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## **CHINA | Gao Zhisheng's Family Members Allowed First Prison Visit Since March 2012**

The younger brother and father-in-law of Christian human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, were allowed to visit him at Shaya Prison in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on Jan. 12, the first family visit he has received since March 2012. In a phone conversation with Human Rights in China, Gao's wife, Geng He, reported that Gao's mind seemed 'clear' and he spoke normally.

Gao Zhisheng, a prominent Beijing human rights lawyer who has defended Falun Gong practitioners and house church Christians, was first detained in 2009. Following international pressure Gao reappeared in March 2010, during which time he told the Associated Press that he had been severely tortured while in detention. He disappeared again in April 2010. Nothing was known of his whereabouts until Dec. 16, 2011 when the Chinese news agency, Xinhua, reported that Gao had violated the terms of his probation and had been returned to prison for 3 years. Gao's brother, Gao Zhiyi, has repeatedly requested permission to visit him in prison.

This month's visit is important confirmation that Gao is still alive. In August 2012, two rights defense lawyers who travelled from Beijing to meet with Gao were told that he did not want to see any family or lawyers. Then in November 2012, on the eve of the 18th National Party Congress, Gao's family received a letter purporting to be from Gao himself instructing them not to visit him. His brother thought the letter was strange and became worried for Gao's safety.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "CSW is very pleased that two members of Gao Zhisheng's family have been allowed to visit him in prison. However, we remain concerned about the lack of information about Gao's well-being and the schedule for his release. We urge the Chinese authorities to allow Gao's family and legal representatives access to him in prison and to ensure that he is treated in line with the standards set out in the UN's Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners."