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CHINA CSW calls for release of Gao Zhisheng and Dr. Fan Yafeng as Chinese President visits U.S.

As Chinese President Hu Jintao's state visit to the US draws to a close, CSW calls on the Chinese government to release Gao Zhisheng and Dr Fan Yafeng. The call follows new reports confirming Gao's torture in detention.

Speaking a press conference in Washington, Hu Jintao reiterated that China is a developing country before admitting, "...a lot still needs to be done in China in terms of human rights".

On 10 January Associated Press published an interview with Gao from March 2010, in which he confirms his extreme torture during his disappearance. Gao told the interviewer how he had been beaten with pistols, tied up with plastic bags and, on one occasion, tortured incessantly for 48 hours. The prominent self-taught human rights lawyer, twice-nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, first went missing on February 4, 2009. Following a brief reappearance in March 2010, Gao went missing again on April 20; his current whereabouts are unknown. Gao's wife and two children fled from China and are now living as refugees in the US.

Gao, who was once named one of China's Top Ten Lawyers by the Ministry of Justice, first attracted attention from 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.

In China, an open letter signed by 19 Chinese human rights lawyers calling for an end to the use of torture in detention was released this week. The letter expresses grave concern at the harsh torture of Gao, as well as the treatment of Dr. Fan Yafeng, head of the Chinese Christian Human Rights Lawyers Association, who was subject to inhumane treatment by police, including being hooded and beaten, during questioning in December 2010. Dr. Fan remains under strict house arrest in Beijing.

Hu Jintao's state visit to the US is the first by a Chinese President for 13 years. Earlier this month, Chinese Vice-President, Li Keqiang, visited the UK for talks on trade and the environment. The US and UK governments are under pressure from NGOs and activists not to sideline human rights in talks about the economy.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "As Hu Jintao returns to China from the US, CSW calls upon the Chinese President to live up to his commitment to do more in the name of human rights by releasing Gao Zhisheng and ending the house arrest of Dr Fan Yafeng. China's rise in economic power must be matched by a commitment to abide by international and domestic law in the treatment of its citizens."