive the ashes, according to the Central Tibetan Administration. Instead, the family was placed under house arrest and ordered not to discuss Dolma's death or protest with others. The Tibetan government-in-exile said Chinese authorities imposed severe restrictions on phone and internet lines in the area, causing news of the woman's death to be delayed by several days. It was not immediately clear if the phone and internet restrictions were still in place on Thursday. Free Tibet director Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren, speaking on June 12 after the self-immolation attempt, said restrictions on religious practice by the Chinese government are among the "deepest grievances" of the Tibetan people. "The majority of those who have set themselves alight in Tibet are actually lay people but it is not uncommon for them to stage their protests near monasteries," he said. Byrne-Rosengren added: "Five of those who have set themselves alight this year have been monks or nuns. While Chinese authorities have permitted the gathering at Nyatso monastery this year, Tibet's religious heritage has been decimated by the Chinese occupation and what remains is barely tolerated by the regime." Since March 2011, a total of now 119 Tibetans have set themselves on fire as part of protests taking place in Tibet, leading to the arrests of hundreds of Tibetans by Chinese security forces. As a result of the unrest, Chinese authorities have stepped up security in the region, but the self-immolations have continued. The first incident happened on March 16, 2011, when 21-year-old Phuntsog from Kirti Monastery set himself on fire. It happened on the third anniversary of protests in Ngaba during which at least 13 people were shot dead by Chinese security forces. Phuntsog later died of his injuries.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1147/tibetan-nun-dies-after-setting-self-on-fire-in-anti-china-protest.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619