



9 April 2025

We, the undersigned Tibet organisations, express our profound concern regarding the sudden death of 56-year old Tulku Rigzin Hungkar Dorje, the Abbot of Lung Ngon Monastery in Gade County, Golok, Amdo, Tibet [CH: Gande County, Guoluo Prefecture, Qinghai Province] while in detention in Vietnam in late March 2025. We note with alarm the lack of clarity around both the circumstances and exact cause of his death.

According to reports, Tulku Rigzin Hungkar Dorje faced interrogation by Chinese officials in August 2024, allegedly linked to his failure to provide a sufficiently warm reception for the Chinese government-appointed Panchen Lama, and his commitment to preserving Tibetan religion, culture, and language through independent schools.

We are deeply troubled by the reports of his arrest from a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City [Saigon] on 25 March 2025, in a joint operation involving Vietnamese police and Chinese agents, and the subsequent announcement of his death by his monastery, Lung Ngon, on 3 April 2025. Reports further indicate that a group of Chinese officials from the United Front Work Department, Religious Affairs Bureau of Gade County government, the National Security Bureau of Golok prefecture government, and the Qinghai Provincial Intelligence Department, arrived in Vietnam on the morning of 5 April.

Our concerns are compounded by the conflicting accounts of the circumstances surrounding his death, including that the initial cause stated by the Vietnamese authorities was a heart attack and that the Chinese authorities fleetingly presented a death certificate to Lung Ngon Monastery in Tibet, but did not permit the monastery to retain any record or make copies of the documentation.

In line with international legal standards, which establish a duty to investigate any potentially unlawful death, particularly when it occurs in custody, we urge the Vietnamese Government to:

1. **Carry out a full, prompt, transparent, and independent investigation** into the circumstances surrounding the detention and death of Tulku Rigzin Hungkar Dorje¹ and to urgently and fully disclose the findings of the investigation.

¹ This investigation must adhere to international standards, including the UN Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death and the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions

2. **Immediately produce Tulku Rigzin Hungkar Dorje's body** so an autopsy can be performed by independent forensic experts in accordance with international standards.
3. **Ensure Tulku Rigzin Hungkar Dorje's bereaved family and next of kin are kept fully informed** about all proceedings, progress, and findings of the investigation in a timely and appropriate manner.
4. **Facilitate the immediate return of the body of Tulku Rigzin Hungkar Dorje to his family** at the earliest possible time following the investigation, to enable the performance of traditional Tibetan funeral rites.

We emphasise the presumption of state responsibility in cases of death in custody and stress that a failure to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation constitutes a violation of the right to life.

We call upon the international community to urge the Vietnamese Government to uphold international legal obligations and ensure a credible and transparent inquiry into this deeply concerning case.

Signed

International Tibet Network

Free Tibet

Tibet Justice Center

Australia Tibet Council

Tibet Action Institute

Students for a Free Tibet

Students for a Free Tibet - India

and the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the Istanbul Protocol). The Human Rights Committee and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights have both affirmed that investigations of potentially unlawful deaths should be undertaken in accordance with international standards, including the Protocol: General comment No. 36 (2018), para. 27; Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Ortiz Hernández y Otros v. Venezuela*, Judgment, 22 August 2017, paras. 158–161; and Inter-American Court of Human Rights, *Ruiz Fuentes v. Guatemala*, Judgment, 10 October 2019, para. 180.