



Tibet Justice Center



BRIEFING ON THE CURRENT SITUATION IN DEGE COUNTY, EASTERN TIBET | 5 APRIL 2024

In late February 2024, Chinese police beat and arrested hundreds of residents of Dege County, including monks from local monasteries, who have been protesting¹ the construction of a large hydropower dam on the Drichu River² in Kardze (Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, eastern Tibet. Although most detainees were released after a month, several community leaders remain in prison or otherwise unaccounted for.

If it goes ahead, the Kamtok (Ch: Gangtuo) hydropower station would see several ancient and culturally important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries destroyed, and a number of entire villages submerged, displacing thousands of Tibetans whose livelihoods have flourished alongside the river for many generations.

Dege residents represent hundreds of thousands of Tibetans whose lives are being uprooted and their lands transformed to achieve China’s ambitious goal to build a hydropower network across Tibet to power eastern China. Despite the inevitable military crackdown, information blackout, arbitrary and extralegal detention, and collective punishment that will follow, Dege residents are raising the alarm to alert the international community to what is at stake in their historic home – the loss of Buddhist cultural sites, connection to land and community, the erasure of their place in Tibet, and the absence of any representation or avenues for addressing legitimate concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

We urge governments and China-based diplomats to carry out the following actions:

1. Urgently seek information from Chinese authorities about events in Dege since 14 February and press China to:
 - a. recognise and uphold the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association to ensure that Tibetans and others can engage in peaceful activities and raise concerns and criticisms, including government relocation and rehousing policies and practices;
 - b. Protect the right to free, prior, and informed consent, right to a cultural life, and the right to enjoy effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy;
2. Urgently issue public statements expressing concern at the arrests and the ongoing situation and share concerns and information on all available channels;
3. Immediately request meaningful and unfettered access to Dege County to assess the current situation, including requesting visits to detention facilities and affected monasteries.

¹ 'China: Free Detained Tibetan Demonstrators', *Human Rights Watch*, February 2024

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/28/china-free-detained-tibetan-demonstrators>

² The area affected by the proposed dam is the Drichu River, also known as the upper Yangtse River in Chinese. This river, the longest in Asia, originates in Tibet.

This briefing contains the following information:

I. BACKGROUND TO THE HYDROPOWER DAM AND PROTESTS

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOCATION

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IV. HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

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B) LACK OF FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSULTATION AND CONSENT

C) THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

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V. RECOMMENDATIONS

I. BACKGROUND TO THE HYDROPOWER DAM AND PROTESTS

Protests against the Kamtok hydropower dam first erupted in 2012 when the 2,240-megawatt dam was approved by China's National Development and Reform Commission.

In October 2012, residents issued an appeal against the forced relocations that would result from the dam's construction, stating the government had deceptively promised it would not move forward with the project unless more than 80 percent of locals agreed.³ There is no evidence this consent was ever given, and construction of the hydropower station began in 2018, with local sources noting that work was often carried out at night to draw less attention.

The Kamtok hydropower dam is one of eight cascading dams planned for the Driчу River, identified as one of China's top three hydropower bases. Kamtok hydropower station is also one of hundreds of large hydroelectric dams currently planned, under development, or under construction across the Tibetan plateau. Hydropower dams in Tibet have been increasingly promoted by the Chinese government to meet rising energy demand, expand renewable energy sources, and take advantage of recent advances in dam-building technologies. The long-term goal is to turn Tibet into an energy exporter, initially powering eastern China under the East-to-West Power transmission project⁴, and later neighbouring countries through a global renewable energy grid.

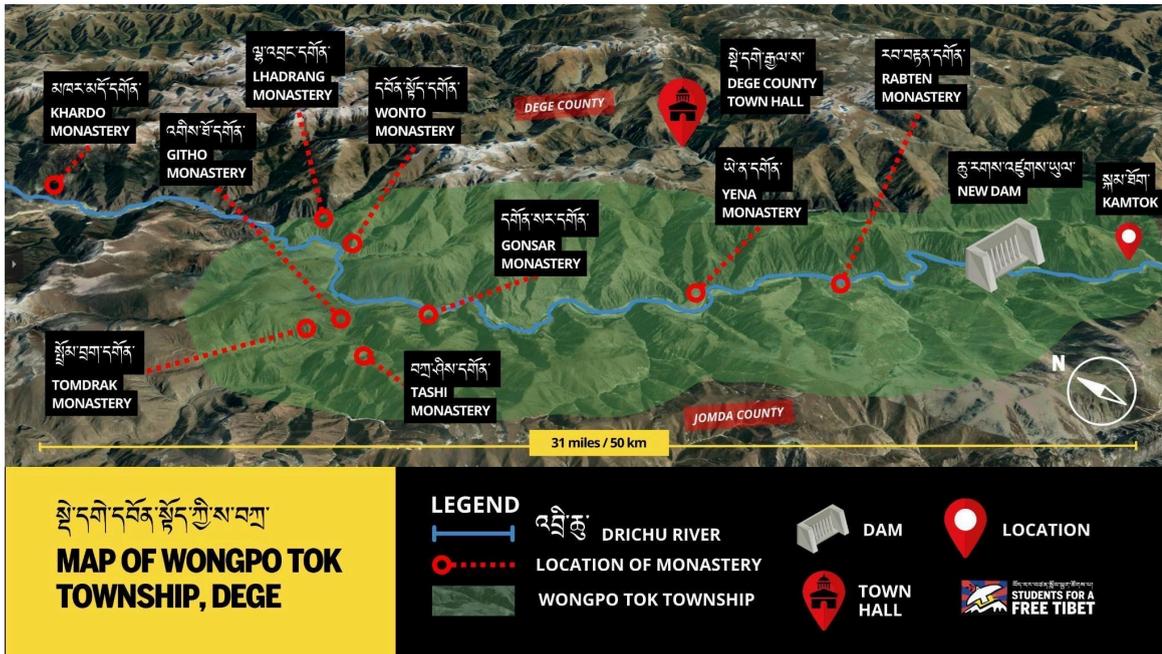
Hydropower dams come with serious risks for the local environment and residents. Hydropower dams are susceptible to and increase the risk of earthquakes, landslides and flash floods, especially in these active seismic regions. While hydropower is renewable, dams are not environmentally friendly. They increase the human footprint in remote, fragile and biodiverse ecosystems, and also interrupt aquatic life, soil and nutrient flows downstream. Finally, dams cause the resettlement of residents, who are often forced to relocate without consultation, and provided with inadequate compensation or access to a fair process for seeking remedy to damages incurred. An International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) analysis of over 200 hydropower dams in Tibet has found over 40 dams under construction or planned that have relocation orders ranging from 122⁵ residents

³ 'Tibetans' opposition to the call to build hydropower stations, and "Water from Paomaquan to Tibet—On the Great Development of Hydropower in Tibet"', *Invisible Tibet*, 29 October 2012 woeser.middle-way.net/2012/10/blog-post_29.html

⁴ '西藏未来三年向11省市送电61亿千瓦时' (Ch: 'Tibet will send 6.1 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity to 11 provinces and cities in the next three years'), 新华网 (Ch: Xinhua net), 20 November 2020, http://m.xinhuanet.com/2020-11/20/c_1126766162.htm.

⁵ '西藏玉曲河扎拉水电站迁移人口安置独立评估招标公告' (Ch: Tender announcement for the Independent Assessment of Resettlement of the Resettled Population at the Yuqu River Zala Hydropower Station in Tibet'), 西藏自治区住房和城乡建设厅 (Ch: Department of Housing and Urban-rural Development of the Tibet Autonomous Region), http://zjt.xizang.gov.cn/xwzx/zbgg/202109/t20210908_259884.html.

to 10,000⁶ residents. This is a conservative figure, as Qinghai province alone announced in 2009 that it will relocate 120,000 residents in the upper reaches of the Yellow River by 2030.⁷



II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LOCATION

The historical and cultural area of Dege has a special history and it is known to be the heart of Kham, eastern Tibet⁸. Dege was once a Kingdom in its own right and is a cradle of arts and culture. The most famous cultural landmark is the Dege Printing Press built in the 18th century, well known for printing the Dege edition of the Kangyur text - an authoritative collection of Buddha’s teachings in Tibetan that is widely used. The printing press has also been designated a Protected Heritage Site in China.

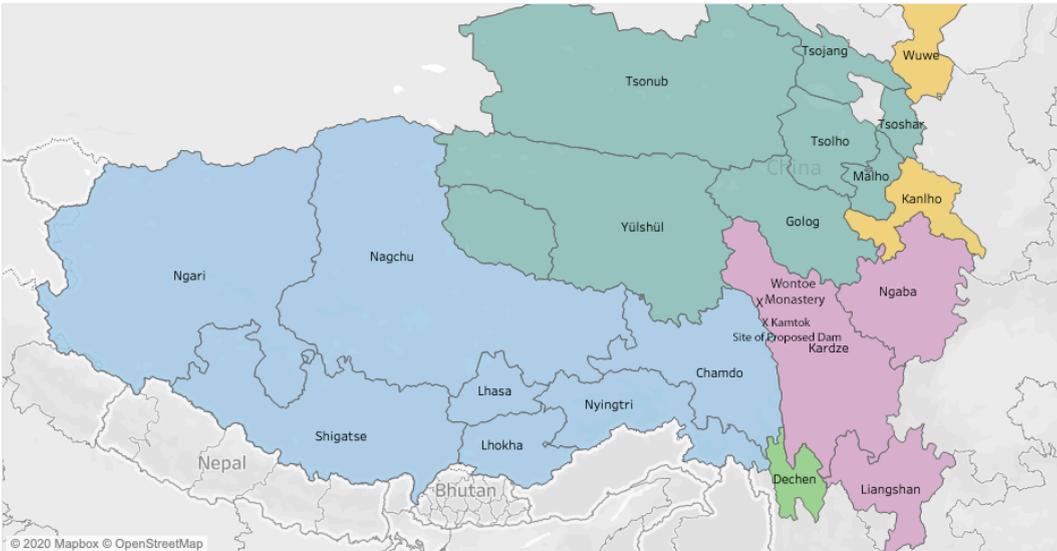
Today Dege is a divided area, split by Chinese-imposed administrative boundaries across provinces, prefectures and counties (see map below). Dege straddles Chamdo (Ch: Changdu) in the Tibet Autonomous Region and Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture which is part of today’s Sichuan Province. The areas affected by the construction of this dam are in Jomda (Ch: Jiangda) County in Chamdo on the TAR side and Dege County on the Kardze, Sichuan side.

⁶ Long Pan (formerly known as Lao Huxia) hydropower dam in Dechen Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan plans to relocate about 10,000 residents. Similarly Yangqu hydropower dam in Qinghai will relocate 9,238 residents. See ‘库区移民冲刺全面小康——青海大中型水利水电工程搬迁群众生活状况调查’, (‘Immigrants in the reservoir area strive to achieve a comprehensive well-off society—A survey on the living conditions of people relocated to large and medium-sized water conservancy and hydropower projects in Qinghai’), <https://kknews.cc/other/8pbjr9e.html>, 8 April 2019.

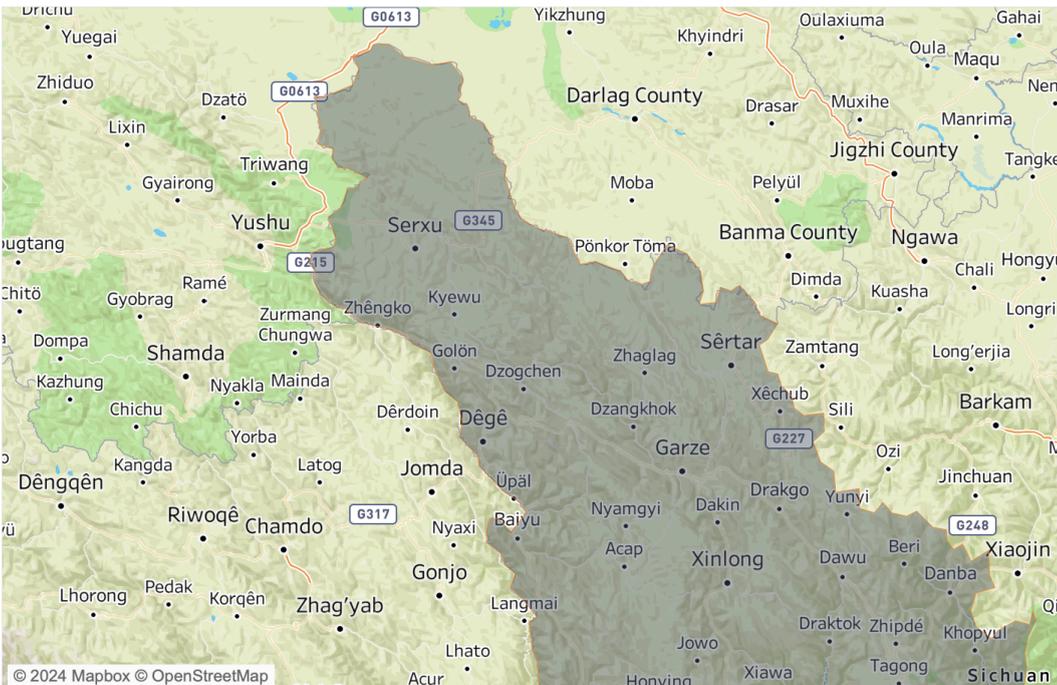
⁷ ‘黄河上游规划建设水电站23座 水库移民将达12万左右’ (Ch.: ‘23 hydropower stations are planned to be built in the upper reaches of the Yellow River, and about 120,000 people will be immigrated to reservoirs’), 重庆市发展和改革委员会 (Ch: Chongqing Municipal Development and Reform Commission), https://fzggw.cq.gov.cn/zwx/bmdt/202002/t20200212_5175017_wap.html.

⁸ ‘Tibet’ refers to the three Tibetan provinces of Amdo, Kham and U-Tsang - not just TAR but all the divided areas that makeup TAR, and Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures within Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. The total Tibetan population in all these provinces as per the Chinese population consensus in 2010 is 6.2 million. According to updated figures from the 2020 census, there are 3,6 million people living in the TAR.

Tibet in Prefectures



Kardze Prefecture (Sichuan)



Notably, the Dege resistance to the Kamtok hydropower dam has been especially vigorous because the dam will submerge historic monasteries that survived the violent destruction of the cultural revolution. Of particular concern is Wontoe (Ch: Wangdui) Monastery⁹, which houses sacred Buddhist murals that date back to the 17th century or earlier. Tsering Woesser, the prominent Tibetan writer and poet has written about the urgent need to protect these monasteries and murals, noting:

[...] Wontoe and Yena Monasteries belong to the Sakya sect of Tibetan Buddhism, and they have a long history and survived the “Cultural Revolution.” A group of murals from the 14th to 15th centuries are considered “one

⁹ History of Wontoe Monastery:
<https://highpeakspureearth.com/the-history-of-wontoe-monastery-in-the-encyclopedia-of-monasteries-and-temples-in-kham/>

of the most important Tibetan Buddhist murals discovered locally so far, and have high reference value for the study of Tibetan painting art.”



“The Sacred Murals of Wontoe Monastery in Dege”

While Dege appears to be a special case of resistance, it is not an isolated case. As noted above, over a hundred thousand residents across Tibet will be forcibly relocated under grand plans to build a hydropower network across Tibet that will power eastern China. These other sites of forced relocation have garnered less attention because they have occurred in sparsely populated areas¹⁰, where local communities are not as politically organised as Dege – a region known as a political and cultural centre with a proud and strong community.

It should be noted that Dege residents are especially courageous in documenting their persecution and seeking the support of the international community by sharing information with Tibetans in exile. This is indeed a last resort effort, given all other avenues for resistance appear to have failed and sharing news with people outside Tibet leads to persecution. The anti-mining protests in Driru County that erupted in 2010 and escalated in 2013 offer a cautionary tale. After about 3,500 villagers gathered to protest against illegal mining on their sacred mountain, local government officials deployed armed security forces, launched a political re-education campaign, forcibly shut down three monasteries, and arbitrarily detained at least 47 individuals.¹¹ At least two Tibetans died in custody, and the well-being of others remains uncertain as strict information controls were deployed to prevent news from being shared with the outside world. At present, Driru remains isolated and in an information black hole.

III. EVENTS IN DEGE COUNTY SINCE FEBRUARY 2024

It is the nature of research on Tibet that there are information gaps. Yet monitoring groups have been able to reconstruct many of the events that have taken place in Dege County since 14 February.

¹⁰ Yebatan (叶巴滩) and Lawa (拉哇) hydropower dams are downstream from Kamtok dam. Yebatan has already relocated 644 people and the Lawa project will relocate 1,335 people. Details on the Yebatan relocation figures are no longer available, as articles on Chinese websites often expire. However, information was previously available at <https://www.gzz.gov.cn/gzzrmzf/c101413/202207/f2723eeb0418463bbc6677f4be390f2c.shtml>, accessed in September 2023. The Lawa hydropower project will relocate 1,335 people. See ‘总投资309.69亿元！国家发展改革委关于金沙江拉哇水电站项目核准的批复’ (Ch: ‘The total investment is 30,969 billion yuan! Approval of the Jinsha River Lawa Hydropower station project from the National Development and Reform Commission’), 北极星水利发电网 (Ch: Polaris Hydropower Grid), 15 January 2019, <https://news.bjx.com.cn/html/20190115/956665.shtml>.

¹¹ ‘Driru County: The New Hub of Tibetan Resistance,’ Tibet Watch, 2014.

14 February	Over 100 Tibetans peacefully protest the Kamtok dam
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 100 Tibetans (some sources including <i>Radio Free Asia</i> (RFA) say 300) gathered at the local government office in Dege, calling on authorities to halt the hydroelectric dam. • Protests were non-confrontational, despite a large police presence. Some protesters carried the PRC flag, making it clear they were not criticising the Chinese Communist Party or its leadership. • County officials responded that they lacked the power to stop the planned dam. • Local sources reported several protesters were detained and then released the next day.
20 February	Monks appeal to visiting officials at Yena monastery
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local officials visited two of the affected monasteries, Wontoe Monastery and Yena Monastery. • Video footage taken at Yena Monastery on 20 February shows monks and locals imploring visiting officials to stop the hydropower dam. They can be seen holding their thumbs up in a gesture used by some Tibetans to show they are pleading and appealing for dialogue.
22 February	Early news of 100 arrests and some injured.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • News of arrests was accompanied by videos of police encircling monks and forcefully shoving and dragging them around. Local sources stated that some of the monks needed hospital treatment. • Local sources sent information that approximately 100 people had been arrested. • Detainees were instructed by police to bring food and bedding from home. They were held in various places because of the large numbers, including a police station in Upper Wontoe and an old prison in Dege County
24 February	Several hundred people arrested
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA had reported at least 1,000 arrests, based on information from two sources. Other monitoring organisations have been unable to verify the estimate and have been more conservative. Human Rights Watch and Tibet Watch report several hundred. • Not all those detained were protesters. Human Rights Watch reported community members who visited the detention centres to appeal for the detainees' release were also detained.
26-27 February	A least 40 monks released
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA reported that around 20 monks from Wontoe Monastery were released on Monday 26 February and another 20 on 27 February. Even after their release, authorities imposed strict restrictions on their contact with the outside world.
28 February	Police deployed in Wonpo Township
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Footage showing armed police marching through a street in Wonpo Township was shared widely and verified. • The size of the deployment is not possible to verify, but there are approximately 200 police personnel in the video alone. The video resembles a similar deployment in nearby Dza Wonpo in Sershul County in 2021, when about 200 security personnel arrived to lock down the local area and then began carrying out checks beyond the scope of simple security, such as investigating locals' houses and phones for images of the Dalai Lama and leading to further arrests.
7 March	Two detained local leaders were transferred to the larger Dege County Detention centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RFA reported that Tenzin Sangpo (the senior administrator of Wontoe Monastery) and Tenzin (a village official), who were arrested on 23 February had been transferred from their place of detention to the larger Dege County Detention Centre.
25 March	Hundreds of detainees were released, but some protestors remain in detention.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RFA cited two local sources who reported hundreds of detainees had been released, with some protesters remaining in detention. RFA's report mentioned Tenzin Sangpo and Tenzin, who has been reportedly passed on to the government Procuratorate Office, with no further details about their current condition, whereabouts or charges against them.
2 April	Wontoe monastery's senior administrator Tenzin Sangpo and four local residents remain in detention and are accused of disrupting social order.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RFA reported further updates on 2 April by RFA that at least five remain in detention, including Tenzin Sangpo and four local residents who are accused of disrupting social order.

On 14 February, at least 100 Tibetans (some sources including *Radio Free Asia (RFA)* say 300¹²) gathered at the local government office in Dege, calling on authorities to halt the hydroelectric dam. Footage shows that these protests were non-confrontational. Some of the protesters carried the PRC flag, reminiscent of past attempts by Tibetans to petition authorities while making it clear they were not criticising the Chinese Communist Party or its leadership. The footage also showed a large police presence in front of the protesters.

Despite the residents' appeals, county officials responded that they lacked the power to stop the planned dam. Local sources also state that several protesters were detained during these protests and then released the next day.

The following week, local officials visited two of the affected monasteries, Wontoe Monastery and Yena Monastery. A video taken at Yena Monastery on 20 February shows monks and locals imploring visiting officials to stop the hydropower dam. They can be seen holding their thumbs up in a gesture used by some Tibetans to show they are pleading and appealing for dialogue.¹³

On 22 February, news of arrests was accompanied by videos of police encircling monks and forcefully shoving and dragging them around. Local sources stated that some of the monks needed hospital treatment.

At this stage, local sources sent information that approximately 100 people had been arrested. Detainees were instructed by police to bring food and bedding from home. They were held in various places because of the large numbers, including a police station in Upper Wontoe and an old prison in Dege County.

It has been difficult to get estimates of how many were arrested. By 24 February, *RFA* had reported at least 1,000 arrests¹⁴, based on information from two sources¹⁵. Other monitoring organisations have been unable to find out how *RFA's* sources arrived at this number and have generally been more conservative, with Human Rights Watch and Tibet Watch saying several hundred. Not all of those detained were protesters. Human Rights Watch found that community members who visited the detention centres to appeal for the detainees' release were also detained.¹⁶

¹² 'Tibetans protest forced resettlement due to Chinese dam project', *RFA*, 15 February 2024

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/dam-project-02152024172629.html>

¹³ 'Tibetans Protest Peacefully Against the Relocation of the Yena Monastery', *Tibet Times*, 22 February 2024

<https://en.tibettimes.net/2024/02/21/tibetan-people-held-a-peaceful-protest-on-their-knees/>.

¹⁴ 'China arrests more than 1,000 Tibetans protesting dam project', *RFA*, 23 February 2024

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/protesters-arrested-02232024164340.html>.

¹⁵ Follow up with RFA by Tibet Watch.

¹⁶ 'China: Free Detained Tibetan Demonstrators', *Human Rights Watch*, February 2024

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/28/china-free-detained-tibetan-demonstrators>.

RFA reported that around 20 monks from Wontoe Monastery were released on Monday 26 February and another 20 on 27 February. Even after their release, authorities imposed strict restrictions on their contact with the outside world.¹⁷

On 28 February, a short video was widely shared and later verified, showing armed police marching through a street in Wonpo Township on that day. The size of the deployment is not possible to verify but there are close to 200 police personnel in the video alone¹⁸. The video shows parallels with a similar deployment in nearby Dza Wonpo in Sershul County in 2021, when around 200 security personnel arrived to lock down the local area and then began carrying out checks beyond the scope of simple security, such as investigating locals' houses and phones for images of the Dalai Lama and leading to further arrests¹⁹.

On 7 March, RFA reported that two individuals arrested on 23 February had been transferred from their place of detention to the larger Dege County Detention Centre. These are Tenzin Sangpo, the senior administrator of Wontoe Monastery, and Tenzin, a village official²⁰.

Apart from this update, there were no further photos and videos and scarcely any information from the local area between the police deployment on 28 February and 25 March. On 25 March, RFA reported that according to two local sources, hundreds of detainees had been released. The report added that at least some of those involved in the protest remained in detention, naming Tenzin Sangpo and Tenzin, who it said have been passed on to the government Procuratorate Office, with no further details about their current condition, whereabouts or charges against them.²¹

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

The recent arrests and the dam construction pose several serious concerns for the affected Tibetan peoples' human rights, including arbitrary detentions, rights to information, participation, and housing, as well as their cultural rights.

A) ARRESTS:

Hundreds of Tibetans have been arbitrarily arrested and detained without due process in response to peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression as well as freedom of assembly and association. Further arbitrary detentions took place following the protests when community members who visited detention centres to appeal for detainees' release were themselves then arrested. Tibetans who have attempted to visit detainees with food and water continue to be turned away.

We are not aware of any internationally recognisable criminal charges against Tibetans still in detention. While some Tibetans have been released, scores of others remain in detention, and the whereabouts of others are unknown. The arrests also appear to be incommunicado in nature, with Tibetans being detained without access to family or lawyers. Such practices by the Chinese authorities are routine when arresting Tibetans.

¹⁷ 'Exclusive: Chinese authorities release dozens of Tibetans arrested for dam protests', RFA, 27 February 2024

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/dam-protests-02272024162905.html>.

¹⁸ 'Imposing heavy restriction after deployment of huge armed police at Wonpoto township, Derge County', *Tibet Times*, 28 February, last accessed 10 March 2024 <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/hZetznZ8amU>

¹⁹ 'Eight more Tibetans detained amid heightened climate of fear and internal spies', *Tibet Watch*, 9 September 2021

<https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2021/9/9/eight-more-tibetans-detained-amid-heightened-climate-of-fear-and-internal-spies>

²⁰ 'After protest, Tibetan monastery leader and village official sent to detention center', RFA, 27 March 2024

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/detention-center-03072024164620.html>

²¹ 'China releases Tibetan monks and residents held for dam protests', RFA, 25 March 2024

<https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/protesters-released-03252024172802.html>

Obtaining information on where detainees are being held, ensuring that detainees are immediately granted access to their families and lawyers, and ensuring that the Chinese authorities are providing Tibetans with the necessary medical care they need, is crucial.

It is unclear whether those who were beaten and injured by police at the protests - and arrested - have been given the appropriate and necessary medical care they need.

The nature of these arrests violates standards on arbitrary detention under customary international law, as well as China's own Constitution and domestic laws and the protections they afford. These include Article 35 that "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, and of demonstration", Article 41 that citizens have "the right to criticize and make suggestions regarding any state organ or state employee, and have the right to file with relevant state organs complaints", and Article 37 that states "unlawful detention, or the unlawful deprivation or restriction of a citizen's freedom by other means, is prohibited; the unlawful search of a citizen's person is prohibited."²²

B) LACK OF FREE, PRIOR, AND INFORMED CONSULTATION AND CONSENT:

Tibetan communities of Dege have not been adequately consulted prior to the approval of the dam and have not given their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Those who engaged in peaceful protests to air their grievances were arrested and local sources report that the dam construction was often carried out at night to draw less attention from residents.

While Tibetan residents have known about the project since 2012, local communities appear to not have been presented with adequate access to information, such as a complete environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the project nor the project's potential impacts on health, living conditions, and adequate housing were never fully explored nor sufficiently studied. Meaningful participation requires that information is available, accessible, and in an appropriate form for the affected community, including in the Tibetan language.

Many other affected communities, including those living up and downstream of the project site in China, have also not been properly informed about the project, consulted, or given an opportunity to participate in matters related to the dam construction.

Among the rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)²³ are the rights to access information and meaningful public participation under Articles 19 and 25. It is well established that these rights extend to environmental matters.

The right to access information is part of the freedom of opinion and expression as established in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and Article 19 of ICCPR. The right to take part in the conduct of public affairs is stipulated in Article 21 of UDHR and Article 25 of ICCPR.

C) THREATS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE:

In line with its international legal obligations, China should adopt appropriate measures to support Tibetans in their efforts to preserve their culture. They must also obtain - from affected communities - free and informed prior consent when the preservation of their cultural resources is at risk.

²² http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/2007-11/15/content_1372964.htm

²³ While China has signed, but not ratified the ICCPR, it is still obliged under international law to refrain from "acts which would defeat the object and purpose" of the treaty, as per the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

The threat to Tibetan cultural and religious sites, such as the monasteries threatened with destruction by the construction of the Kamtok hydropower dam, would violate the right of residents in Dege County to take part in cultural life, a right enshrined under Article 22 of the UDHR, and Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

There is extensive literature in international law regarding the duty of states to protect religious sites and symbols. Human Rights Council resolution 6/37 (1981), urged states “to exert the utmost efforts, in accordance with their national legislation and in conformity with international human rights and humanitarian law, to ensure that religious places, sites, shrines and symbols are fully respected and protected and to take additional measures in cases where they are vulnerable to desecration or destruction”. This language was recalled in Article 4(b) of the Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/40.

Furthermore, the 2016 Report of the Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights recommended that China take appropriate legislative, administrative, educational and technical measures to prevent, avert, stop and suppress the intentional destruction of cultural heritage, explicitly recommending that states should “[t]ake all steps necessary to facilitate prosecution of those responsible for intentional destruction of cultural heritage, [...] at the national or the international level, in accordance with relevant international standards; and to this end, collect and preserve evidence needed for such prosecution.”

It should also be noted that United Nations Special Rapporteurs covering a range of human rights issues, including the Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, have previously had to remind China of its international obligations to protect sites of cultural and religious significance in Tibet. In 2016, six Special Rapporteurs wrote to the Chinese government regarding the mass expulsion of residents and demolitions within the religious communities of Larung Gar and Yachen Gar, reminding them of the above standards.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS:

We urge governments and China-based diplomats to carry out the following actions:

4. Urgently seek information from Chinese authorities about events in Dege since 14 February and press China to:
 - a. recognise and uphold the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association to ensure that Tibetans and others can engage in peaceful activities and raise concerns and criticisms, including government relocation and rehousing policies and practices;
 - b. Protect the right to free, prior, and informed consent, right to a cultural life, and the right to enjoy effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy;
5. Urgently issue public statements expressing concern at the arrests and the ongoing situation and share concerns and information on all available channels;
6. Immediately request meaningful and unfettered access to Dege County to assess the current situation, including requesting visits to detention facilities and affected monasteries.

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