

**Written Statement of Teng Biao
Before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

April 8, 2014

I am a human rights lawyer from China. My name is Teng Biao.

In March, just before First Lady Michelle Obama gave a talk at the prestigious Peking University during her visit to China, I tweeted to draw her attention to the plight of two remarkable Peking University alumni: Cao Shunli and Xu Zhiyong.

On March 14, human rights activist Cao Shunli died in detention after being tortured and then denied medical treatment.

The last time I saw Ms. Cao was in Hong Kong at an international human rights workshop in early 2013. She had been released for the second time from detention in a *laojiaosuo*, a Reeducation Through Labor camp, and had immediately jumped back into the fray of defending human rights. In September last year the authorities at the Beijing International Airport where she was en route to Geneva to participate in the UN Human Rights Universal Periodic Review prevented Cao Shunli from leaving China. She was then abducted and detained for the third time, but this time, she did not come out alive.

For the past ten years, Dr. Xu Zhiyong has been one of the most prominent figures in the Chinese civil rights movement.

The last time I was in contact with him was a few days before he was formally arrested. He sent me a record of his conversation with the secret police. The government gave him several opportunities to compromise: if he agreed to abandon the New Citizens Movement he would be spared from incarceration. Dr. Xu refused outright to compromise.

He said, if fighting for citizen's rights and freedom is a crime, he was willing to pay the price. He prayed to God with these words: "I love mankind, and for this love I am willing to face death."

Dr. Xu was sentenced to four years in jail. He was charged with "disturbing public order" while publicly campaigning for equal rights of the children of migrant laborers in cities, and demanding officials disclose assets in order to combat corruption. Several dozen

supporters of Xu Zhiyong and the New Citizen's Movement have been arrested and will soon be put on trial.

Incomplete statistics reveal that since March 31 last year, at least 200 rights advocates have been arrested, including human rights activists like Guo Feixiong, Zhang Lin, and Zhao Changqing who have been imprisoned numerous times for political reasons since 1989; rights lawyers like Ding Jiayi; Zhang Shaojie, a pastor at a Christian Church in Henan province, and Ilham Tohti, a Uighur scholar who has been a long-time advocate of peaceful dialogue between Uighurs and Han Chinese.

It can be confirmed that during this crackdown, many human rights activists have been subjected to inhumane torture while incarcerated. People now released who were tortured include Ding Hongfen, Shen Jun, Song Ze; while Li Biyun, Huang Wenxun, Yuan Fengchu, Yuan Xiaohua, Liu Ping, Wei Zhongping, Li Sihua and others continue to be detained. All of these people were incarcerated for participating in peaceful and legal human rights activities. Almost at the same time Cao Xunli died in custody, 43-year-old Tibetan political detainee Goshul Lobsang was tortured to death in Kanlho (Gannan).

Many prisoners of conscience are connected to the New Citizens Movement. The earlier incarnation of the New Citizens Movement was a group called *Gongmeng*, or Open Constitution Initiative, founded by Xu Zhiyong and myself in 2003. The Open Constitution Initiative focussed on issues like freedom of speech, freedom of religious belief, opposition to torture, and opposition to the unfair household registration system. It actively joined in a large number of human rights cases such as those involving Gao Zhisheng and Chen Guangcheng, as well as producing an investigative report on the 14 March 2008 unrest in Tibet.

The New Citizens Movement advocates "Freedom, Justice and Love" to encourage ordinary people to fight for citizens rights and unite human rights advocates around the country. Its activities include: promoting educational equality, pressing officials to disclose their assets, and arranging for like-minded people to have meals together. Since 2003 the rights defence movement has taken advantage of social media and internet technology, including on-line mobilisation, open letter writing campaigns, signature campaigns, leaflet distribution, pro bono legal work, street corner speeches, and peaceful protests, to bring the citizens rights movement to new heights.

Why is the Chinese government savagely suppressing the Citizens Rights Movement and individual rights activists?

Since its inception in 2003, the rights defence movement has made great progress. The earlier ground work of and the sacrifices made by activists, and the intensification of social

conflicts reveal several trends: 1) Rights activists are coming out from cyberspace activism into real-world activism. 2) The movement is growing beyond individual cases to becoming active on the streets. 3) The activists are moving away from legal appeals towards political appeals. 4) Individual activists are gradually joining together creating a semblance of organisation. Examples are: Charter 08, the Chinese Human Rights Lawyers Group and the New Citizens Movement.

The authorities sense an obvious threat as the rights movement has progressed towards the New Citizens Movement. However, the rulers of China are unwilling to engage in dialogue and absolutely refuse to relinquish their totalitarian privileges. Under the guise of maintaining stability above all, the authorities brutally punish anyone who in their mind dares to threaten their legitimacy to rule China.

The government's heavy-handed crackdown will of course frighten some people, but cannot resolve social problems in Chinese society. On the contrary, suppression will only intensify conflicts and problems. Many rules and regulations in China directly violate people's dignity and freedom. The fissures in our society will become wider and calls for rights and democracy will become more intense if we do not make substantial adjustments to the country's legal and political systems. More and more people are standing up to demand rights and democracy.

For example, a few days ago, thousands of residents in Maoming, in Guangdong Province in southern China, risked their lives to take to the streets to protest plans for a paraxylene (PX) project which possess serious pollution risks.

Also recently, in Jiansanjiang in Heilongjiang Province in northern China, a number of lawyers were detained by local police for investigating a "Legal Education Center," informally known as a "brainwashing class," which is used to imprison innocent citizens without any legal procedure.

Three of these lawyers were roped and hung up while police punched and beat them with police batons.

Why did lawyers and citizens stand up and take on these "brainwashing classes"? Because they are modern-day concentration camps. Countless Falun Gong practitioners have been sent by the authorities to "brainwashing classes" or Re-education Through Labor camps. At least 3,000 people have been tortured to death in such places since 1999.

As a result of their advocacy of freedom, many human rights activists lose their own freedom. I recall the time in 2011 when the secret police in Beijing kidnapped me and held

me in a secret location for 70 days, during which time I was subject to tortures including sleep deprivation, being punched and kicked, and being held in solitary confinement. While the secret police used violence against me, they frankly declared, “Don’t talk to us about the law. No one can help you now.”

But I never for a moment gave up hope. My longing for justice and freedom gave me strength. Another source of strength was my firm belief that my friends in jail and on the outside would continue to fight, because we share the same dream for freedom. I firmly believe that our numbers will grow and that our calls for freedom will ultimately stun this savage totalitarian regime to its core.

I also firmly believe that outside China, in the USA, in Europe and in every corner of the world where the light of freedom shines, while the struggle for human dignity continues, we will not be forgotten.

I greatly admire the members of Congress and the American government for your efforts in advocating freedom and human rights. However, the international pressure on violators of human rights around the world is far from adequate. The Chinese government not only manipulates the international human rights system, it also makes use of its economic, military and political influence in order to blackmail great democratic nations. It threatens not to purchase Boeing jets if America criticises the Chinese human rights situation. It threatens not to purchase Airbuses if European leaders meet with the Dalai Lama. At many international conferences Chinese human rights has become the elephant in the room.

How much economic benefit can we afford to sacrifice for the freedom of humanity? When people make this calculation they are already on the wrong track. Oppressors of freedom will not desist, they will not respect national boundaries, they will not abide by international principles they have promised to follow and they take advantage of the internet and economic globalisation, they take advantage of flawed international institutions (the most egregious violators of human rights have colluded to infiltrate the UN Human Rights Council, and non-democratic regimes in the UN are betraying the interests of their own peoples as well as universal human rights). The oppressors of freedom are becoming more powerful by taking advantage of the head-in-the-sand policies of democratic countries and “the silence of the good”. By the time the free world becomes aware of the need to protect freedom, I fear it may well be too late.