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**Chinese Accuse Former Middlebury College Student of Espionage:
*Sanders, Leahy Send Letter Demanding Answers Concerning
Ngawang Choephel's Captivity***

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., joined Rep. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., in sending a letter to the Chinese government demanding specific information about the imprisonment of former Middlebury College Student and Tibetan Fulbright Scholar Ngawang Choephel. The lawmakers' action was taken in response to a letter Sanders received from the Chinese Embassy accusing Choephel of being an American-funded spy.

Last month Sanders organized a bi-partisan coalition of 44 members of Congress who joined him in writing a letter to President Jiang Zemin requesting Choephel's release, or a fair and public trial. Shao Wenguang, Counselor for the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, wrote back to Sanders, stating, "We have learned that, funded by some Americans, Ngawang Choephel was sent by the Dalai Lama's "government-in-exile" to Tibet, used the cover of so-called collecting Tibetan folk songs to gather sensitive intelligence and engaged in illegal separatist activities." Sanders said this charge is especially disturbing since it carries the death penalty under Chinese law.

Tuesday, Sanders and Leahy sent a letter to the Chinese Ambassador Li Dauyo demanding the answers to seven specific questions:

- How is Mr. Choephel's health
- Where is Mr. Choephel being held?
- Does Mr. Choephel have access to a private attorney?
- Has Mr. Choephel been formally charged with a crime?
- What is the evidence against Mr. Choephel?
- Who are the Americans alleged to have conspired with Mr. Choephel, as Mr. Wenguang wrote to "gather sensitive intelligence" in Tibet, and what is the evidence of their involvement in such a conspiracy?
- When will Mr. Choephel be brought to trial, and how will the trial be conducted?

The lawmakers wrote, "Along with other Americans of goodwill, we want very much to pursue close, friendly and productive relations between our peoples and governments, but cases like that of Mr. Choephel continue to be a source of widespread concern."

Sanders said he will continue to pressure the Chinese government to push for the release of Ngawang Choephel. The U.S. State Department told Sanders' staff that it intends to pursue the Choephel case, due in large part to the efforts of the many Vermonters who have become involved in the case.

Contact: Steve Bressler at 202-225-4115. (Copies of the letters are available upon request.)