

Van: Rob Hogendoorn rob.hogendoorn@openbuddhism.org
Onderwerp: Re: Central Tibetan Administration's eulogy for Sogyal Lakar
Datum: 5 september 2019 om 12:27
Aan: diir@tibet.net
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Dear Sir, Madam,

With this I wish to express my grave concern over the Central Tibetan Administration's published eulogy for Sogyal Lakar.

[Source: <https://sogyalrinpoche.org/paying-homage-blog/central-tibetan-administration-dharamsala>]

Allow me to remind you that the Central Tibetan Administration subscribes to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

[Source: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/tic.pdf]

Let me also quote some articles from the Declaration that directly pertain to the decades-long abuses by Sogyal Lakar and his enablers.

Article 3: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

Article 5: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

The Charter of the Tibetans-in-exile declares about the Tibetan administration:

Article 3: "The future Tibetan polity shall uphold the principle of non-violence and shall endeavour to promote the freedom of the individual and the welfare of the society through the dual system of government based on a Federal Democratic Republic."

Article 4: "It shall be the duty of the Tibetan Administration to adhere to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as specified by the United Nations, and to also urge and encourage all other countries of the world to respect and comply with such Declarations, and shall emphasize the promotion of the moral and material well-being of the Tibetan people, the safeguarding of their social, cultural, religious and political rights, and in particular, the ultimate achievement of their common goal."

Article 17 sub 10: "It shall endeavor to improve the purity and efficiency of academic and monastic communities of monks, nuns, and tantric practitioners, and shall encourage them to maintain proper behavior."

Article 17 sub 11: "It shall endeavor to disseminate a non-sectarian and wholesome tradition of Buddhist doctrines."

[Source: <https://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Charter.pdf>]

Witness its present eulogy for Sogyal Lakar, however, the Central Tibetan Administration seems to be much more concerned by violations of these principles and acts of violence *against* Tibetans than *by* Tibetans.

Apparently, the plight of (mostly) Western victims or survivors of abusive Tibetan lamas is neither its concern nor its priority.

Why would one come to such a conclusion? Because the Central Tibetan Administration had the temerity to write:

"We are grateful for all the beneficial activities H.E. Sogyal Rinpoche has accomplished in terms of holding, preserving and spreading the dharma teachings and the Tibetan culture. Remembering such kindness, we make the strong wish that all his profound aspirations be spontaneously fulfilled without any obstacles and that his true reincarnation come swiftly, manifesting the same ability to benefit the teachings and sentient beings as his predecessor."

There's really no excuse for this: the world is a much safer place without an "eminence" that is "manifesting the same ability" as Sogyal Lakar. It really is that simple.

Or, as Karen Baxter of the British law firm wrote:

"Based on the evidence available to me, I am satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities: a. some students of Sogyal Lakar (who were part of the 'inner circle', as described later in this report) have been subjected to serious physical, sexual and emotional abuse by him; and b. there were senior individuals within Rigpa who were aware of at least some of these issues and failed to address them, leaving others at risk. Assuming that the Rigpa leadership concludes that the appropriate overall course is to put in place structures and procedures to ensure that its work as an organisation can continue in the future without the risk of harm, I recommend the following: 1. Sogyal Lakar should not take part in any future event organised by Rigpa or otherwise have contact with its students; 2. Rigpa should take steps to disassociate itself from Sogyal Lakar as fully as is possible (having regard to any legal arrangements which may for the time being connect the organisation with him); 3. Rigpa leadership in each country (being the trustees or equivalent) and the Vision Board should, as necessary, be refreshed in order to ensure that; a. its members are unconnected with the harmful events referred to in this report and so can credibly lead the programme of changes required; b. its members are all publically committed to the concept that abuse will not be tolerated by anyone, or against anyone, within Rigpa (including teachers); and c. wherever possible, the leadership should include some members who are unconnected with the student body, for example lay trustees as such would be recognised in the United Kingdom."

[Source: <https://www.rigpa.org/independent-investigation-report>]

Likewise, the British Charity Commission's gave the following reasons for disqualifying Patrick Gaffney from all charities for a period of 8 years:

"Patrick Gaffney was serving as a trustee of the charity, which is based in London and has objects to advance the Buddhist religion. Evidence uncovered by the Commission shows Mr Gaffney had knowledge of instances and allegations of improper acts and sexual and physical abuse against students at the charity. Mr Gaffney failed to take appropriate action in response to this information and is therefore responsible for misconduct and/or mismanagement in the administration of the charity."

[Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/charity-commission-disqualifies-trustee-from-rigpa-fellowship>]

This is an unforced error to boot. After all, prime minister Lobsang Sangay is the first Tibetan to attend Harvard Law School (LL.M. 1996, S.J.D. 2004, the latter is Harvard Law School's most advanced law degree).

[Source: <https://today.law.harvard.edu/lobsang-sangay-ll-m-96-s-j-d-04-named-prime-minister-of-the-tibetan-government-in-exile/>]

Mr. Sangay is a legal scholar and a politician, so he cannot plead ignorance. I am sure he understands fully well what upholding these principles and respecting the judgment of Karen Baxter and the Charity Commission requires.

All things considered, the hypocrisy of the Central Tibetan Administration stance is staggering to me. How can you pose as a champion of human rights, compassion and nonviolence while publicly endorsing a known abuser? Please consider for a moment how much you would have accomplished by just keeping silent.

To help you weigh the adverse effect your stated position has on the image of Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan people and the Central Tibetan Administration, I submit the following press reports for your consideration:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/01/obituaries/sogyal-rinpoche-dies.html>

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/british-cover-up-of-guru-sogyal-rinpoches-sexual-abuse-2lt8kpf92>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/02/trustee-uk-charity-covered-up-abuse-buddhist-guru-rigpa-fellowship>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/obituaries/2019/08/29/sogyal-rinpoche-author-best-selling-tibetan-book-living-dying/>

<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/mort-en-thailande-du-maitre-tibetain-controverse-sogyal-rinpoche-20190829>

<https://www.midilibre.fr/2019/09/02/lex-directeur-du-temple-bouddhiste-de-lodeve-poursuivi-pour-abus-sexuels-est-mort.8389041.php>

Please note that Rigpa's publicity campaign—of which your eulogy is now a constituent part—has prompted an online petition asking Dharma teachers to retract their homage to Sogyal Lakar:

<https://www.change.org/p/mindrolling-jetsün-khandro-dharma-teachers-please-retract-your-homages-to-sogyal>

I therefore request you to reconsider the Central Tibetan Administration's position and statement. The least you can do to make amends, is to publicly acknowledge and deplore the traumas and suffering Sogyal Lakar, enablers like Patrick Gaffney, and Rigpa institutions have caused untold numbers of victims and survivors.

Together with my co-author Mary Finnigan, I have recently published 'Sex and Violence in Tibetan Buddhism: The Rise and Fall of Sogyal Lakar' (Jorvik Press, 2019, <http://jorvikpress.com/books/sex-and-violence-in-tibetan-buddhism/>).

I am sending complimentary copies of our book to the Secretary of the Department of Religion & Culture and the Office of His Holiness the fourteenth Dalai Lama today.

Kind regards,

Rob Hogendoorn, LL.M.
(The Netherlands)