



(Cover of Gao's first book, screenshot)

A Chinese human rights lawyer persecuted by authorities for his support of oppressed communities, including Christians and Falun Gong practitioners, has been awarded the Shahbaz Bhatti Freedom Award for 2018.

The whereabouts of the lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, have not been publicly known since August, 2017, so the award was presented to his wife, Geng He, in California by David Kilgour, a goodwill ambassador and board member of the First Step Forum, an initiative that monitors religious freedom and human right abuses worldwide.

The Shahbaz Bhatti Freedom Award is named after Pakistan's first Christian Cabinet Minister, murdered in 2011 for his criticism of Pakistan's blasphemy laws and his defence of Aasiya Noreen, a Christian woman still on death row for a conviction of blasphemy of Islam. She is widely known as Asia Bibi.

The lawyer received the award for his “dedication to China's religious freedom and human rights”.

International respect

“Disappeared” Human Rights Lawyer Gao Zhisheng Receives Freedom Award

China Uncensored

In his 2006 memoir A [China More Just](#) , Gao Zhisheng says that the Communist Party uses “the most savage, most immoral, and most illegal means to torture our mothers, torture our wives, torture our children, and torture our brothers and sisters...” after he spent several months investigating the techniques of torture used by the Communist Party against adherents of Falun Gong.

“Lawyer Gao is internationally respected enormously,” Kilgour said at the awards ceremony. “He was first targeted by the Party and the state in China in 2005 for standing up for various oppressed communities in China, including Christians, coal miners,” and adherents of Falun Gong, a Chinese spiritual practice.

In January 2009, Gao’s wife and two children escaped China with the help of underground faith groups. Since they left China, they have had a difficult time reaching Gao and their own families in China.

His family hasn’t been in touch with Gao since Aug. 13, 2017, and his whereabouts is unknown.

“Why has Gao today been missing for more than a year? Why is he disappeared? Why are none of his family members in China able or willing to answer their phones when Geng He calls them from America?” Kilgour asked in his speech. “Why were the identification papers for all of Gao’s family in Xinjiang taken away?”

Gao has been nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize.