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Verein Tibeter Jugend in Europa
Tibetan Youth Association in Europe

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
U.S.A.

Zurich, 6th November 2009

Dear Mr. President

We are writing to you as representatives of Tibetan refugees and Tibet supporters living in Switzerland, requesting that you make Tibet a significant topic on the agenda during your visit to China in November. In particular we ask you to exert pressure on the Chinese government to release Dhondup Wangchen, a Tibetan film-maker arrested in 2008 for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

Dhondup Wangchen [Chinese: Dunzhu Wangqin] was detained in Tibet on 26 March 2008 for filming interviews with ordinary Tibetans about their views on the Olympic Games, the Dalai Lama and Chinese government policies in Tibet. The film footage was smuggled out of Tibet and integrated into the documentary film "Leaving Fear Behind", which gives a rare glimpse into the reality of Tibetans living under Chinese occupation. The film has been screened in over 30 countries and can also be seen online at <http://www.leavingfearbehind.com>.)

According to information provided by official sources, Dhondup Wangchen was arrested in July 2008 under suspicion of "inciting separatism" and was formally charged in June 2009. It is believed that Dhondup Wangchen's trial has started. His family recently received a letter from Dhondup Wangchen, which was smuggled out of prison, and which reads:

*"A few days ago I had a terrible nightmare and I struggled with the thought that something terrible has happened at home. I am worried about my aged father and mother. I am very much worried. Would it be possible to inform me about their situation? Please be frank with me. With regard to my situation there is no need to worry. I will face my fate. While I am aware that a release will be very difficult and I may remain here for a longer period there is a feeling that I have failed to be a more caring son for my parents. **My trial has started. There is no good news that I can share with you. It is unclear what my sentence will be.**"*

Additionally, China recently told a foreign government that the case was "now under judicial proceedings". If convicted, Dhondup Wangchen may face a lengthy sentence.

China has denied initial appeals for observers to attend Dhondup's trial. This raises acute concerns that Dhondup Wangchen's trial is taking place in secret. In addition he has been denied access to his family's choice of lawyer, Li Dunyong, from the Beijing Gongxin law firm.

Further fears that Dhondup Wangchen may not receive a fair and open trial were raised with the news that up to four Tibetans were executed in Lhasa on 20 October 2009. These Tibetans were involved in the protests that swept Tibet last spring. Their executions are believed to be politically motivated and it seems those convicted were not permitted a fair judicial process.

In Switzerland, we have been informed that Mrs. Widmer-Schlumpf - the Swiss Justice Minister and member of the Swiss Federal Council - addressed Dhondup Wangchen's case during her recent visit to China at the end of October 2009.

We therefore believe that now is a critical time for all governments to present a unified front pressurizing China to release Dhondup Wangchen and all political prisoners, and to call on the Chinese leaders to initiate judicial processes which will allow fair and open trials. It is especially your voice, Mr. President, that needs to be heard now and that can lead the way for other governments to engage themselves for the release of Dhondup Wangchen and the improvement of human rights situation in Tibet and China in general.

Therefore, we request that you

1. call on the Chinese leadership to immediately release Dhondup Wangchen, as his only "crime" was to peacefully exercise his right to freedom of expression, as guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
2. demand full information pertaining to Dhondup Wangchen's case, including the charges he faces and the status of his trial as well as about his health.
3. ask for permission to send observers to his trial, to ensure that Dhondup Wangchen receives a full and open trial as is guaranteed under China's constitution, and that he is allowed legal counsel of his own choosing.
4. call on the Chinese government to enter into a genuine dialogue with the representatives of H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama without preconditions.

Yours sincerely

Swiss-Tibetan Friendship Association (STFA)

Tibetan Woman's Organisation in Switzerland (TWOS)

Tibetan Youth Association in Europe (TYAE)