

Congressional Executive Commission on China

Hearing on Prominent, Imprisoned Human Rights Lawyer Gao Zhisheng

Testimony of Geng He, Wife of Disappeared Chinese Human Rights Lawyer Gao Zhisheng

February 14, 2012

Greetings Mr. Chairman and Mr. Co-Chairman. Thank you for inviting me to speak about my husband, imprisoned Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. I would like to thank the Congressional-Executive Commission on China for holding this hearing today and everyone in attendance for your interest in Zhisheng's case.

Zhisheng, a well-known lawyer in China, represented some of the country's most vulnerable citizens. He represented plaintiffs who lost their land to development projects like the 2008 Summer Olympics. He defended factory workers that were arrested after they demonstrated against low wages and long hours. He represented members of Christian house churches and practitioners of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement. But as Zhisheng once said, "you cannot be a rights lawyer in [China] without becoming a rights case yourself."

In 2005, the government suspended Zhisheng's law license and closed his law firm after he refused to drop his most sensitive cases. He was convicted of inciting subversion in 2006 after confessing in the face of threats against our children. Since then, our lives have been turned upside down. The government placed our family under constant surveillance. Police moved into our apartment building and followed us everywhere. Even worse, the government has repeatedly abducted and tortured Zhisheng.

In September 2007, authorities disappeared Zhisheng and held him for over 50 days after he wrote an open letter to the U.S. Congress exposing human rights abuses in China. Policemen

covered his head with a black mask and took him into a room where they stripped him naked and beat him. They used electric batons to shock him all over his body—specifically his private parts—turning his skin black. After losing consciousness from the torture, he awoke covered in urine. Later, his captors used cigarette smoke to burn his eyes so severely that he could not open them. They even stabbed his private parts with toothpicks. Zhisheng asked them to lock him up in a prison, but they refused. They said, “You are simply dreaming if you want to go to prison. We can make you disappear whenever we want to.” And that is what they’ve done.

In order to protect our children, I escaped with them to the United States in January 2009. The next month, the authorities abducted Zhisheng again. This time the government held him for over a year before he briefly reappeared the following spring. In an interview with the *Associated Press*, Zhisheng described even more torture during the disappearance. Police beat him with handguns for two days and nights. He said these were the worst beating he had ever endured—that his life “hung by a thread.” Soon after the interview he disappeared again.

I last spoke to Zhisheng on April 17, 2010, my daughter Grace’s 16th birthday. Since then, our family has been burdened with constant uncertainty. Zhisheng’s absence has caused my daughter severe emotional anguish; she dreams that her father is dead. My son has tears in his eyes on Father’s Day. He tells his teachers that he doesn’t have a father. Recently, we were forced to endure rumors that guards had tortured Zhisheng to death.

Then in December, less than one week before Zhisheng’s probation was scheduled to end, Chinese authorities added to our uncertainty by claiming that he would spend the next three years in a prison in Xinjian. All they said was that Zhisheng violated his parole; they didn’t even say what he supposedly did wrong. This news came just before the holidays. In the past we tried

to avoid the holidays, in no mood to celebrate without news about Zhisheng. But this year it was even worse.

Some people have asked us if we are relieved because the government says that he is alive. But the news has not brought us any peace of mind. In fact, we are more worried than ever. Zhisheng's brother and my father traveled a long distance to the prison in Xinjian, but authorities rejected their request to see him. They claimed that he could not have visitors because he is undergoing a three-month "education period" and that he didn't want to see any family. The government has lied so many times that we don't know what to believe. We don't know if he is at the prison in Xinjian. We don't know if guards are torturing him again. We don't even know if he is still alive.

Today, I would like to ask for your help. Please help my children get their father back. Please help free a voice for China's most vulnerable.

Zhisheng is a lawyer. His sense of justice and outstanding eloquence moved even the hearts of judges in the Chinese communist system. Zhisheng's case shows that the Chinese communist regime is simply lying when it claims to respect the rule of law—the rule of law that Zhisheng fought so hard to protect. By locking him away, the government has silenced his voice. Now, the international community must speak out on his behalf. I have brought with me some of Zhisheng's writings and an *Associated Press* article about the torture he faced and ask that they be included in the record so that Zhisheng's own words will be a part of these proceedings.

It comes as no small irony to me that while I am down here speaking to you, Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping is just up Pennsylvania Avenue meeting with President Obama at the White House. While I am always pleased to be among such great friends and champions for human rights, I would have wanted just a moment with Vice President Xi to ask why he and the

Chinese government has to continue to torture my husband, me, and my two young children. I had thought up to now that the Obama Administration was strongly acting on my husband's behalf. But I am saddened and surprised it has appeared to downplay China human-rights concerns before this visit. I didn't even get a reply from the White House to my request to see Vice President Biden to tell him of my family's suffering and I read in news reports that while he met a number of Chinese scholars and human rights experts, he intentionally avoided meeting any victims of Chinese human rights abuses to avoid offending the Chinese government. Such self-censorship by the United States gives license to the Chinese government to act with impunity.

I am so grateful that the United States has provided protection to my family from the Chinese government, which we so desperately needed. But I need to ask that all of you – including President Obama and Vice President Biden – continue to call on the Government of China to respect the human rights of all its citizens, including Zhisheng. I ask that you continue to report on his case so that the truth about his treatment at the hands of the government will be known to the world. And I hope and pray that with your help, my husband will regain his freedom and my family can be together once again. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak here today. I would welcome any questions you may have.