

Beat: Local

Tibetan artist sets himself on fire in anti-China protest

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USPA News - A traditional Tibetan artist was killed Sunday when he set himself on fire in protest against Chinese rule in Tibet, the Tibetan government-in-exile said. More than 60 people have set themselves on fire in similar anti-China protests since March 2011.

Free Tibet, a group campaigning for an end to the `Chinese occupation` of Tibet, said 25-year-old Dorje Lungdup set himself on fire at around 10:30 a.m. local time on Sunday near Sakyil Hotel in the monastery town of Tongren in western China's Qinghai province. He died at the scene. A photo released by the Central Tibetan Administration showed the body of a heavily burned man wrapped in Tibetan traditional scarves in front of a photo of the Dalai Lama. The government said in a statement it was "deeply saddened" by the latest self-immolation, but gave no other details. The body of Lungdup was taken to Dolma Square in front of Tongren Monastery where "thousands of Tibetans" paid their respects, Free Tibet said. A representative of the man's family told the crowd that Lungdup had set himself on fire for the return of the Dalai Lama and begged them not to protest for the sake of their safety. "A large security presence has since been deployed," the activist group said after Lungdup's body was cremated to prevent authorities from interfering. "Tibetans in the town say that they are frightened to leave their homes. Internet and mobile communications are being interrupted to prevent the spread of information." Since March 2011, a total of now 63 Tibetans have set themselves on fire as part of protests taking place in Tibet, leading to the arrests of hundreds of Tibetans by Chinese security forces. As a result of the unrest, Chinese authorities have stepped up security in the region, but the self-immolations have continued. The first incident happened on March 16, 2011, when 21-year-old Phuntsog from Kirti Monastery set himself on fire. It happened on the third anniversary of protests in Ngaba during which at least 13 people were shot dead by Chinese security forces. Phuntsog later died of his injuries. In October 2011, Tibetan Prime Minister Lobsang Sangay expressed his concern about the incidents. "The incidents are a clear indication of the genuine grievances of the Tibetans and their sense of deep resentment and despair over the prevailing conditions in Tibet," he said. "It is therefore of the utmost urgency that every possible effort be made to address the underlying root causes of Tibetan grievances and resentment." The Dalai Lama has resided in the Indian city of Dharamsala, which is now the seat of the Tibetan Government-in-exile, since 1960 following a failed uprising against Chinese rule of Tibet. Dharamsala is also referred to as `Little Lhasa`, referring to the capital of Tibet.

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