

Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Ref.: UA CHN 21/2025
(Please use this reference in your reply)

3 October 2025

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacity as Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders; Special Rapporteur on minority issues and Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 55/2, 51/8, 52/9, 59/4, 52/4, 52/5 and 52/7.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning the alleged arbitrary extension of the prison sentence of Mr. A-Nya Sengdra, a Tibetan environmental and human rights defender whose health is seriously and rapidly deteriorating in detention. Concerns regarding Mr. Sengdra's situation have already been brought to the attention of Your Excellency's government in letters [UA CHN 11/2020](#) and [AL CHN 14/2023](#).

Mr. A-Nya Sengdra (阿亚桑扎) is an environmental activist, anti-corruption human rights defender and community leader in Gande County, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province. The charges brought against him appear to be in retaliation for his leadership in mobilising community members against illegal mining, wildlife poaching and local government corruption.

According to the information received:

Mr. A-Nya Sengdra was arrested on 4 September 2018 by the Gade County Public Security Bureau in Golog, Tibet. He was sentenced to seven years in prison for “gathering people to disturb public order” and “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”. Mr. Sengdra's received a seven-year sentence, which was originally due to end on 4 September 2025.

However, in August 2025, it was reported that his sentence had been extended until February 2026 without clear legal justification. Independent sources indicate that the extension of his sentence was related to a charge of “theft” from years ago, which was allegedly a fabricated charge.

Gade County People's Court, Golog Prefecture Intermediate People's Court, and Supreme People's Court, Sixth Circuit Court (Xi'an) are reportedly responsible for convicting Mr. Sengdra on charges incompatible with his peaceful activities in favour of the environment and for subsequently rejecting appeals and requests for a new trial, in violation of procedural guarantees and international human rights law.

Mr. Sengdra's health is seriously deteriorating. He has been held in solitary confinement for most of his detention period, exacerbating concerns about his health and constituting cruel or inhuman treatment. In 2024, six years after his arrest, his family was able to visit him for the first time, but the visit lasted only a few minutes. During that meeting, his family noted that his health had deteriorated significantly due to the refusal of prison authorities to provide medical care. Recent reports from late August 2025 confirm the further deterioration of his health condition.

Furthermore, although reports suggest that Mr. Sengdra's is being held in Menyuan Prison, his family and lawyers have not received any official confirmation of his current detention location or of the conditions of it.

The allegations described above are reportedly part of a wider pattern of reprisals against environmental defenders in Tibet, particularly those fighting on the front lines against large-scale mining and hydroelectric projects.

While we do not wish to prejudge the accuracy of the information received, we are gravely concerned about Mr. A-Nya Sengdra's continued detention beyond his sentence period and the deterioration of his health, reportedly caused by abuse of power by local authorities. We are deeply concerned by what appears to be the criminalization of the legitimate work of a minority community member and environmental defender.

There are serious concerns about the lack of official information regarding Mr. Sengdra's whereabouts and his physical integrity, particularly regarding his access to adequate medical care and treatment while deprived of his liberty. We wish to recall that, by depriving persons of their liberty, States assume responsibility to care for their life and physical integrity. Inadequate conditions of detention can be a factor contributing to serious injury in detention, and when conditions are seriously inadequate, they can constitute an immediate or long-term danger to life and even death.

In this connection, we would like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (reviewed on 17 December 2015 and renamed "the Nelson Mandela Rules"), in particular to rule 24 that establishes that the provision of health care for prisoners is a State responsibility and that the State should ensure continuity of medical treatment for chronic conditions; rule 27(1), which provides that all prisons shall ensure prompt access to medical attention in urgent cases, as well as rule 58 which establishes that prisoners shall be allowed to communicate with their family and friends at regular intervals.

We are also concerned about what appears to be arbitrary detention due to the undue extension of the prison sentence initially established in the judgement.

Furthermore, we are concerned about the alleged systematic rejection of appeals and requests for retrials, as this could violate the right to due process and the right not to be detained or deprived of liberty arbitrarily. In this connection, we would like to refer to articles 2, 5, 7, 9, and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and articles 7, 9, 19, 21, 22 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), signed by China on 5 October 1998, which codifies the absolute and non-derogable prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the prohibition of discrimination, the right to not be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, the right to freedom of expression, and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. Article 27 of the ICCPR further provides for the protection the rights of persons belonging to minorities.

We would also like to draw the attention of Your Excellency's Government to the Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment, presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2018 (A/HRC/37/59). These principles do not create new obligations, rather, they reflect the application of existing human rights obligations in the environmental context. Framework principle 2 establishes that States should respect, protect and fulfil human rights in order to ensure a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. To this end, States should therefore refrain from violating human rights through causing or allowing environmental harm and protect against harmful environmental interference from other sources, including business enterprises and other private actors.

According to Framework principle 4, States should provide a safe and enabling environment in which individuals, groups and organs of society that work on human rights or environmental issues can operate free from threats, harassment, intimidation and violence. To that end, States must adopt and implement laws that protect human rights defenders, ensure that their work is not criminalized or stigmatized and provide for effective remedies for violations, including appropriate compensation.

Like other human rights defenders, environmental human rights defenders are entitled to all the rights and protections set out in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In this context, article 9 of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders holds that everyone has the right to benefit from an effective remedy and to be protected in the event of the violation of those rights, as well as to article 12 of the Declaration, which requires States to take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone exercising their rights under the Declaration against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action.

The full texts of the human rights instruments and standards recalled above are available on www.ohchr.org or can be provided upon request.

In view of the urgency of the matter, we would appreciate a response as soon as possible on the initial steps taken by your Excellency's Government to safeguard the rights of Mr. A-Nya Sengdra in compliance with international instruments.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would also be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and any comment you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.
2. Please provide information on the current physical and mental integrity of Mr. A-Nya Sengdra, including information about the measures undertaken to ensure his access to appropriate and adequate medical care while in detention, and also in relation to his current place of detention and whether his family members and relatives have been granted access to it.
3. Please provide detailed information on the factual and legal grounds for the extension of the prison sentence of Mr. A-Nya Sengdra, including clarification about the exact nature of the charges that have been levied against him and the facts that supported these charges and explain how these are compatible with international human rights norms and standards. Please specify when the facts that supported these charges occurred, why these charges were not brought during his original prosecution, and whether Mr. A-Nya Sengdra was afforded proper judicial proceedings for these new charges, including access to independent legal counsel of his choosing and the right to appeal.
4. Please indicate the measures undertaken by your Excellency's Government to ensure that human rights defenders, and in particular those advocating and working for the rights of persons belonging to minorities, are able to carry out their legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment, without the fear of prosecution, harassment and violence, and without discrimination, in full respect of their human rights.

This communication and any response received from your Excellency's Government will be made public via the communications reporting [website](#) within 60 days. They will also subsequently be made available in the usual report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

Further, we would like to inform your Excellency's Government that after having transmitted the information contained in the present communication to the Government, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention may also transmit the case through its regular procedure in order to render an opinion on whether the deprivation of liberty was arbitrary or not. The present communication in no way prejudices any opinion the Working Group may render. The Government is required to respond separately to the allegation letter and the regular procedure.

While waiting for your response, we urge the Government of your Excellency to take all necessary measures to guarantee that the rights and freedoms of Mr. A-Nya Sengdra are respected and, in the event that your investigations support or suggest the above allegations to be correct, to immediately release him considering that he complied with his initial sentence, and guarantee his safety and medical attention, as well as the accountability of any person responsible for the alleged violations should be ensured. We also request that the Government of your Excellency adopts effective

measures to prevent the recurrence of these acts including and especially in relation with those who are working for the protection of the environment and human rights.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Astrid Puentes Riaño

Special Rapporteur on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

Matthew Gillett

Vice-Chair on communications of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention

Irene Khan

Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

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