

UA 252/07

Fear for safety/ possible incommunicado detention**PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA Gao Zhisheng (m), aged 43, human rights lawyer**

Human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng has not been seen since 22 September. His family has been unable to confirm his whereabouts. It is possible that Gao was detained by members of the State Security Bureau, but the Chinese authorities have made no official announcement of his detention. Amnesty International is concerned that Gao Zhisheng's safety is at grave risk.

According to Beijing-based human rights activist Qi Zhiyong, around ten plainclothes officers and several police vehicles arrived at Gao Zhisheng's home on 22 September. According to Hu Jia, another close contact of Gao Zhisheng, he might have been taken away by officers from either the State Security Bureau or the National Security Unit of the Beijing Public Security Bureau. However, no one witnessed his being taken away. Repeated unsuccessful attempts to contact Gao's wife, Geng He, suggests that she is now prohibited from talking freely over the phone.

The visit to Gao Zhisheng's house by state security personnel was apparently linked to his issuing of an open letter to the US Congress on 13 September, drawing attention to the deterioration in the human rights situation and stating that, in light of this, he could not support the country's staging of the 2008 Olympics. On 16 September, a group of police officers from the National Security Unit of the Beijing Public Security Bureau stormed and searched Gao Zhisheng's home. At that time a "supervision and modification" committee made up of Public Security Bureau officials was reportedly established to deal with Gao's case.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gao Zhisheng was convicted of 'inciting subversion' in December 2006 in connection with his activism, including his organization of a hunger-strike protest in Beijing in February 2006 to draw attention to the plight of several other activists who had been subjected to human rights violations, and his publishing of an open letter to the authorities calling for religious freedom and an end to the 'barbaric' persecution of the Falun Gong spiritual movement. The authorities had already suspended the operations of his law firm, the Shengzhi Law Office, and revoked his law license in late 2005. Unusually, the court ruled that his three-year prison sentence should be suspended for five years, meaning that he would not be imprisoned unless he commits a criminal offence during that period. For more information, see UA 14/06 (ASA 17/001/2006, 19 January 2006) and follow-ups.

In April 2007, Gao Zhisheng reported other Chinese activists that he had been treated harshly by police during a four-month period in custody in 2006, including being handcuffed and forced to sit in an iron chair or cross-legged for extended periods, and having bright lights shone at him. He said he only agreed to confess to his 'crime' in order to protect his family.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- calling on the authorities to reveal the whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that Gao Zhisheng will not be tortured or ill-treated while he is in custody, and that he has access to lawyers, members of his family and any necessary medical treatment;
- expressing concern that Gao Zhisheng's family members are under tight police surveillance and calling for all restrictions on their freedom of movement to be lifted;
- urging the authorities to ensure that human rights defenders can carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of arbitrary detention, torture or ill-treatment, or other human rights violations.

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: +86 10 65961109 or 2260 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs) or 2260 (c/o Ministry of Communications)****Email: gazette@mail.gov.cn****Salutation: Your Excellency****Minister of Public Security of the People's Republic of China**ZHOU Yongkang Buzhang
Gong'anbu
14 Dongchang'anjie, Dongchengqu
Beijingshi 100741

People's Republic of China

Fax: +86 10 63099216 (it may be difficult to get through, please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Director of the Beijing Public Security Bureau

MA Zhenchuan Juzhang

Beijingshi Gong'anju

9 Qianmen Dongdajie

Dongchengqu

Beijingshi 100740

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Salutation: Dear Director

and to diplomatic representatives of China accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 November 2007.
