



8.12.2011

CHINA CSW calls for release of Gao Zhisheng at end of probation period

The missing Christian human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng's 2006 probationary sentence for "subversion of state power" is due to expire on August 14. He has not been heard from for almost 18 months and repeated inquiries to the Chinese authorities have not been met with a response.

Gao Zhisheng was sentenced three years' imprisonment and five years' probation in 2006. In a letter to Gao, published by China Aid, his wife Geng He wrote, "This August 14 is the last day of the probation period and should be the date when you regain freedom. I am looking forward to this day and to hearing your voice and to our family being reunited. The whole family looks forward to this day!"

The prominent self-taught 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 as he travelled home to Beijing after visiting relatives in Xinjiang province. He reported being subject to severe torture in detention and there are grave concerns for his health and wellbeing. Gao's wife and two children fled from China and are now living as political asylees in the US.

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

The request for Gao's release comes as other prominent Chinese human rights defenders are under pressure. Blind human rights lawyer, Chen Guangcheng, is being held with his wife and six-year-old daughter in severe conditions under house arrest in Shandong province. Christian leaders are also under pressure. Pastor Shi Enhao, Deputy Chairman of the Chinese House Church Alliance, is beginning a two-year re-education through labour sentence for "holding illegal religious meetings". 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.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "CSW calls upon the Chinese government to release Gao Zhisheng at the end of his probationary period. Gao's life and work continues to be an inspiration to many around the world who speak out against injustice. 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."