

Written Statement of Li Hai, Falun Gong practitioner and former member of Department of Treaty and Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China

Hearing of Foreign Affairs Committee regarding human rights in China, July 25, 2012

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, honorable Members of Congress. I would like to first thank Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen for holding this important hearing and for giving me the opportunity to participate. I am truly honored to be here to share what I experienced and witnessed in China and I hope it will be helpful to you.

I have organized my remarks to focus on three points:

1. My personal experience being persecuted in China for practicing Falun Gong and my knowledge of the current situation for Falun Gong practitioners still in China.
2. The psychological torment inherent to the Communist Party's campaign, which can be more damaging than physical torture.
3. How, despite the ferociousness of the Communist Party's efforts to wipe out Falun Gong, this campaign is actually failing. Instead, the party is losing the hearts and minds of more and more Chinese people.

Lastly, I would like to share what I hope the United States government can do to help advance human rights in China.

My personal experience of persecution and torture

I began to practice Falun Gong in 1995 when I was completing a master's degree in international law at the Beijing Foreign Affairs College. I was interested in qigong and came across the main book of Falun Gong's teachings *Zhaun Falun* at a book stall. As I read it, I was impressed that it answered many questions I had related to qigong and life in general. I was disillusioned with the state of Chinese society and how much lying and cheating there was among people. I felt that the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Tolerance that Falun Gong talked about and taught people to follow was how I wanted to live my life. A few months later, I discovered that another student at my university was a Falun Gong practitioner, so he showed me where I could go to a park to join others in doing the exercises.

In 1997, I entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Department of Treaty and Law. Over the next several years, I was part of the delegations representing China at various bilateral and multilateral negotiations. These included negotiations surrounding the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and discussions with the Portuguese government in the lead up to the handover of Macau back to China.

During that time, there were numerous Falun Gong practitioners working for the government. There were about 20 practitioners that I knew at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and several others at the Ministry of Commerce or even the State Security Bureau. Many were Communist Party members, including myself. We didn't feel there was any conflict between that and our personal spiritual practice.

On the weekends, when I would go to my local practice site, there were 50 to 100 people from all strata of society. Some were retired workers, while others were doctors, high school teachers,

or professors at Peking Union Medical University. We would quietly sit in meditation with a very powerful, tranquil energy field. I'll never forget those days.

This all changed in mid-1999 when our lives were turned upside down. Then Communist Party-head Jiang Zemin became jealous and fearful of Falun Gong's popularity and influence in society, and decided he couldn't tolerate it anymore. Like myself, many of those people from the practice site in Beijing have since been fired from their jobs, sent to labor camps or prisons, tortured, and forced to flee the country. Some have been killed.

Between July 1999 and January 2012, when I arrived in the United States, I was detained four times, with the longest time being seven years.

Right after the Communist Party announced that it was prohibiting Falun Gong, I went with others to the Petitions Office of the State Council to express that Falun Gong was good, did no harm to anyone, and that the government was making a terrible mistake. Armed police immediately detained us, put us onto large trucks, and took us to Fengtai Stadium on the outskirts of the city. The stadium was full with thousands of Falun Gong practitioners. We were released that evening.

In November 1999, I went to appeal again and was detained. This time I was held for one month. In June 2000, I joined a march to a Beijing labor camp to protest the mistreatment of Falun Gong practitioners being held there, whose lives we had heard were in danger. I was tortured and held at multiple locations for over a month.

Meanwhile, I was under increasing pressure at work to give up my belief. In January and February 2000, two people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came to my parents' home in Shandong, where I was staying. They each pressured me to give up my practice and threatened my family about what would happen if I didn't. One was Mr. Gao Shumao, who was the person within the ministry responsible for getting Falun Gong practitioners to renounce their practice; I believe that he was in the 610 Office within the ministry. The other person was Ms. Xue Hanqing, who was the director of my department at the time and who more reluctantly tried to convince me to give up my practice. They have both gone on to have high-profile careers. Mr. Gao became ambassador for China in Mongolia and Ms. Xue is now a judge at the International Court of Justice. By contrast, my colleagues and I who practiced Falun Gong were fired, imprisoned, and had our careers taken away. This is how the Communist Party rewards and punishes people: those who help further its illicit agenda of persecution are promoted, while those who peacefully stand up for their rights are fired.

In December 2000, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified me that I would be taken to a "transformation class." I knew from others' experiences that this would mean endless harassment and torture to force me to renounce Falun Gong, and that I would be sent to a forced labor camp if I refused. I went into hiding to escape, joining untold others across the country and effectively becoming a refugee in my own country.

Over the next year and a half, I roamed from place to place, living off of savings and assistance from fellow practitioners. I couldn't get a job because then the authorities would have found me and taken me to a "transformation class." During that time, I met a few other practitioners and we started working together to make and distribute homemade CD-ROMs and brochures with

videos and information to help Chinese people see through the Communist Party's lies. Together we made and gave out about 100,000 of them.

In November 2002, after delivering some of these materials to a fellow practitioner, several plainclothes police officers abducted me. Apparently, they had been following me.

They didn't take me to a police station, as required by law. Instead, they took me to a hotel on the outskirts of Beijing, in Daxing District. There were people working at the hotel and even a few guests. They locked me up in a side room next to a fenced-in yard. Actually, it is not unusual for plainclothes security agents in China to take Falun Gong practitioners to these kinds of makeshift detention facilities. Some are in hotels, some are in schools, some are even at Buddhist temples. The officers found out my name and tried to force me to tell them the address of where I was staying. There were other practitioners hiding at that location, who would be arrested if I revealed the address, so I refused. Then, they began beating me.

They cuffed my hands behind my back, kicked me in the back and legs, and punched me in the ribcage. I still refused to tell them, so they whipped me with a belt. I remained silent. That's when they brought out the electric batons. They shocked the top of my head, my neck, my palms, my genitals, and other sensitive parts of my body. The pain was excruciating. I instinctively tried to dodge the blows, twisting, and rolling on the ground. I was moving so violently that one of my hands even slipped out of the handcuffs. But the officers kept shocking me until the batons ran out of batteries. Then they poured cold water all over my body. It was late autumn. They left the door open and pointed a fan on me. It was freezing, but I kept my silence. Later, they did another round of slapping and electric baton shocks, then cuffed me to a bed. Because of the torture, I couldn't walk for several days.

After a few days, they transferred me to another location that they called the Beijing City Legal Training Center. Despite its civilized sounding name, this was a horrific place dedicated to holding and persecuting Falun Gong practitioners. Each practitioner was locked up in a solitary room, guarded by armed police 24 hours a day. Every movement was watched and recorded. During the day I was tied to the chair. At night, I was tied to the bed. They forced me to have an intravenous infusion because I had gone on hunger strike to protest my illegal abduction. During that time, they denied us the most basic human dignity and right to personal hygiene—for months, I wasn't allowed to shower, cut my fingernails, or shave.

In February 2003—about four months after those officers abducted me—the authorities started the paperwork to charge me with a crime. I discovered that until then, I had technically been under “residential surveillance.” As you can see, this was totally untrue. I hadn't been home in years and the way I was being treated went far beyond surveillance. It was only in May 2003 that they let me send a note to my family to tell them what had happened and where I was. They hadn't heard from me in eight months. I only learned a year and a half later that during that time, my mother had passed away. She was only 60 years old, but her health deteriorated from the stress of not knowing what had happened to me and fearing the worst. I didn't even have a chance to say good-bye or go to her funeral.

In April 2004, Beijing's No. 2 Intermediate People's Court held a trial for me and eight others. We were three women and six men tried together because the authorities felt we were connected from being involved in making and distributing the video discs (VCDs). The trial was a total

sham. It lasted just a few hours and it was clear that the outcome had been decided ahead of time. I was sentenced to nine years in prison. The others were given terms ranging from three to 14 years. I appealed the verdict immediately. I felt it was important to expose the farce of the trial for what it was. I argued in my appeal letter that I was innocent, that practicing Falun Gong and giving out materials about it is not a crime under Chinese law and especially, not under international law since China was a signatory to several human rights treaties. Because of the Communist Party's influence over the judge, my appeal was rejected and the sentence confirmed.

In August 2004, I was sent to Qianjin prison that is in Tianjin but administered by Beijing authorities. If you have a chance to go through the gates, you will see that it looks very pretty and clean on the outside, kind of like a school. There are trees, green grass, flowers. But that lovely façade doesn't change the horror of what happens inside.

“Transformation” and psychological torment

Because I had pleaded my innocence in my written appeal, the prison authorities felt that I was a committed practitioner, so they redoubled their efforts to “transform” me.

“Transformation” is at the core of the persecution against Falun Gong. What does it mean? It means that they force you to sign statements cursing Falun Gong and repeating the Communist Party's lies. They make you say that Falun Gong is bad, even if you know it is good. Worst of all, they make you help them do the same thing to other practitioners.

Guards and security agents will do anything to force a Falun Gong practitioner to “transform,” including beatings, sleep deprivation, and even sexual assaults. For me this time, rather than using harsh physical torture like shocking with electric batons, they used a more subtle, but equally painful method for “transformation” that is well-known, especially in Beijing.

They would wake me up early after very little sleep. I was in a room with two criminal inmates to monitor me. They forced me to sit on a stool in a fixed position, sitting stiffly upright, with my knees closed, and my hands on my knees. If I moved or started falling asleep, they would yell at me or kick me. If you sit like that for a little while, it may not seem so uncomfortable, but imagine sitting like that for 12, 14, or 20 hours a day. First your back starts to ache, then your shoulders, eventually you feel shooting pain going through your thighs and down your legs. After a few days, my feet were so swollen, I couldn't even put on shoes. If I needed to go to the bathroom, I had to ask permission. More often than not, they wouldn't immediately allow me to go, adding to the pain and making each minute feel even longer.

As I sat there, they forced me to watch videos slandering Falun Gong. Then, guards would come in and out to talk to me. They would tell me that everyone else had transformed and that I couldn't avoid it. They would threaten that they would leave and let the criminal inmates “take care” of me. They would bring in other practitioners who had already been “transformed” to say the same things. This went on day after day. I completely lost track of time. I think a few weeks passed. I couldn't bear it any more. I gave in and signed their papers. It wasn't that I believed what I was saying. I knew in my heart that Falun Gong was good. That these were all lies. But I just didn't have confidence in myself that I'd be able to endure nine years of endless torture. So, I decided to give them a fake “transformation” to lessen the persecution.

But even after I signed the paper, they wouldn't stop tormenting me. They made me write "transformation materials" to support their lies and read them out in front of a video camera, so they could use it in their propaganda and have a tool to forever remind me of my humiliation. After that, they made me write a "thought report" every day, then summarize it every week, every month, every year. That was the worst part. It was bad enough if they made me go against my conscience once. But they made me do it again, and again, and again, for years.

Think about the thing that you most fundamentally believe is good and true. Maybe it is your belief in Jesus or the Jewish god. Maybe it is your belief in the principles of freedom and human dignity. Then imagine being forced every day to say that they are bad and that this truth you so fundamentally adhere to is false. It makes you feel hopeless, weak, defeated, hating yourself.

To this day, I deeply regret being "transformed." I wish that I could have resisted. After I gave in, I felt like a walking zombie. I felt like I was a physical body, but I had no spirit, no soul. Worst of all, I felt ashamed. I felt that I had betrayed myself, my fellow practitioners, and everything in the universe that was right and good. I had betrayed the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Forbearance I so deeply believed in.

I was numbed and somehow made it through. But not everyone is so lucky. There was one young scholar I knew in Beijing. His name is Lin Chengtao and he was a researcher at Peking Union Medical University. He was sent to a labor camp for practicing Falun Gong. The psychological pressure and "re-education" at the camp caused him to have a mental breakdown. He never recovered. Now, this once brilliant young scientist is like a crazy person.

What happened to me wasn't an isolated case. It was part of the whole system the Communist Party has put in place to persecute Falun Gong. At each level, it creates incentives for people to carry out the persecution. In the prison, guards who were so-called "effective" at transforming Falun Gong practitioners would get rewarded. One such team-leader was promoted to deputy warden.

Most of the time, it wasn't the guards that would beat us. More often, they would use the ordinary criminal inmates to do that. These were people imprisoned for committing violent acts, sexual assaults, or economic crimes. The guards liked the violent ones because they were willing to beat other prisoners. If the inmates helped persecute Falun Gong, they could get points. As they accrued more points, they would be eligible for early release. That's how distorted the Communist Party is—it releases rapists and thieves into society to reward them for beating honest people like Falun Gong practitioners.

There were 16 sections at the prison, with around 100 prisoners in each. Three of the sections held Falun Gong practitioners, though they were mixed in with non-Falun Gong practitioners too, so the latter could monitor the practitioners. When I left the prison in 2010, there were still about 60-70 Falun Gong practitioners being held there. That is only one prison. There are three other and labor camps holding Falun Gong practitioners just in the Beijing area, as well as various detention centers and facilities for "transformation classes." In some parts of the country, especially in the Northeast, the number of practitioners imprisoned is even greater. Some individual camps hold hundreds of practitioners alone.

The Falun Dafa Information Center and independent experts like Ethan Gutmann estimate that there are hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners in custody at any given time. From what I saw, I believe these estimates are true.

I was released before the end of my term because I had earned points by doing jobs in the prison that others didn't want to do, like cleaning the bathroom. But even after I got out, the authorities wouldn't leave me alone. Police and agents from the 610 Office, a Communist Party security force created to persecute Falun Gong, would visit me periodically and ask if I was practicing again. Even after I had started practicing again, I didn't dare tell them. If they had found out, I would have been taken to a transformation class.

Actually, about a year after I got out, every Falun Gong practitioner who was released from prison had to attend a transformation class before being allowed to go home. Previously, it depended on the district, and my district didn't require it, so I didn't have to go through that extra round of persecution in 2010. But in 2011, it became required in every district. After talking to some people who research human rights in China, I found out that actually in 2010, the 610 Office started a new three-year transformation campaign against Falun Gong. I realized that this change I had heard about in Beijing was part of that campaign.

The persecution is failing

The reason that the Communist Party and the 610 Office make such an effort to hold transformation classes, including for Falun Gong practitioners just coming out of prisons or labor camps, is because most people start practicing again once they are released, even if they were forcibly "transformed" in custody. Like me, 80 percent of those Falun Gong practitioners start practicing again once they get home. That makes the Communist Party very afraid.

In August 2010, three months after my release, I met up with a woman I knew from before, and who would later become my wife. She and her mother were both Falun Gong practitioners. They lent me Falun Gong books and encouraged me to resume my path of spiritual cultivation that I had abandoned under torture. In prison, my eyesight deteriorated badly. I could barely read for five minutes, even with glasses. Once I started practicing Falun Gong again, my vision was quickly restored.

I soon gained more courage and began telling people I met about the persecution I had suffered. As I did so, I noticed a big difference in people's reactions in 2010 compared to 2002. I saw that more and more people really hated the Communist Party, and weren't afraid to say so. Because of the rampant corruption and other phenomena in society, like tainted food products, people knew that the Party was bad. This made it much easier for them to see through the Communist Party's lies about Falun Gong and understand that we are being wrongfully persecuted.

From these experiences, I really feel that despite all of the money and brute force that the Communist Party has poured into censorship and repression, it is losing the true battle for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people.

Even though I was sent to prison for it, I feel honored to have played a small role in this process. As I mentioned before, in 2002, a group of us made and distributed about 100,000 VCDs and brochures. We would get the content from other practitioners who had gotten through the

internet blockade and downloaded information from the Minghui website. Since I was fairly computer savvy, my job was to buy blank CD-ROMs and burn the information onto them.

We wanted to let more Chinese people know the truth about Falun Gong and the persecution so they wouldn't participate and commit horrible crimes. That period of time was shortly after the CCP fabricated the self-immolation incident on Tiananmen Square. That hoax by the CCP was played on television again and again, making a lot of people feel Falun Gong practitioners were crazy and violent like the CCP claimed. A lot of the VCDs we made included information that analyzed the CCTV footage and showed that the incident was staged and that Falun Gong practitioners don't do things like setting themselves on fire.

I was inspired to keep helping with this effort after a small, but meaningful exchange in 2001. I went into a store to buy a bag and then gave the storeowner a homemade VCD that had some of the above information. I told him that I hoped he could watch it and learn the truth. When I came back a few weeks later, he quietly told me he had watched it and that he could see that what the government said about Falun Gong was all lies. His attitude had completely changed. I felt that if only more people in China could go through that change, then it would help Chinese people be less hateful and not participate in the persecution. According to the Minghui website, today there are around 200,000 grassroots print sites like the one I participated in, helping undo the effects of the Communist Party's censorship and propaganda.

What can the U.S. government do?

On January 12, 2012, I came to the United States with my wife, our child, and my mother-in-law. I am deeply grateful to the United States government for granting us political asylum and to all of the kind Americans who have helped us get settled.

As the United States Congress and government think about how to improve human rights in China, I hope you can keep something in mind: if we truly want to free China, we need to free Falun Gong.

This persecution is pervasive. Hundreds of thousands, likely millions, of Falun Gong practitioners around the country experience abuses like the ones I did every day—abductions, sham trials, torture in prisons and makeshift detention facilities, and “transformation” classes. Once every three days a new case of a Falun Gong practitioner being killed from abuse is reported, but this is just a drop in the bucket.

But the victims are not just Falun Gong. They are also the prison guard pressured to torture practitioners, the factory manager who must identify Falun Gong workers for brainwashing, the husband forced to divorce his Falun Gong practitioner wife or lose his job. Millions of Chinese have been coerced into betraying their conscience and becoming minions of a tyrannical regime.

Is it really possible for China to move towards better human rights or the rule of law when these atrocities are happening on such a massive scale?

Given the urgency of the situation, the U.S. government should speak out publicly to condemn the persecution of Falun Gong and call for the release of all Falun Gong prisoners of conscience. The House of Representatives passed a resolution doing just that in 2010. However, President Obama and members of his administration have not. It may sound like just words, but it is what

the Communist Party truly fears—that its crimes be exposed and condemned by the international community.

In this context, there have been reports that Wang Lijun, the police chief from Chongqing who attempted to seek asylum in the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu in February 2012, may have disclosed information about the persecution of Falun Gong in China during that visit, especially with regards to organ harvesting from Falun Gong prisoners of conscience. Given Wang's previous role as police chief in Liaoning province where the practice of organ harvesting was first uncovered and his well-documented involvement in organ transplants, it is reasonable to believe he would be privy to such information. The American and Chinese public deserve to be informed if this is indeed the case. I hope that the U.S. Congress can urge the Department of State to disclose any such information it obtained from Wang.

Lastly, I also have a small personal request. Of the nine of us who were sentenced together in 2004, I know that at least three are still suffering in prison. Their names are Mr. Wang Yi (王益), Ms. Dan Ling (但凌), and Mr. Zhang Zhenzhong (张振忠). I hope they can be added to the list of prisoners of conscience whose cases American officials raise with their Chinese counterparts, so that they can be released immediately.

Thank you again for providing me with this opportunity to share the information I have about the plight of Falun Gong practitioners in China. The Chinese people very much appreciate the kind support of the American people and government in their struggle for freedom. As more and more Chinese awaken, I truly believe it won't be long before we are able to fully enjoy the fruits of that struggle.