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## CHINA CSW and LCF deliver petition calling for release of Gao Zhisheng to Chinese Embassy

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Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and the Lawyers Christian Fellowship (LCF) will deliver a petition signed by 150,000 people to the Chinese Embassy in London on International Human Rights Day. The petition calls on the Chinese government to release missing Christian human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng.

A prominent self-taught lawyer, Gao, who was once named one of China's Top Ten Lawyers by the Ministry of Justice and was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, attracted attention from the authorities for defending cases of religious persecution, including house church leaders and Falun Gong practitioners. In 2007 he wrote an open letter to US Congress highlighting the use of torture by Chinese authorities.

He first went missing on 4 February 2009, and following a brief reappearance in March 2010, went missing again on 20 April. He has been tortured in previous detention and there are grave concerns for Gao's health and welfare. Gao's wife and two children have sought political asylum in the US.

The petition, coordinated through the FreeGao.com website set up by US-based China Aid, includes signatures from 150,000 individuals from 180 countries. It will be accompanied with a letter to Ambassador Liu Xiaoming expressing "deep concern" for Gao's "welfare, condition and situation" and requesting the Chinese government to "take immediate action to release Gao Zhisheng immediately".

The request for Gao's release comes on the day of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo. Liu Xiaobo, this year's winner, is in prison in China and cannot receive the prize in person. His wife, Liu Xia has been under strict house arrest in Beijing since the prize was announced and the Chinese government appears to have cracked down on dissidents in previous weeks, lest they attempt to attend the ceremony.

Chen Guangcheng, a blind human rights lawyer, remains under strict house arrest at his home in Shandong province. In Beijing, Dr. Fan Yafeng, leader of the Chinese Christian Human Rights Lawyers Association whose members are renowned for taking on human rights and religious freedom cases, is also under house arrest and subject to constant police harassment in Beijing since being warned not to speak to foreign journalists on 12 October. In the latest incident, Dr. Fan reported that since 4 December his wife and mother are being closely monitored and followed. The academic and house church leader has also been banned from contacting foreigners and holding Christian meetings in his home.

CSW's Advocacy Director, Andrew Johnston said, "On International Human Rights Day we join many in China and around the world in remembering Gao Zhisheng, whose life and work continues to be an inspiration. His disappearance has lasted too long and represents a grave denial of rights to a Chinese citizen. CSW calls upon the Chinese government to release Gao Zhisheng and all those under house arrest in China for daring to speak up for injustice."