

# **CECC Hearing Testimony**

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## **Political Prisoners in China: Trends and Implications for U.S. Policy**

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**Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 628**

Senator Byron Dorgan, Commissioners:

I am Wan Yanhai, director of Beijing Aizhixing Institute. I have been working on HIV/AIDS prevention and care for 20 years, since 1990. Our organization, Beijing Aizhixing Institute, or Beijing Aizhi Action Project, has been working on HIV/AIDS, human rights, and civil society development for 16 years - since 1994.

In the summer of 1994, I had a meaningful conversation with a psychiatrist in Beijing that influenced my philosophy about serving the people. When mentioning being monitored by security agencies in China, I said that I didn't care and I could still manage my work from jail. The senior doctor said that if I am sacrificed, nobody benefits; and if I am sacrificed, I will not be able to work. It is a loss. To continue to carry out my work that is helpful to others, I need to protect myself.

This philosophy has guided my approach to dealing with security agencies in China. Through great effort and careful attention, I have managed to keep working in China for the past 16 years.

In the past 16 years, I was briefly detained from August 24 to September 20 of 2002; November 25 to 28 in 2006; and December 27 to 28 in 2007. I left China because of security concerns in January 1997, October 2002 and May of this year. But most of the time, I have been able to continue my work in China.

Why am I sitting here, and not in prison? I have to say that I benefited from the following factors:

1. HIV/AIDS is a public health concern, which the Chinese government also cares about.
2. I used to work at the government health education institute, where I became known to the public and established good working relationships or friendships with individuals in government.
3. Government officials who were friendly helped.
4. International media coverage also offered some support and protection.

But I also carefully managed my own activities and took a sensitive approach in the language I used surrounding my work. I don't know whether these are reasons for my success or failure. But, I'd like to share these with you.

1. Be transparent, don't hide.
2. Comport yourself as if you are being monitored all of the time and be sensitive to all potential risks.

3. Use a professional approach and appropriate language.
4. Avoid personally offending police and keep good communication with them.
5. When arguing with police, do so with regards to their logic, not the basis of their order.
6. Be aware of friends and allies inside the government, and everywhere.
7. Be critical not only of China but also of the United States and other countries.

When I was detained by the Beijing State Security Bureau for releasing a classified document, from August 24 to September 20 of 2002, and detained by the Beijing Public Security Bureau in November of 2006, the investigations were similar, focused on our funding sources, relationships with human rights groups and media, and information provided for foreigners. In 2006, the focus of investigation was on my relationships with overseas foundations and human rights activists inside China. As a nongovernmental organization (NGO) receiving foreign donations, I was very careful when answering questions. I insisted that I was serving the Chinese people and China, and we happened to receive foreign donations. And we also applied for Chinese government funding, although not much funding has been provided for us.

While in detention, I was careful in my use of language and tone, and tried not to offend police. Sometimes we chatted. When they asked questions, I seriously thought about my response and then answered. I told police officers that I was serving the people—if my work became too difficult and dangerous, I could give up. I cooperated with a bottom line that I should not harm a third party.

In talks over tea and meetings in my office with security agents, I was more open and frank, and questioned security departments or government policy in general.

As a leader of an organization, we managed the organization in a transparent and professional way and based on the law. We anticipated that the Chinese government will come to investigate any day.

Our work, however, has been severely damaged by government threats. Our conference on compensation for those infected with HIV/AIDS through blood transfusions was cancelled in November 2006. Many other events were also cancelled. Time was wasted. We psychologically felt bad. We stopped working a month before the Beijing Olympics for two months. We stopped working a month before the People's Republic of China's (PRC) 60-year celebration. We had to politically sensor ourselves, which might damage our solidarity with other organizations and people.

I left China via Hong Kong on May 6th of this year after being harassed by multiple government agencies. In the first six months of 2010, our organization received pressure and harassment from about 10 agencies, including public security, state security, the tax department, the department of industry and commerce where we were registered, propaganda department, the fire department, etc.

Senators, human rights advocacy and civil society groups are developing rapidly in China. But human rights defenders and civil society groups are under severe surveillance and recently under attack by the Chinese government. How can the US government make a difference?

1. US AID programs can make a difference, but currently I don't know whether the US has a clear strategy to support civil society groups and human rights defenders. Should the US have an evaluation of its current aid programs in China from a human rights perspective?
2. Information and Internet freedom is crucial in empowering people and protecting people. But if people are not well organized, information itself can't work. The US should strengthen its work of supporting people in their efforts to organize in ways that are based on democratic rules and principles.

3. The US should guarantee that US-based businesses will not be used to persecute human rights defenders and civil society organizations. Companies involved in information censorship and that provide privacy information to the Chinese government should be punished in a democratic world.