



Following confirmation that the body of [Tibetan political prisoner Tenzin Delek Rinpoche](#) was cremated in prison on the 16th July, Free Tibet has obtained letters from his family to prison authorities demanding that they provide legal justifications for their actions in the period around and following his death on Sunday, 12 July.

Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's family had been denied access to him in the days before his death, despite being summoned by authorities to the prison in Chengdu from their home hundreds of kilometres away on 2nd July. Following his death, the authorities initially denied access to his body and stated their intention to cremate it in prison. The two letters from his sisters were written and submitted on Wednesday (15th July), after which authorities permitted family members and monks to see the body, before cremating it in prison against the family's wishes. The letters:

- noted that despite promises to do so, no death certificate was given to the family;
- requested that the authorities specify the legal justification for failing to return his body to the family;
- requested that the authorities provide the legal justification for prison staff being permitted to cremate his body;
- requested a delay in cremation of the body as is permitted under new Chinese regulations concerning the bodies of prisoners;
- proposed that if the body was returned, the family would not press for an investigation into the cause of death (the letter from his younger sister, Dolkar Lhamo, refers to this proposal as the family's "humble wish");
- asked why they were not notified immediately of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's death, even though authorities knew their whereabouts in Chengdu at the time.

Free Tibet director Eleanor Byrne-Rosengren said:

"In other parts of the world, even prisoners who have been executed by the state are returned

Family Call for Answers Over Cremation of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche

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to their families in time for funerals to take place. It's clear from the personal appeal in this letter that the refusal to do so here caused Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's family great anguish. Despite their grief, they have, nevertheless, been sure to seek specific answers and legal justifications for the actions of the authorities. The family's bid to hold China's government to account for its actions demands the support of international governments.

“Every aspect of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's case, from his conviction in a secret trial through to the recent denial of medical parole and now the cover-up over the cause of his death is in violation of basic legal principles and standards of common decency. This is a litmus test of the global community's willingness to challenge China's contempt for human and civil rights in Tibet: if our governments allow China impunity in such a high profile case, they are giving the green light to similar and worse abuses in future.”

The letters were submitted after Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's sisters had been summoned by the authorities that day and read a document which they were told was his death certificate. They were also told that the man who read them the letter was the doctor who had examined the Rinpoche.

When the sisters asked if they could have the letter the authorities refused and instead asked them to give a thumbprint on the letter as acknowledgement of having been read the contents. When they refused they were detained but released later in the evening of the same day, after the younger sister passed out and collapsed.

In response to the sisters' letters, the prison offered access to the body, while insisting it would still be cremated in jail. Initially the Tibetans who had gathered held firm and continued demanding the body. Eventually they realised this was futile and a group of 18 monks went to the prison to change the Rinpoche's clothes and wash his body. At 6:30am a number of visitors were allowed into the prison to see the body but only two lamas and two relatives were allowed to stay and witness the cremation, which took place inside the prison. The crowd that had gathered outside the prison then dispersed.

One eyewitness said that the Rinpoche's lips and nails had turned black. As a result, many Tibetans believe that the Rinpoche had been poisoned.

The [US State Department](#) and organisations worldwide had called for the release of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche's body to his family.