

URGENT ACTION

FORMER PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE DETAINED AGAIN

Activist and human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng is said to be currently in police custody in Beijing. Last heard from on 13 August 2017, his exact location and current condition remain unclear. Given his previous treatment in detention, and without access to a lawyer, he is at high risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Gao Zhisheng was first reported missing by his family on 13 August 2017. Local police in Jia County and Yulin City, both located in the northern Chinese province of Shaanxi, denied that he was being held in police custody and even conducted a ground search for him shortly after he was reported missing. On 17 August a protest was held outside the Chinese embassy in San Francisco and dozens of people, including Gao Zhisheng's wife, urged the Chinese Government to release information on his whereabouts.

After receiving no information for over three weeks, Gao Zhisheng's family finally learned on 5 September that he had been taken to Beijing. The government official, who relayed this news to his elder brother, refused to provide details about Gao Zhisheng's exact whereabouts, his current condition or the grounds for his detention. It has been suggested on social media by Gao Zhisheng's friends that his detention might be linked to an interview in June 2017, with a Hong Kong based magazine, where he criticized the Communist Party and President Xi Jinping.

According to his fellow activist and friend Ai Wu, since he first went missing on 13 August, at least three of Gao Zhisheng's supporters in China have been criminally detained, seven summoned and two given verbal warnings by police. His elder brother Gao Zhiyi was also briefly detained for several hours on 26 August. It was believed that these are authorities' attempts to silence critics and conceal any information about Gao Zhisheng's current status. A former prisoner of conscience, Gao Zhisheng has previously shared his experience of repeated torture in detention, raising fears for his current condition.

Please write immediately in Chinese, English, or your own language urging the authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Gao Zhisheng if he has been detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- Pending his release, immediately disclose the whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng, and ensure that he is detained in an official place of detention, is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment; and he has regular, unrestricted access to his family, lawyers of his choice, and medical care on request or as necessary;
- Allow the peaceful work of Human rights defenders and their families without fear of hindrance, intimidation, arbitrary detention or imprisonment, in line with the UN Declaration on Human rights defenders.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 26 OCTOBER 2017 TO:

Director of Beijing Municipal Public Security
Bureau,

Wang Xiaohong
Beijingshi Gong'anju
9 Qianmen Dongdajie
Dongchengqu
Beijingshi 100740
People's Republic of China

Salutation: Dear Director

Minister of Public Security

Guo Shengkun Buzhang
Gonganbu
14 Dongchanganjie
Dongchengqu
Beijingshi 100741
People's Republic of China
Tel: +86 10 6626 2114 (Chinese Only)
Email: gabzfwz@mps.gov.cn

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Premier
Li Keqiang Guojia Zongli,
Guowuyuan Bangongting
2 Fuyoujie, Xichengqu,
Beijingshi 100017,
People's Republic of China.
Fax: +86 10 6596 1109 (c/o Ministry of
Foreign Affairs)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR LIU XIAOMING, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, 49-51 Portland Place W1B 1JL, 020 7299 4049, press_uk@mfa.gov.cn

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 13 August 2017, Gao Zhisheng's wife posted on Twitter that she had tried to call her husband but had been unable to reach him for two days. She then contacted his elder brother, Gao Zhiyi, who told her that he had visited Gao Zhisheng's home that morning and found no one there. Gao Zhiyi reported Gao Zhisheng's missing on the same day.

Gao Zhisheng is one of the most respected human rights lawyers in China, with the Ministry of Justice naming him "one of the nation's top 10 lawyers" in 2001 for his pro bono work on public interest cases. Despite this, Gao Zhisheng has been subjected to enforced disappearance, torture, illegal house arrest and detention as a result of his work, which includes representing human rights activists and working on other politically sensitive cases. In late 2005, the Beijing Municipal Justice Bureau revoked his lawyer's license and suspended the operations of his law firm, Shengzhi Law Office. This was a direct result of Gao Zhisheng's open letters to the government calling on them to stop religious persecution, including persecution of Falun Gong practitioners.

In February 2006 Gao Zhisheng organized a hunger strike campaign to draw attention to the persecution of human rights activists in China. Shortly after the campaign ended, the authorities detained Gao Zhisheng on 22 August and held him without charge. After a month, on 21 September, he was charged with the vaguely-defined offence of "inciting subversion of state power". In December 2006, he was given a three-year suspended prison sentence with a five-year reprieve.

In April 2010, he told Associated Press in an interview that he was tortured while in detention. Shortly after that he went missing again and his whereabouts were unknown for almost 20 months. In December 2011, state media announced that Gao Zhisheng had violated terms of his suspended sentence and was therefore sent to serve his three-year sentence in prison.

Due to the constant harassment by authorities, including freezing the family bank accounts and preventing his children from attending school, Gao Zhisheng's family fled China in March 2009 and currently reside in the United States. In October 2010, his daughter Grace Geng wrote an open letter to the President of the United States of America saying "President Obama, as the father of two girls yourself, please ask President Hu Jintao of China to tell this daughter where her father is."

After he was released from prison in 2014, Gao Zhisheng has been living with his elder brother's family in an isolated village in Shaanxi province under tight surveillance. His family said he had suffered abuse in prison and malnutrition that led to severe damage to his teeth which, three years later, still makes it difficult for him to eat solid food. According to his family, the authorities had barred Gao Zhisheng from leaving the village to receive medical and dental treatment. Despite his difficult situation, he has remained outspoken about human rights and continues to criticize the Chinese Communist Party.

In 2016, Gao Zhisheng launched a memoir titled "The year 2017, Stand Up China" with the help of his daughter Grace Geng. In the book, Gao Zhisheng detailed his treatment while in detention from 2009 to 2014, and told of his life after he was released and sent to Shaanxi to live under round-the-clock police surveillance with his elder brother, Gao Yisheng. He wrote the book as a way of continuing his resistance against human rights violations under the ruling Chinese Communist Party.

Activists and human rights defenders continued to be systematically subjected to monitoring, harassment, intimidation, arrest and detention. Police detained increasing numbers of human rights defenders outside of formal detention facilities, sometimes without access to a lawyer for long periods, exposing the detainees to the risk of torture and other ill-treatment.