



NAROPA UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Naropa University Statement Regarding Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

July 5, 2018

The Board of Trustees of Naropa University met in special session on Sunday, July 1, 2018 to discuss the serious allegations of sexual misconduct by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. None of the alleged conduct took place at Naropa, nor did they occur in the Sakyong's performance of any role at Naropa. However, that does not make the need for these Board actions any less important for the integrity of our Naropa Community.

The Sakyong holds the role of Naropa Lineage Holder and, by virtue of that position, is also an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Board. These positions, while largely honorific and symbolic, attempt to reflect Naropa University's roots in, and inspiration from, the 2500 year living inheritance of the Buddhist and Shambhala lineages.

We have reviewed the accounts presented by several women, who, at the time of the encounters were members of Shambhala International, relating abuse that occurred as recently as 2011. We find the accounts of these women to be credible and believable. The Sakyong and the Kalapa Council, the governance body of Shambhala International, the religious organization presided over by the Sakyong, have not denied the allegations and, in part, have apologized for the misconduct. These two factors-credible allegations and some acknowledgement by the Sakyong provide sufficient basis for, and require us to take, immediate action.

Therefore the Board has asked the Sakyong to resign from both his role as an ex officio member of the Board and as the current Naropa Lineage Holder. The Board seat is created in our corporate bylaws which also covers the resignation of a member. The Lineage Holder position was created by resolution of the Board in 2000 and may be vacated or modified by action of the Board or by resignation. **The Sakyong has agreed to resign from both positions effective immediately.**

We did not take this action lightly. Naropa University is legally independent from Shambhala International (and has been since 1987), and most of our staff, faculty, students, trustees and alumni do not identify as members of the Shambhala organization. But a great many do, so these complex and painful issues are very personal to many connected to Naropa. Naropa and Shambhala International share a founder in Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche and share a vast lineage of contemplative practice and meditation in action in an unbroken stream going back to the teachings of Gautama Buddha. Thus, the transgressions of a lineage holder wound Naropa just

as they wound the community in which the Lineage Holder is more actively engaged. The imperative to illuminate and rebuke such transgressions are Naropa's imperatives as well.

For Naropa the value of having a connection with a living Lineage Holder who represents the energy which empowers our work can be a good thing. But it is not essential to our continued ability to thrive. The absence of a Lineage Holder does not cut the connection to our lineage of contemplative pedagogy and compassionate and skillful action. Thousands of people have studied and worked at Naropa over our forty-four year history. Most had no personal connection to a particular lineage or teacher. However their experience here was in no way incomplete.

The container which is Naropa University is a product of the wisdom, insight, knowledge and commitment of faculty, staff and students, and the countless compassionate and brilliant teachers, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, whose diligent efforts over 2 ½ millennia created the conditions that allowed Naropa University to emerge. That is the energy field we draw upon and will continue to draw upon, and which does not disappear if a Lineage Holder must step down and the position is vacant for a time.

This statement and the actions within it are meant to address the specific unacceptable behavior by the Sakyong. However, we understand that there is much work to be done at Naropa and elsewhere, and that this action, while significant, does not relieve us from continuing institutional and individual sensitivity, vigilance, and accountability in this area. All institutions, including Naropa, must honestly and meaningfully address the issues raised regarding sexual misconduct and abuse of power and the creation and perpetuation of toxic environments which give rise to them. Such events illuminate the need to redouble our commitment to transparency and equity in its broadest sense. That is work the Board of Trustees will continue to undertake, and we will do whatever we can to encourage and support such efforts throughout Naropa.

We do not know what further steps will be taken within Shambhala International or by the Sakyong personally. The timing of actions by Shambhala International is not ours to manage or control. We hope for an outcome that leads to healing and impactful change. Our obligation is to Naropa University, its community and its legacy. The imperative for us as individuals and communities, to recognize, take responsibly, reconcile, heal and move forward more strongly is at the heart of our mission.

Best Wishes,



Jerry Colonna
Chair of the Board of Trustees



Charles G. Lief
President