

TibetInfoNet - Update - Special Report

10 February 2006

ISSN: 1864-1407

Tibetans burn animal skins in Rebkong

In apparent response to a recent appeal by the Dalai Lama to ban the use of endangered species' skins for garments in Tibet, a popular campaign has been launched in the north-eastern area of Rebkong (Qinghai/Amdo). In the course of the campaign, animal furs are collected for voluntary destruction. The climax of the campaign is scheduled for 12 February 2006, when the collected skins will be publicly burnt on a pyre.

The public burning of mainly otter and fox fur trimmings, used to decorate traditional Tibetan festive garments, has been taking place in Qinghai province (the area known to Tibetans as Amdo) almost every day since the local new year, which this year fell on the same day as the Chinese new year (29 January). The centre of the movement appears to be in Rebkong county (Chin: Tongren), Malho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Chin: Huangnan).



A local Chinese language website reported that a campaign was launched in Sakyil village (Chin: Siherji) on 07 February 2006. The campaign was initiated by two villagers, Tseten Gyal and Gonpo Gyal. On the morning of 07 February, they displayed their own otter, fox, leopard and other furs in the large square of Rongwo monastery (Chin: Lungwu). They expressed their intention to burn the skins in the hope that local Tibetans would unite to "change their (...) area's current general trend of competing increasingly with each other in dressing and jewelry", and invited the public to follow their example. Three families spontaneously joined the initiative, thus generating what appears to have become a strong local movement. The furs used to trim clothes are collected and partially burned in front of the owner and onlookers, making them valueless. The campaign is scheduled to end on 12 February 2006, which corresponds in the local Tibetan calendar to the 15th day of the traditional lunar month and the Great Prayer Festival (Tib: monlam chenmo), thus underlining the religious dimension of the campaign. On this day, all the fur trimmings collected will be burned in the public square. Further collections and burnings of animals' skins in other parts of Tibet have been reported, but so far, cannot be confirmed.

The campaign has been introduced in response to speeches made by the Dalai Lama in India in January 2006. The speeches have been conveyed to local people by word of mouth and videos are also said to be in circulation. However, in public the Dalai Lama's name is not mentioned. According to the Rebkong website, "these are mainly non-governmental, spontaneous mass activities". Although local police are said to be irritated by this sudden outburst of environmentalist activities, no negative reactions have been recorded so far.

A Tibetan Conservation Awareness Campaign (TCAC) was formally launched by the Dalai Lama in April 2005. It was initiated by the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the UK-based Care for the Wild International (CFTWI) and the Rowell Fund. The campaign seeks to sensitize the Tibetan community in order that they take proactive roles in wildlife conservation and discourage fellow Tibetans from being involved in wildlife trade. Pictures and footage from Tibet disseminated internationally by the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and the New Delhi-based Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) in September 2005 (see TibetInfoNet's [Special report of 31 January 2006](#)), as well as a number of recent arrests of fugitive wildlife traders in India and Nepal, appear to have given additional boost to the campaign.



At the Kalachakra ceremony held from 5-16 January 2006 at Amravati, Andhra Pradesh (South India), the Dalai Lama expressed his strong disapproval of the wildlife trade and the use of animal skins among Tibetans. Estimates put the total number of participants to the event at 100-125,000, with probably the highest ever number of Tibetans from Tibet attending. Their number is given as 9-10,000, most of whom came from the eastern and north-eastern parts of Tibet where the use of animal skins is particularly wide-spread.

On 10 January 2006 the Dalai Lama began his teaching with a message on wildlife conservation. He said "I am ashamed and don't feel like living when I see all those pictures of people decorating themselves with skins and furs". He also required the participants to carry this message back to Tibet. On 13 January 2006 the Dalai Lama also spoke about the poaching of the endangered

Tibetan antelope or chiru, which was selected by the Chinese authorities as one of the mascots for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. On 16 January he repeated his statements and exhorted Tibetans to live in harmony with wildlife and nature, and requested those from Tibet not to use and trade in such items.

Following his statements, events organized jointly by environmental NGOs and a number of Tibetan associations recorded a large number of participants. Educational film screenings in eastern Tibetan dialects had to be repeated up to ten times. During such a screening session, a businessman from Lhasa declared that he possesses otter skins worth 40,000 Yuan in Tibet and promised to burn these publicly. Around 3,000 Tibetans from Tibet signed a pledge saying they would not wear, buy or sell animal products, which was presented to the Dalai Lama.



© 2008 TibetInfoNet (Reg.Nr. BN8490, Germany). All rights reserved.

TibetInfoNet is an independent information service that provides news and analysis of the current political, economic, social, environmental and human rights situation in Tibet.

Website: www.tibetinfonet.net
Phone: +44 (0) 20 300 206 33
Fax: +49 (0) 2238 9494466
Email: tin@tibetinfonet.net