

Students rally for Tibetan freedom

by Yuyun Hartono

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University of Wisconsin student members of Amnesty International, Students for a Free Tibet and the Wisconsin Tibetan Association are currently sponsoring a Week of Action to save the life of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, a religious leader in eastern Tibet possibly facing execution in January 2005.

The focus of the week of action features volunteers at the Memorial Union collecting signatures for a letter that will be sent to the Chinese government.

UW graduate student Van Ly, Madison chapter coordinator of Students for Free Tibet, said Rinpoche was wrongly sentenced to death by the Chinese government in April 2002 and his retrial in January 2003 did not comply with international standards.

“The Chinese government did not present credible evidence against [Rinpoche]. He was denied access to lawyers and did not have a fair trial,” Ly said. “The only way we can save him is to build up international pressure to overturn the death sentence.”

Week of Action is also attempting to increase awareness among UW students of the situation in Tibet and to increase international support.

“We want UW students to sign our petitions, send protest postcards to the Chinese government, learn about the situation in Tibet and become involved in [our mission],” Angie Hougas, Wisconsin coordinator of Amnesty International, said.

Ly and Hougas agreed getting international support makes a tremendous difference.

“I am pretty optimistic that [Rinpoche]’s life could be saved if there is an intense international pressure,” Ly said. “Ngawang Sangdrol, a Tibetan nun who was arrested by the Chinese government when she was 15, was released from jail because of the pressures from human-right groups around the world.”



Derek Montgomery

Hougas said American students should be concerned about the happenings in Tibet.

“Students need to be aware of the human-rights violations that happen around the world — Tibet is an excellent example of how freedom of religion is suppressed in a country of [a culture and people],” she said.

Hougas said she expects students to be a part of this human-rights activity because students in America have the right to speak their minds.

“We have the responsibility to speak up for Tenzin’s right because he cannot do it for himself,” Ly added.

UW senior Fuja Sentosa Tjie, who volunteered at the booth in Memorial Union Monday, said although he does not know the details of Rinpoche’s case, he is concerned about the enforcement of human rights.

“I think everyone in the world deserves a fair legal treatment ... [Rinpoche] is not an exception here,” he said. “I will learn more about the case and will probably come back to sign the [letter].”

Amnesty International, Students for Free Tibet and the Wisconsin Tibetan Association will show the film “Sentenced to Die: the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche” Thursday at the Orpheum Theatre.

Friday night, the last day of week of action, the activists will host a candlelight vigil at Memorial Union at 6 p.m. and again a half hour later on Library Mall.

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