

URGENT ACTION



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Note: Please write on behalf of these persons even though you may not have received the original UA when issued on February 2, 2009. Thanks!

15 September 2009

Further Information on UA 24/09 (2 February 2009) and follow-up (9 February 2009) - Arbitrary detention/Fear of torture and other ill-treatment

CHINA **Gao Zhisheng (m), aged 48**

Human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who has been missing since February 2009, was seen in his home town in Shaanxi province, central China, in late June or early July. He was seen by local residents, accompanied by a dozen local and Beijing Municipality Public Security Bureau officers. The witnesses reported he looked thin and weak. His current whereabouts remain unknown, and he is at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

According to Gao Zhisheng's wife Geng He, who is now in the USA, local residents reported that Gao Zhisheng was in Shaanxi Province for a few hours, visiting his mother's grave, before being taken away by the police officers. It is unclear whether he was able to meet with members of his family, who are still under tight police surveillance.



Eyewitnesses state that Gao Zhisheng looked ill, and appeared much thinner than before he went missing in February. Despite the warm weather, he wore winter clothes. Amnesty International is concerned that he has been tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

Gao Zhisheng has been kept under surveillance in Beijing Municipality since he was sentenced in December 2006. However, the US-based Radio Free Asia reported that he was allowed to leave Beijing and return to his home town in Shaanxi Province before Chinese New Year on 26 January this year. Nonetheless, on 4 February, he was taken away from his home in Shaanxi Province by more than 10 security agents and his whereabouts have remained unknown since then.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Human rights activists in China who attempt to report on human rights violations, challenge policies which the authorities find politically sensitive, or try to rally others to their cause, face serious risk of abuse. Many are jailed as prisoners of conscience after politically motivated trials, while growing numbers are being held under house arrest with the police conducting intrusive surveillance and standing guard outside.

Amnesty International's mission is to undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending grave abuses of the rights to physical and mental integrity, freedom of conscience and expression, and freedom from discrimination, within the context of its work to promote all human rights.

Gao Zhisheng received a three-year prison sentence, suspended for five years, in December 2006, for “inciting subversion.” He also received one year of deprivation of political rights. He has been kept under constant surveillance since he was sentenced, in a way that goes far beyond what is normal for those serving suspended sentences in China.

The authorities had detained Gao Zhisheng on 22 August 2006, formally arrested him on 12 September and sentenced him on 22 December after a closed trial. This came after he organized a hunger strike campaign to draw further attention to persecution of peaceful activists in China in February 2006.

In April 2007, Gao Zhisheng publicized the torture and ill-treatment he had suffered while in custody awaiting trial. This led to an escalation of the oppression and harassment of him and his family.

On 13 September 2007, Gao Zhisheng published an open letter to the US Congress, which drew attention to the deteriorating human rights situation in China. Nine days later, plainclothes police came to arrest him. They went to his home, stripped off his clothes and beat him unconscious. During the six weeks of illegal detention that followed, the security agents subjected Gao Zhisheng to violent beatings and repeated electric shocks to his genitals. They held lit cigarettes close to his eyes for several hours, which left him partly blind for days afterwards.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible:

- calling on the authorities to release Gao Zhisheng immediately and unconditionally;
- urging them to ensure Gao Zhisheng has access to proper medical treatment while he remains in custody;
- urging the authorities to guarantee that Gao Zhisheng is not tortured or ill-treated while he remains in custody;
- urging the authorities to provide information on his whereabouts, and the reasons and legal basis for his continued detention.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China

WEN Jiabao Guojia Zongli
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie, Xichengqu
Beijingshi 100017

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Fax: 011 86 10 65961109 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Director of the Beijing Public Security Bureau

MA Zhenchuan Juzhang
Beijingshi Gong'anju
9 Dongdajie, Qianmen
Dongchengqu
Beijingshi 100740
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Fax: 011 86 10 65242927

Salutation: Dear Director

COPIES TO:

Director of the Shaanxi Provincial Department of Public Security

WANG Rui Tingzhang
Shaanxisheng Gong'anting
Xinchengdayuan Donglou
Xi'anshi 710006

Shaanxisheng
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Email: info@shxga.gov.cn

Salutation: Dear Director

Ambassador Wen Zhong Zhou
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
2300 Connecticut Ave. NW
Washington DC 20008

Fax: 1 202 328-2582

Email: chinaembassy_us@fmprc.gov.cn

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.

Check with the AIUSA Urgent Action office if sending appeals after 27 October 2009.