



ASIANEWS N° 1/2010

Newsletter for the Supporters and Friends of Tibet

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Dear friends,
We'd like to wish you a happy 2010 with a few lines of poetry:

‘Since its origins,
the essential and intrinsic condition
of all the infinite beings that exist
has been the state of perfect purity
of the enlightened;
with the knowledge that this is true also for me,
I am committed to the achievement
of supreme fulfilment.’

Lonqenba

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by Andrea dell'Angelo, Director of ASIA Onlus

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EDITORIAL

ADOPT TIBET, 2010 Campaign: We Need You! by Andrea dell'Angelo, Director of ASIA Onlus

Dear friends,

2010 has just begun and we are ready to start again and to welcome the challenges that the New Year brings, with all the commitment required to succeed.

In Tibet, the situation remains very difficult. Many areas are off-limits to foreigners and subject to strict control by the authorities in the People's Republic of China.

Despite major difficulties, ASIA has remained one of the few international organizations and the only Italian NGO present in the Tibetan region, with projects for cultural protection, health and education.

In 2009, we were once again able to observe the preservation and celebration of the traditions and daily customs in areas where we have now been operating for over 15 years. Not only have we managed to maintain the autonomy of many of the schools we have built, but within these structures we have also developed activities designed to reinforce the ethnic and cultural roots for new generations. As Tashi Tsering, headmaster of a primary and secondary school built in the Qinghai province in 1997, recently proudly noted, 'The schools built by ASIA are special schools, where the children continue to be Tibetan. Moreover, thanks to the contributions of our long-distance sponsors, we can offer decent living conditions and a good education so they can build a better future '.

We also had a big achievement in terms of cultural protection: **the reconstruction of Galingteng College**, which is one of the most significant cultural and spiritual centres in eastern Tibet and is of particular importance to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and Yeshe Namkhai.

As you know, the college burnt down last February. It was rebuilt in six months, thanks to the participation of the whole Dzogchen Community, who responded to our appeal with great generosity.

We raised 176,000 euros within a short space of time and were able to sign contracts with local businesses to rebuild the two college buildings.

The reconstruction of the student dormitories and centers for retreat began in July, followed by the spiritual master's quarters and the small classrooms close to the temple.

The work is now close to completion and the Galingteng monks are finally about to return to life in the college ([click here to see up-to-date photographs of the construction work](#)).

This experience has encouraged us to make an even greater commitment and multiply our efforts to **Adopt Tibet**, mindful of the precious cultural and spiritual heritage safeguarded by its people.

Adopt Tibet means getting actively involved: taking concrete action and showing your commitment to the Tibetan population. We have therefore created a new **T-Shirt**, which will be given free to new long-distance sponsors and demonstrate their participation in our next



project: **500 new long-distance sponsorships**. Long-distance sponsorship presents a **major opportunity**. It is a highly effective means of supporting the most vulnerable groups who have a key role in Tibetan society. The new generations and the future: **its children**. The custodians of tradition and memory: **its elders**. The guardians of ancient Tibetan knowledge and spirituality: **its monks**.

With your support we have succeeded in achieving these and many other significant results over the years.

I ask you now to actively participate in our new challenge and support the **Adopt Tibet** campaign.

Help us to extend the **Adopt Tibet** network by persuading friends, relatives and co-workers to become 'long-distance parents' of the Tibetan population.

[Click here for more information about the campaign.](#)

LIVE FROM TIBET – 'On the Road' diary by Roberta Caminiti, Long-distance Sponsorship Project Director



Meet the Girls from Golok School

by Roberta Caminiti, Long-distance Sponsorship Project Director

It's daybreak. Today is a special day and we all know it. In silence, we load up the car with all the necessary equipment: cameras, video cameras, tripods, bundles of documents and a few gifts for the girls sent by supporters. **Today we are finally going to visit Golok School!** For two years it has been impossible for us to organise a supervisory visit to this project. And so me, Federica, Dorjie and Yeshe are very excited and impatient to get there. When the car leaves the main road for the dirt track that leads to the school, we are all on the edge of our seats. At last we arrive. The school is beautiful. Marco, the architect who designs our school buildings using bio-architectural technology, has created a wonderful structure that is comfortable, welcoming, functional and above all warm! The headmaster and teachers give us a warm welcome. The little girls are in class and they watch us curiously through the large windows. One of them peeps out the door but is quickly called back to class by her teacher. The silence that pervades the valley is interrupted by the chiming of the girls' voices as they



recite their lessons. Besides being beautiful, **the school functions effectively.** This can be seen in the results achieved (the Golok girls attained the best results in the county for their Tibetan and English exams), together with the smiles and happiness of the girls who study here. The headteacher tells us that they still need to improve their Mathematics and Chinese tuition, as good training in these areas would allow the girls direct access to secondary education. In addition to these subjects, Golok School offers Traditional Culture, History, Politics, Geography, Chinese, Mathematics and a little Physics and Biology.



We go to visit the girls in their rooms to chat with them for a bit, see what they get up to and check their living conditions. They are very sweet and entertained by the miming that I often resort to on these occasions! After lunch we go to visit the classrooms while the lessons are in progress. And then we have an idea! Why not make some videos to send to our supporters? Why not involve the English teachers in our interviews with the girls? And this is how we find out that the girls from the third year upwards can speak English. Not only that, but I notice an ease and spontaneity in their responses that I've rarely encountered in other school environments. Dorjie notices it too, **you can feel a sense of calm that is surely due to the trusting relationships the teachers have succeeded in fostering.**

We return the next day to concentrate on compiling records for the new girls who will be part of the next long-distance sponsorship project. Having overcome their initial awkwardness, the girls entertain us now with songs and dancing and let themselves get caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment. Everyone helps to fill out the forms and take photographs, and we laugh when a yak poses behind the girls being photographed. This collective, close participation fills us with cheer.

The sun is about to set, and before we say goodbye the teachers give us letters that the girls



have prepared for their sponsors. They are right to be proud of them, the drawings are beautiful. The older girls have even woven some gifts from coloured wool by hand. The thing that moves us more than anything is a book that the school has published containing poetry, essays and drawings by the girls with long-distance sponsors.

We say goodbye to everyone and get back in the car. We are happy, almost euphoric, and glad to have seen the results of our work with our own eyes. **The school is probably one of the best in the area and the fact that it is the first school devoted entirely to girls is extremely important.**

The girls receive care and attention, and the project has had positive effects on the local population. An increase in the average education level for nomadic women, who have a key role in the traditional Tibetan social system, has produced positive effects for the wellbeing of the community as a whole and will continue to do so.

Reaching these achievements is the result of positive teamwork. The creation of this school has in fact been possible thanks to the joint efforts of many individuals, and is a concrete example of the significant results that can be attained by working together towards a major common goal. **I leave Golok full of energy, fresh motivation and the desire to take action. I hope to succeed in sharing these feelings with our supporters on my return to Rome. It is thanks to their silent backing and their trust that we are able to carry forward a project such as this.**

If you would like to support this project and help the Golok girls to become women, [start a long-distance sponsorship.](#)

The 'On the Road' diary from Roberta's LIVE FROM TIBET mission has been published on Facebook, accompanied by short videos and photos. [Watch the Golok children video.](#)

REPORTS: A few words from our supporters



[Pleased to Meet You](#)

by [Federico Ballarin](#) – long-distance 'parent'

After the overnight bus journey from Delhi to McLeod Ganj, we decided to treat ourselves to



a taxi to reach Chauntra, a small village in Himachal Pradesh very close to Bir.

A Tibetan community has been established here and two colleges have been built. One is the Tibetan Central School for Tibetans (TCS), the other is the Tibetan Children's Village (TCV). The aim of our trip to Chauntra is to meet two young Tibetan girls: Tenzin Choedon and Tenzin Sandol.

Tenzin Choedon is just five years old and attends the TCS nursery school, where she has already lived for two years. The teacher who looks after her tells us that the girl has not seen her parents since she arrived because her family can't afford the bus fare.

When we meet Tenzin Choedon she watches us: a little shy, a little curious and perhaps a little frightened. The ladies from the school try to explain who we are and encourage her to make friends with us. Only a month ago the Zhenphenling center for the Dzogchen Community in Rome, to which we belong, became her long-distance sponsor. We are greatly separated from her by age, distance and language, but we begin to communicate with glances and smiles, until she agrees to take Lucilla and I by the hand and accompany us on a tour of the school courtyard.

The next day we go on a visit to the TCV, which is around a kilometer away from the TCS. On the way we pass by an enormous monastery with a beautiful gompa (temple).

The school practises the Montessori pedagogical method and very close attention is paid to the students' diet; they are not allowed fizzy drinks for example. I am pleased to learn that my 'daughter' is being raised with such a comprehensive approach. Yes, my daughter, because I have been sponsoring Tenzin Sandol's studies for more than a year and I can't wait to meet her. She arrives from her class in school uniform. I had only seen her in a photograph and she looked moody, but now that I meet her I realise that it's not the case at all. She is wonderfully full of energy with a bright and direct gaze. She has already learned a few words in English, but it is the director who performs the introductions. As a gift from Italy we've brought her a red-and-yellow-striped 'Totti' football shirt. ASIA had told us that the boys and girls alike are football fans, or at least they love the famous team shirts. We make friends with Sandol, who accompanies us with a teacher on a tour of the kitchen, dormitories, library, computer laboratory, the school's small gompa, and finally her classroom.

The next day we go to Bir, with the two girls and Mr. Gyalpo of the TCS as our guides. In the center of the village stands a Nyingmapa monastery with a beautiful temple, which we visit. We then go into a shop and buy some clothes and shoes for the girls. Choedon, the youngest, tries on everything without batting an eyelid, pleased with the sandals that fit her perfectly. Sandol, however, would like some more trendy, grown-up shoes. However, we try to explain to her that when we asked her teacher what she needed, she recommended something comfortable and practical. We manage to convince her to take a look at the outdoor sandals too and choose her favourite pair. When we leave the shop, Sandol takes us by the hand and drags us towards the village center, crying enthusiastically, 'Here is my house!' At her home, we are greeted by an aunt, who makes us welcome and offers us a cool drink. Unfortunately, we can't stay long as Mr. Gyalpo is waiting to take us on a visit to another monastery further up towards the hill. We finish the drink, say goodbye, and continue our trip. Sandol is pleased to have shown us her house and introduced us to her relatives. We set off by Jeep and stop to watch the paragliders taking off the hill on the way to the



second monastery. When we visit the monastery we get the sensation that we have arrived in Tibet, surrounded by the beauty of 108 stupas of varying dimensions. It stands out white in the midst of the green pines. For the residents of Bir, many Tibetan refugees, others born here, it is a piece of Tibet that has been transplanted from just beyond the Himalayas. The evening soon arrives and we celebrate together in a restaurant. The next day it is time to leave. We would have liked to stay longer but we don't want to disrupt the children's lives, their studies or their playtime with friends.

It wasn't easy to let go of little Tenzin Choedon's hug, or look away from Tenzin Sandol's smile! We leave feeling that we now have two more daughters, not just two little girls to whom we offer financial support. Hanging from a wall in the TCV is a quote by Gandhi: 'Happiness does not lie in what you receive, but in that which you succeed in giving to others'.

REPORTS : A few words from our supporters



Tibet in the Woods

by Stefano Nicoli – long-distance 'parent'

The theme of the summer camp for students of the Frati Cappuccini di Schio (VI) parish secondary school was 'Momo and the Value of Time'. Various associations organised a series of stands with displays to encourage reflection on what it means to **'give up your time for others'**. Among these, ASIA had created a project in a very evocative setting.

They had in fact made a woodland trail with coloured posters containing information about the association and its projects, which gave the 60 youngsters a powerful experience of the problems faced by the Tibetan population. In small groups aided by an adult leader, the children learned about the school construction and long-distance sponsorship projects that ASIA manages, and were encouraged to reflect on the importance of preserving cultural identity. They were told how long-distance sponsorship projects are a concrete means of helping the Tibetan population to preserve their culture and traditions.

Evening prayers were one of the high point of the camp. Here it was clear that many of the children's hearts had been touched by an understanding of the problems faced by a population, together with an explanation of how in reality it is possible to help.



EVENTS & NEWS

Spinning For Tibet!

The second edition of this demonstration of solidarity took place in Grottaferrata on Sunday 29 November. Last year funds were raised for the construction of the school in Derge. This year the objective of the three spinning sessions in aid of Tibet was to fund a long-distance sponsorship.

Mission accomplished and sponsorship activated!

'Contrasti' – Photography Exhibition in Brescia

The photographs were taken by Alberto Giuliani and Carlo Meazza, two well-known professional photographers with a particular commitment to fostering awareness of different cultures and distant populations. They narrate the contradictions that characterise modern Tibet.

On one hand, we witness the silence and introspection of the monasteries, the deepest spirituality, the magical and desolate moorland, and the omnipresence of sacredness; on the other, the deterioration of the environment, both urban and social, caused by prostitution, lack of job security, corruption and neglect.

The exhibition was organised by ASIA in collaboration with the Dzogchen Community of Brescia. It was inaugurated on November 28, 2009 at 17 :00 at the National Museum of Photography (Vicolo San Faustino, 2 – Brescia) and ended on December 27.

Pollenzo Adopts Tibet !

On November 19, ASIA hosted '*Adopt Tibet*', an evening dedicated to the Tibetan population held at the 'Agenzia di Pollenzo' in Bra in the province of Cuneo. The event, organised by 'Un Ponte di Pollenzo' Association, was an excellent opportunity to introduce the community of Pollenzo to life in Tibet through stories and images. Linda Fidanzia of ASIA and two of our long-distance 'parents', Mario Ciravegna and Alessandro Vetrò, shared their personal experiences in order to highlight the importance of long-distance sponsorship as a means of helping the Tibetan population to maintain its cultural identity and achieve a better future. At the end of the evening the president of 'Il Ponte' Association announced that the board members were going to become long-distance sponsors of a Tibetan child!

The Rights of the Child Around the World - Albese

On the International Day of the Rights of the Child, ASIA participated at a round table, organized by the Albese municipality in the province of Como, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the ratification of the United Nations Declaration. The focus of the event was children in developing countries, and many people attended to listen with interest to the representatives of children's associations.



Solidarity Dinner in Modena!

In what has now become tradition, the Modena group organized a solidarity dinner in aid of the Tibetan population on November 13. The event was a great success again this year: it was attended by more than 50 people, who watched a presentation on ASIA's activities and a video on long-distance sponsorship. The outcome of the evening was more than satisfactory: the long-distance sponsorship of a Tibetan boy, Sherah Tapal, who for the next three years will have the chance to study at the school in Derge!