

CECC Hearing on China's Pervasive Use of Torture

April 14, 2016

Written Testimony Submitted by Ms. Geng He, Wife of Lawyer Gao Zhisheng

Respected Ladies and Gentlemen:

My husband Gao Zhisheng is one of China's top ten lawyers, but starting in 2005, he became a target of the Chinese government's persecution and torture for his legal defense work on behalf of persecuted Christians and Falun Gong practitioners. In November 2005, the government revoked his lawyer's license and forcibly closed down his law firm. On August 15, 2006, the police unexpectedly kidnapped him, and by holding our children and me hostage, they forced my husband to admit he was "guilty." After Gao had been "disappeared" for four months, on December 22, 2006, the police found him guilty of "inciting subversion of state power," and sentenced him to serve three years in prison, a sentence that was suspended for five years, with deprivation of his political rights for one year. He came home, but was now reputed to be a convicted criminal. However, while serving a suspended sentence at home, the Chinese Communist Party's police kidnapped Gao Zhisheng more than six times, with one of those disappearances lasting for 21 months. He suffered many forms of torture during each disappearance.

He first experienced torture on September 21, 2007. Gao Zhisheng had sent an open letter to the U.S. Congress that exposed the Chinese Communist Party's trampling of human rights, and, in retribution, the Chinese Communist police placed a black hood over Gao's head and took him away for 50 days. The day he was kidnapped was September 21, during which Gao Zhisheng experienced terrifying torture and suffering at the hands of the police. On that day, six or seven policemen placed a black hood over his head, brought him into a room, and stripped him naked. After beating him, four of the policemen each took an electric baton in hand and struck him all over his body, including his genitals, causing his entire body to shake convulsively and to roll on the floor in pain as his sweat rolled off him like rain. The police continued to use electric shocks to torture him for several hours, during which time he fell in and out of conscious, almost to the point of death. On the second morning, the police set alight five cigarettes and let the smoke go into his nose and eyes, and pricked his genitals with toothpicks. They continued to use many forms of torture through the afternoon of the third day. By then, Gao Zhisheng was desperate to break free of this pain, and calling out the names of his two children, he began to smash his head

against the table in an effort to kill himself. But his suicide attempt did not succeed, though it left Gao with swollen eyes and head, and blood running down his face. Gao Zhisheng begged his captors to put him in jail, but the police responded, "If you think you're going to prison, dream on. We can make you disappear permanently!" As they said this, they continued to cruelly torture my husband throughout the day until nighttime. At the end of it, Gao Zhisheng's eyes were so swollen from the smoke that he could no longer open his eyes and his skin was darkened all over at the places he had been touched by the electric batons. And the torture didn't end there and then.

In an attempt to protect our two children and in a state of absolute terror, in January 2009, I escaped China with my daughter and son. On February 9, 2009, Gao Zhisheng again was kidnapped and disappeared.

On September 25, 2009, Gao Zhisheng was hooded and taken away by several burly men of Uyghur ethnicity in front of secret police from Beijing. When Gao was being taken to a secret jail, his captors beat him severely with their fists. Upon arriving at the secret jail, they roughly stripped off his clothing and shoes, but leaving the black hood on, they proceeded to mercilessly beat and torture Gao for the next 48 hours. One of the men punched his chin with his bare fists, and another grabbed his neck, dragged him backwards and shoved him into the wall. They began to throttle him, causing his lungs to lack air, blood to swell his brain, his eyeballs to protrude and almost pop out, and make him feel as if death were imminent. But unexpectedly, they loosened their grip, and Gao weakly leaned against the wall as he sank to the floor. Several of the thugs began to curse him, and started to shamelessly kick his legs, making Gao scream out in pain. Under the barrage of both curses and kicks, Gao couldn't move his legs anymore, and was shaking uncontrollably. When they were tired of hitting him, they sat down and ate. Following their break, they continued to beat Gao for a day and a night. They tried to force Gao to beg for mercy, but Gao refused, and they went crazy with anger and beat him till the sun rose the next day. But Gao didn't beg for mercy. One of the thugs cursed him, saying: "You animal, if you don't kneel today, I'm definitely going to kill you." Sure enough, their beatings became even more inhuman! Gao's two legs and feet were already swollen and bent, yet they still harshly kicked him and with each kick, Gao suffered greatly. But Gao adamantly refused to kneel down. One of the thugs completely lost his cool and pointed a gun at Gao's forehead. Gao said to him, "You are a spiritual pygmy, and don't have the guts to fire a gun." Gao's statement enraged the thug who angrily went into another room. Gao prepared for more torture and the result was that the thug returned with the gun wrapped in a pillow and put it against Gao's head. Gao lost consciousness, thus easing his pain.

One year later, in April 2010, Chinese Communist officials arranged for Gao Zhisheng to be interviewed by the Associated Press. During the interview, Gao didn't hew to the script prepared by the officials, and instead revealed to the Associated Press the truth of his being tortured. Gao again was "disappeared" following the interview.

A period of torture in Beijing started, all of it done at night. On the evening of April 28, 2010, a group unexpectedly barged into Gao's cell room (this group turned out to be same who conducted the torture in 2007). They rushed him from behind and began to throttle Gao, saying, "Little boy, you've fallen again into the hands of your uncles! We'll do a good job of taking care of you!" As before, they used a black hood to cover his head and tightly shackled his hands behind his back. They additionally put two pillow cases over the black hood and forced his body into a ninety degree angle. Two of them then forced Gao to kneel and they put him in a car, as if the whole process was a robbery. While in the car, the torture went on and on, like a living death. Two of the men were behind him, crushing his body, but this was a specially designed car that had no support. Gao was shackled, and from behind, the two were crushing him. What made it even worse was that he lacked oxygen under the thickly layered hoods. His labored breathing began to cause him to shake uncontrollably with sweat pouring off his body and his eyeballs about to pop out of his head. A little while later, his knees had gone completely numb and he momentarily felt his body disconnect from the physical pain. But when trying to get out of the car, Gao found that his legs were numb. He couldn't stand and fell to the ground whereupon the thugs began to kick him without mercy. Gao didn't even have the strength to curl up. Several of them raised him up, only to throw him back to the ground. One pulled his hood off, and another pulled him up into a half sitting position. Three of them unexpectedly began to hit him in the face for several minutes. One brought a lighted cigarette up to Gao's eyes and asked if he still wanted to write essays? After this, he struck Gao's chest with his knee. Gao heard himself cry out with an almost non-human sound, his eyes blurred, and it felt as if his head was spinning and he was floating in the ocean waves. But the non-human cry turned into a strong shout of pain because the thug suddenly loosened his hands and Gao's forehead smashed down on the ground. Gao began to vomit, with half of his face stuck to the ground. Gao's hands were still shackled behind his back so there was no way to reposition himself. The thugs were there smoking and cursing him. Once they finished their cigarettes, someone called Director Wang began to use an electric baton to strike Gao. Gao was in so much pain that he screamed in anguish, and words cannot fully describe that physical pain. They thought that, with enough time and cruelty, the torture would force Gao to kneel for mercy, but Gao never kneeled down. This utterly exasperated the thugs who beat him with greater fury. Finally, Gao was carried to an empty room where he was locked up for 21 months. In almost two years locked up there, the world didn't hear any news of Gao Zhisheng.

According to the Communist Party authorities, the verdict of a "three-year sentence, suspended for five years" should have ended by August 15, 2012 and Gao should have been able to go home. But after his disappearance of more than a year and a half, the words of his tormentors came true and it was as if he had "disappeared."

Not until the end of 2011, following the period of the five-year suspended sentence, Xinhua issued a brief English news report that on December 16, Gao Zhisheng had violated the terms of his suspended sentence and had been sent back to jail to serve the entire three-year sentence. But

within two weeks, there was no news of Gao serving his sentence at the prison, and his family had not yet seen the official paperwork or received any kind of notification about visits. The news also didn't mention what regulation Gao had violated or where he had been for 21 months or why Gao Zhisheng again had been disappeared. On January 1, 2012, Gao Zhisheng's older brother, Gao Zhiyi finally received a "criminal imprisonment notification" regarding Gao Zhisheng from Shahe Prison in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Torture at the Shahe Prison came in disguised form. Gao Zhisheng was imprisoned in a small cell and for three years, did not feel fresh air on his face. From the very start of his detention, they played loud noises on a large speaker to disturb him, and this went on for 96 weeks. All of Gao's teeth fell out from living in this horrific environment and being given poor quality food, resulting in his being unable to walk or speak. At the completion of serving his sentence, he was on the verge of death and had to be lifted out of his cell and carried home.

Gao Zhisheng has sacrificed greatly on behalf of the Chinese people's freedom and human rights. Even though he lost his own freedom and suffered unspeakable torture, he never lost his belief in freedom and human rights. He adamantly believes that a free and democratic system will be realized in China in the near future. He sincerely hopes that the United States will be able to shoulder the moral responsibility of all humankind, and that the U.S. Government will be able to make human rights a key priority in U.S.-China relations. An increasingly powerful China, without human rights, is a threat to the United States and the whole world that can no longer be ignored.

With thanks to God!

Thank you all.

Geng He