

LOCAL NEWS

Boulder's Naropa University removes Shambhala International leader from its board



CLIFF GRASSMICK / DAILY CAMERA

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche presents the Living Peace Award to the Dalai Lama at the Shambhala Mountain Retreat in Larimer County in 2006.



By **CARINA JULIG | FOR THE CAMERA** | CU Independent

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Boulder's Naropa University this week removed Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche from its Board of Trustees, saying it found the [allegations of sexual misconduct](#) against the leader of Shambhala International to be “credible and believable.”

Additionally, the members of Boulder-born Shambhala's governing body, the Kalapa Council, announced Friday that they will all step down from their posts.

A [report published last week by Project Sunshine](#) contained anonymous accounts from multiple women accusing Mipham of sexual assault. So far, neither Mipham nor the Kalapa Council have confirmed or denied the allegations, though Mipham sent out a letter in advance of the report's publication apologizing for “harm” in past relationships with women.

Responses from other Shambhala leaders have been slow to arrive, but a [change.org](#) petition calling for Mipham to step down has gathered more than 600 signatures.

Naropa, the Buddhist-inspired university created by Shambhala's late founder Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, [announced Thursday](#) that its Board of Trustees met July 1 to discuss the allegations against Mipham, and found the women's accounts to be “credible and believable.” The board subsequently requested that Mipham resign from his roles as ex officio board member and Naropa Lineage Holder, which he agreed to do immediately.

Mipham did not have a vote on the board, and the two roles were largely ceremonial and based on Shambhala's importance to Naropa's history. Naropa University has been independent from Shambhala International since 1987, and the statement clarified that none of Mipham's alleged sexual misconduct took place at Naropa or in his role as a board member.

“However, that does not make the need for these Board actions any less important for the integrity of our Naropa community,” the statement said.

Charles Lief, president of Naropa University and co-signer of the statement, said that he was “saddened” by the situation at Shambhala, as he and a number of faculty and staff have personal connections to the organization. He said that it is possible Mipham or another representative from Shambhala could regain the board seat in the future, but for now the board believes the allegations are serious enough to warrant his removal.

The director of the Boulder Shambhala Center — the first of the now more than 200 meditation centers under the umbrella of Halifax, Nova Scotia-based Shambhala International — has said there have been no reported cases of sexual misconduct at the Boulder center since she began her term in 2015.

Mipham owns a home in unincorporated Boulder County, according to property records.

The Kalapa Council, Shambhala's governing body, announced Friday that all of its members will [step down](#) from their posts “in the interest of beginning a healing process for our community.”

It also said that the council has engaged Wickwire Holm, a law firm based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, to conduct an independent investigation into allegations of abuse or misconduct by Shambhala teachers and leaders.

It was not specified whether the council members will be stepping down permanently or only for the duration of the independent investigation. The statement said there will be a phased departure in order to create a smooth transition, and did not give a specific timeline.

The Office of the Sakyong also [released a statement](#) Friday in which Mipham announced that he is “stepping back” from his administrative and teaching responsibilities within Shambhala, and that he fully supports a third-party investigation into the allegations against him. The statement said he is entering “a period of self-reflection.”

Andrea Winn, the creator of the first and second Project Sunshine reports, said that after working on the projects for more than a year, she is [stepping back](#) from her role as an activist.

She expressed disappointment in the Kalapa Council's reactions to the allegations so far, especially its hiring of public relations firm Hiltzik Strategies. The New York City firm is run by Matthew Hiltzik, who has represented high-profile clients including Glenn Beck, Harvey Weinstein and Katie Couric.