

Geng He, wife of Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, held a press conference on September 8, 2014, at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., appealing to the U. S. government and the international community to help bring Gao Zhisheng to the U.S. to receive medical treatment and reunite with his family.

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

My husband Gao Zhisheng is a Chinese lawyer. Throughout his career, he has been dedicated to defending the rights of disadvantaged groups in Chinese society and providing pro bono legal services to them. Standing against the power of the state, he used his legal expertise to educate the general public and to disseminate the concept of justice and human rights. He fought and won justice for victims with his knowledge of the law and his eloquence of expression, establishing a strong reputation and earning the respect of many in China.

While it is difficult to look back on the past eight years, I have had to recall and recount over and over again in front of the media what has happened to him. Fearing for him has been part of my life. For more than five years since my two children and I fled to the United States, I have often been crushed by a sense of despair and hopelessness. I feared that Gao Zhisheng would be subject to brutal torture again, and that the ill-treatment would render him mentally retarded or physically handicapped or both. And no less did I worry that the international attention on Gao would fade...

Now, all of my fears have become a terrible reality. On August 7, Gao Zhisheng was finally released from prison, but the home he returned to has now turned into another prison. Since his release, each morning and each afternoon, public security officers "visit" him in shifts, each lasting two or three hours. As a result, he and family members are unable to live normal lives. A frustrated Gao told the police: "Since your job is to visit me every day and make it impossible for me and my relatives to live in peace, you may as well send me back to prison."

Presently, I can reach him by telephone. He is learning how to speak again, talking in stops and starts, and his relatives often explain his meaning through the static on the phone.

I have tried everything to learn about his situation, including what happened to him during the 20 months of disappearance prior to his sentence in Shaya Prison (沙亚监狱) in Xinjiang Province. I feel I have no choice but to disclose what I have learned to governments, legislatures, the media, and people around the world who are concerned about Gao Zhisheng, and to ask for your help.

This is how Gao Zhisheng was when he was first released from prison: At 5 feet 10 inches tall, he weighed 137 pounds-as opposed to 175 pounds before he went in. He limped as he walked, his body swinging like a polio patient. His face was without color, pale as a ghost. He spoke unintelligibly and was slow to respond to others. Having talked to his father on the phone, my

11-year-old son assessed that “Dad needs to learn Chinese from me.”

Gao Zhisheng had a total of 28 teeth, 12 at the bottom and 16 at the top, all good, before he went to prison. Now he has only 14 good teeth. He lost 2 upper back molars in jail, and another next to those is loose. He has 11 other loose teeth, including 6 in the lower front and 5 on the upper left, all of them so loose that they could be pulled out by hand. When he lies down, the 12 loose teeth fall on his tongue. When he shakes his head, they jangle in his mouth. Since the nerves of these teeth are exposed, he suffers constant toothaches, covering his cheeks all day to alleviate the pain. He can only eat baby food.

Over the past 5 years, he was locked in a dark prison cell of 7 square meters (75 square feet), the cell so small that he would hit the wall by taking two steps in any direction. It had no windows and no ventilation. He was never let out. He was given one meal a day consisting of a single steamed bun and a bowl of boiled cabbage. To eat the bun, he had to tear it into tiny morsels before placing them in his mouth.

Gao Zhisheng’s health is deeply worrisome: he suffers from serious malnutrition, low blood sugar, and has a small cyst on the gall bladder. Particularly, after 5 years of solitary confinement in a dark cell, he has lost part of his speech. According to my younger sister [who is a physician], he will need 2 to 3 years of traditional Chinese medicine treatment to recuperate, and it will probably take about 1 year for him to regain the ability to speak.

Nevertheless, he still said to us: “While in jail for the last 5 years, I felt guilty towards my family because they suffered just as much, fearing for me.” He said that he longs to reunite with his family and to recover. He wants to receive dental care in the United States. But he also said that, while in prison, police told him: “Don’t even think about going to the United States, particularly if the U. S. government wants you to go!”

"Probation period"

Now, please allow me to tell you what Gao Zhisheng went through during the 5 year so-called “probation period” from December 22, 2006, to December 22, 2011, before he was sent to Shaya Prison. Gao was disappeared 6 times during that period, the longest episode lasting 20 months (from April 2010 to December 2011). I learned only recently that, for those 20 months, he was detained in a basement in a military facility.

In *Dark Night, Dark Hood, and Kidnapping by the Dark Mafia*, Gao describes torture he endured in July 2007, which readers found shocking and harrowing. But he told me that the torture he was subjected to over that 20-month disappearance was worse. For example, in winter the room had no heat, and he would shiver in his summer clothes. He counted numbers from day to night, day after day. As a northerner used to harsh winters, he is now afraid of the cold.

This is state persecution of an individual. I am powerless to counter it. The only thing I can do is continue my plea for media attention. More urgently, I call on the United States government and

the international community to speak the voice of justice and provide meaningful help to my husband.

The persecution of Gao Zhisheng is not a result of personal enmity between Chinese rulers and Gao, but because the sinister communist regime feared his righteousness.

His help in individual cases did little to change the entire system, yet in the end he himself was threatened by the authorities for what he did. Starting in 2005, when Gao Zhisheng began to represent persecuted Christians, Falun Gong practitioners, and other persecuted groups, his situation deteriorated fundamentally, and the Chinese authorities began to come down hard on him. The government shut down his law firm and disbarred him from the legal profession. In August 2006 he was illegally kidnapped by Chinese police. On December 22, 2006, he was sentenced to three years in prison with a five-year probation for "inciting subversion of state power." Then, four days before his probation was due to expire, the Chinese official news agency, Xinhua, reported that "Gao Zhisheng will spend the next three years in jail." At the end of 2011, Gao was secretly transferred to the remote Shaya Prison in Aksu Prefecture, Xinjiang. During his time there, relatives were only allowed to visit him twice, 30 minutes each time. In fact, the prison notice prescribed only 15 minutes of family visits, and Gao protested it.

Though negligible compared to what Gao Zhisheng has endured, Chinese communist rulers have also caused my children and myself to suffer tremendous mental and psychological trauma, including through our arduous and dangerous escape [in 2009], and our hardships getting established in the United States.

The persecution of Gao Zhisheng, a lawyer renowned both domestically and internationally, is a microcosm of China's widespread human rights abuses. Therefore I stand here today to make an earnest plea to President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry: I hope you will express publicly your concern for Gao Zhisheng. It would be the most candid and the most direct support for human rights in China. Your voices will give hope and encouragement not only to Gao Zhisheng, whose plight has not ended, but also to those living in China who yearn for freedom and human rights.

Gao Zhisheng himself, as well as our entire family, needs urgent humanitarian attention from all of you, and we need your help to bring him to the United States for dental and health care.

My heartfelt appreciation to all of you. Thank you.

Geng He, Wife of Gao Zhisheng

September 8, 2014