

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 29, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St., NW Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the ongoing detention of Mr. Anya Sengdra, a Tibetan environmental defender and anti-corruption activist who was arrested on September 4, 2018, and sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of “gathering a crowd to disturb public order” and “picking quarrels and provoking trouble.” These charges, frequently used to silence peaceful dissent in China, were based on his efforts to expose corruption and illegal mining practices in Qinghai Province.

Mr. Sengdra was due to be released on September 4, 2025, after completing his sentence. According to information provided to my office, he was not released on this date. Rather, Chinese authorities arbitrarily extended his detention until 2026, without explanation.

Throughout his imprisonment, Mr. Sengdra has been subjected to incommunicado detention, denial of legal and family access, and ill-treatment, according to human rights monitors. His family was granted a rare, brief visit in September 2024—their first in more than six years—and a second visit in August 2025; on both occasions, they reported he appeared in visibly poor health. Reports indicate that Mr. Sengdra suffers from high blood pressure and has not received adequate medical care. The lack of transparency about his current location and health status only deepens our concern for his safety and well-being. His extended incarceration comes in the context of reports of deaths in custody, including as a result of alleged torture, of Tibetans active in civic and advocacy groups.¹

Mr. Sengdra’s case has drawn international attention. Multiple UN Special Rapporteurs, including those on human rights defenders and the environment, have called for his release, stressing that his detention criminalizes legitimate environmental and anti-corruption activism.² The European Union has raised his case at the UN Human Rights Council, and human rights organizations continue to highlight his imprisonment as emblematic of broader efforts by Chinese authorities to suppress Tibetan civil society.³

The Tibetan Policy and Support Act, of which you were an author as a senator, directs the Secretary of State to engage with the Chinese government and Tibetans on environmental matters on the Tibetan Plateau, including the role of Tibetan stakeholders in mitigation and stewardship. Mr. Sengdra is one such stakeholder.⁴

¹ Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Political Prisoner Database, Gonpo Namgyal. <https://www.ppdcecc.gov/ppd?id=result&number=2024-00004>; Central Tibetan Administration, Torture Deaths of Tibetan Political Prisoners (2000-2025). <https://tibet.net/torture-deaths-of-tibetan-political-prisoners-2000-2025/>

² UN experts urge China to drop charges against jailed Tibetan minority human rights defender, OHCHR, May 19, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/05/un-experts-urge-china-drop-charges-against-jailed-tibetan-minority-human>; UN experts seek clarification about nine imprisoned Tibetan human rights defenders <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/08/china-un-experts-seek-clarification-about-nine-imprisoned-tibetan-human>

³ HRC57 - Item 4: General debate on human rights situations that require the Council’s attention, European External Action Service, September 24, 2024. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/hrc57-item-4-general-debate-human-rights-situations-require-council%E2%80%99s-attention_en?s=62

⁴ Subtitle E, Title II, Consolidated Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2021, P.L. 116–260

Given the critical situation Mr. Sengdra is facing due to his declining health, and the unexplained and arbitrary extension of his sentence, we ask for the State Department's assistance in securing his immediate and unconditional release. We urge you to raise Mr. Sengdra's case with your counterparts in the Chinese government and press for his freedom. Pending his release, we ask that you insist Chinese authorities allow regular family visitation, access to independent medical care, and confidential communication with legal counsel.

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



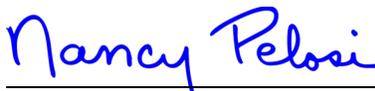
Joe Wilson
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