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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

February 15, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
2201 C St NW Ste 7276
Washington DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

Last December, the Congressional Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission launched the Defending Freedoms Project, a new initiative led by the commission in conjunction with Amnesty International (AI) and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). The purpose of this project is to generate attention and support for human rights by encouraging Members of Congress to adopt and advocate on behalf of prisoners of conscience around the world. As one of the co-chairman, I have already kicked off the project by adopting Gao Zhisheng of China.

Gao Zhisheng is one of the most respected human rights lawyers in China. He has defended activists and religious minorities and documented human rights abuses in China, including a number of high-profile human rights cases, involving Christians in Xinjiang and Falun Gong practitioners. He has been disbarred and subjected to forced disappearance, torture, illegal house arrest and detention as a result of his work. Currently he is imprisoned in Shaya County Prison in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in northwest China, after being incarcerated in December 2011 for allegedly violating the conditions of his suspended three-year sentence. Prior to this, his whereabouts had been unknown for almost 20 months – he has been tortured repeatedly since 2006 and continues to be at high risk of further torture.

Almost exactly one year ago, Chinese dissident Yu Jie wrote an unsettling piece in the *Washington Post* where he stated, “China is a far greater threat than the former Soviet Union ever was,” and “unfortunately, the West lacks visionary politicians, such as Ronald Reagan, to stand up to this threat.” Reagan was respectful but bold. He raised individual dissident cases by name. He linked human rights to every other facet of U.S.-Soviet relations, rather than sidelining it in the context of larger bilateral priorities.

I urge you, in your new position, to publicly and privately raise the case of Gao Zhisheng – a man who has suffered greatly at the hands of his own government solely for proclaiming his Christian faith and defending the persecuted. I would also encourage you to meet with Gao’s wife, Geng He, who now resides in the U.S., to hear first-hand the suffering that her husband and family have endured over several years. It is painfully clear that our current approach to China is not working. Quiet diplomacy, whereby grave human rights and religious freedom abuses are

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reportedly discussed in private meetings but rarely, if ever, raised publicly, has not yielded results and has in fact emboldened the oppressors.

Martin Luther King famously said, "in the end we will not remember the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends." America must be a friend to Gao Zhisheng the imprisoned human rights lawyer. America must be a friend to the Tibetan monks and nuns that have self-immolated. America must be a friend to the tortured human rights activist. We must not be silent in the face of their suffering.

If you would like to be put in contact with Geng He, please contact Kalinda Stephenson in my office at Kalinda.stephenson@mail.house.gov or 202-225-5136.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

BEST WISHES