SPREADING THE WORD: Grassroots efforts to raise awareness have brought together young and old, relaying an urgent message.

Unlikely Heroes

In response to injustice in China, ordinary citizens are doing extraordinary things—on both sides of the Pacific.

At the heart of these efforts is a belief: awareness is a powerful deterrent to evil.

A young software engineer arrives at Central Park in New York City. It's cold, with a snowstorm looming.

Robert gathers a stack of flyers from his bag and stands before a row of placards about the persecution of Falun Gong in China. For the next two hours he will spend his Saturday morning handing out flyers to passers by.

On the other side of the world, Ms. Ling Chen, a woman in her mid-40s, hops on a bicycle. Carrying a bag of leaflets, she will be peddling 90 minutes to a nearby village in central China.

An accountant by trade, Ling will be spending the next four hours placing leaflets on every door in the village. After pedaling home she'll get just a few hours of sleep before heading to work the next morning.

The two have never met, but are bound by an unspoken cause: to end the horrific persecution of Falun Gong in China.

They are part of a mounting—and global—grassroots effort, one chapter in a story of extraordinary courage and self-sacrifice.

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One in a million

Inside China, Ms. Ling is not an isolated case. She and others like her are not lone activists at the forefront of a movement, much less young idealists. They are mothers and daughters, students and professors, businessmen and government clerks. And they number in the millions.

Mobilized around the cause, they have formed into the largest grassroots, underground media in human history.

In tens of thousands of homes, basements, and other locales throughout China, Falun Gong practitioners make not only fliers, leaflets, and newspapers, but also banners, CDs, and DVDs.

The items are distributed throughout most every city and village across China, often under the cover of darkness.

The nighttime activity is for protection. If caught, the price for posting just one informational flier in public might be seven years in jail. And torture.

Despite appearances, these are no ordinary citizens, but heroes: they put their personal well-being on the line, using their own free time and resources to help save the lives of people they may have never met.

The power of awareness

Their goal is to get the materials they've produced—which unveil the persecution in China and debunk Communist Party propaganda—into the hands of as many people as possible. In a country where a repressive regime and kangaroo courts enable police and labor camp guards to torment with impunity, exposing abuses is one of the few avenues of protection that victims have.

"Awareness works," says Levi Browde of the Falun Dafa Information Center. "When a corrupt policeman finds out that his neighbors—and his wife—know he is torturing innocent people, he thinks twice before doing it again."

Other practitioners directly target the torturers—by calling them. An active network of people throughout China and abroad call the actual perpetrators, informing them that the world knows of their crimes and trying to convince them to stop.

The calls often begin within hours of the information having been posted online. And the responses are more encouraging than one might expect. Some perpetrators apologize. Others beg for lenience, promising to desist, if only their names could be removed from the exposés.

Sometimes the most unlikely heroes are also the most effective.

Long distance love

The involvement of figures like Robert in the cause, separated from the persecution by oceans, is equally remarkable.

Outside China, Falun Gong practitioners have produced television documentaries, designed internet software to counteract censorship, filed suits against key perpetrators, and even pedaled across the country.

Their motivation? It goes back to a central component of Falun Gong practice: the concept of compassion.

"In Falun Gong we learn to think of others first, and to develop our compassion. That means that the suffering of others is our own, and so we can't stand by and do nothing," says Robert.

Although Robert isn't calling labor camps in China, he is helping to straighten them out.

"I'll never forget the first time I met a Chinese practitioner who had been released from a labor camp after we wrote letters for him," Robert recalls.

"He had tears in his eyes describing the moment he'd learned that so many people out there were rooting for him."

It is in this spirit that this newspaper was produced. We invite you to share it with others you know, and bring hope to the people of China.

How you can help

- Give this paper to someone you know.
- Tell five people about what you read here.
- Call on government to press for an end to the persecution.
- For more news and insights about Falun Gong, visit: www.faluninfo.net.

For Whom?

Our informational fliers, events, and activism are meant to end a tragedy in China. But they are also meant for you, here in the free world.

As described below, we are all victims. Each of us is potentially impacted by the persecution. We might be asked in some way to betray our consciences, only to regret it later.

Each of us is also inevitably responding to the events in China—be it with sympathy, action, or indifference.

We share this paper to help you navigate these dilemmas. Just in your taking the time to read it and to care about Falun Gong, you are making a difference.

We're All Victims

Victims of the persecution include much more than Falun Gong prisoners of conscience. People from all walks of society have also—unwittingly—become victims.

INSIDE CHINA

The husband who is driven by his workplace to beat his own wife, having been threatened by Party officials with the loss of his job should she continue practicing Falun Gong.

The policeman who is coerced into torturing Falun Gong practitioners to renounce their beliefs, lest he miss a promotion or be demoted for not meeting quotas.

The student who reports a college roommate to school administrators, having believed propaganda about Falun Gong and thinking it evil or dangerous.

AROUND THE WORLD

The reporter who betrays his journalistic integrity—and readership—by choosing not to cover abuses against Falun Gong, for fear of losing press credentials in China.

The mayor who betrays her civic duty by refusing to engage with Falun Gong constituents, lest she anger Chinese diplomats and jeopardize Chinese investments in her city.

The businessman who betrays his conscience and yields to requests from Chinese counterparts to disavow Falun Gong, hoping to gain favor and secure more business opportunities.