



EDWARD McMILLAN-SCOTT
VICE-PRESIDENT

Dr Hans-Gert Poettering,
President, European Parliament

4 October 2007

Dear President, Dear Hans-Gert

RELIGIOUS REPRESSION BY CHINA

Further to our discussion on religious freedoms in China on 19 September in your Brussels office, I regret to inform you of subsequent developments affecting those with whom I had contact during my visit to Beijing in May 2006. As you know, all were arrested after my visit, harassed by the authorities and in two cases I have recent information that they are being tortured.

Since my meeting with you, the renowned Christian human rights lawyer, **Mr Gao Zhisheng**, was forcibly removed from his home on 22 September where he had been under house arrest since January, after his conviction last year for 'subversion'. His current whereabouts are unknown and there are fears for his safety (see Amnesty International Alert at Annex I).

On 26 September, I had a meeting in Strasbourg with a delegation from the National People's Congress of China (NPC) at which I handed over the letter that I sent to your office on 25 September stating my concerns over the inhumane treatment of the three individuals with whom I had contact in Beijing - **Mr Cao Dong**, **Ms Zhang Lianying** (both Falun Gong practitioners) and Mr Gao Zhisheng, who had advised her. I invited the delegation to seek their immediate freedom and in any event to advise you about their wellbeing, before the EU/China Human Rights Dialogue begins in Beijing on October 15.

I then received an email which informed me that on 29 September the lawyer of Mr Cao Dong, **Mr Li Heping** (also a Christian) had been seized by security forces and taken to woods where he was beaten up (see Amnesty International alert at Annex II). I can only assume that the treatment of Mr Li Heping is the result of my meeting with the NPC delegation in Strasbourg (see notes of the meeting at Annex III).

I am holding a Press conference on Wednesday 10 October at which religious freedoms in China will be the focus. I intend to release recent correspondence about individual cases, including this letter and annexes.

In addition, I have contacted the Secretariat of the International Criminal Court (ICC) regarding the above cases and some 3,000 religious prisoners who have died since 1999 under torture in China. The ICC has suggested that an official from the European Parliament's Human Rights Unit should be seconded to prepare a dossier for submission under the Genocide Convention.

I am sure you will agree that the repression of religious freedoms in China, whether of Buddhists, Christians, or Muslims, or in countries such as Burma or Sudan which fall under China's sphere of influence, cannot continue, and I look forward to further contacts with your office on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

cc. Mr José Manuel Barroso - President of the European Commission
Ms Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations
Mr Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy

Annex I

Amnesty International's Urgent Action on Gao Zhisheng - released 28 September 2007

PUBLIC AI Index: ASA 17/045/2007

28 September 2007

UA 252/07 Fear for safety/ possible incommunicado detention

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA Gao Zhisheng (m), aged 43, human rights lawyer

Human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng has not been seen since 22 September. His family has been unable to confirm his whereabouts. It is possible that Gao was detained by members of the State Security Bureau, but the Chinese authorities have made no official announcement of his detention. Amnesty International is concerned that Gao Zhisheng's safety is at grave risk.

According to Beijing-based human rights activist Qi Zhiyong, around ten plainclothes officers and several police vehicles arrived at Gao Zhisheng's home on 22 September. According to Hu Jia, another close contact of Gao Zhisheng, he might have been taken away by officers from either the State Security Bureau or the National Security Unit of the Beijing Public Security Bureau. However, no one witnessed his being taken away. Repeated unsuccessful attempts to contact Gao's wife, Geng He, suggests that she is now prohibited from talking freely over the phone.

The visit to Gao Zhisheng's house by state security personnel was apparently linked to his issuing of an open letter to the US Congress on 13 September, drawing attention to the deterioration in the human rights situation and stating that, in light of this, he could not support the country's staging of the 2008 Olympics. On 16 September, a group of police officers from the National Security Unit of the Beijing Public Security Bureau stormed and searched Gao Zhisheng's home. At that time a "supervision and modification" committee made up of Public Security Bureau officials was reportedly established to deal with Gao's case.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gao Zhisheng was convicted of 'inciting subversion' in December 2006 in connection with his activism, including his organization of a hunger-strike protest in Beijing in February 2006 to draw attention to the plight of several other activists who had been subjected to human rights violations, and his publishing of an open letter to the authorities calling for religious freedom and an end to the 'barbaric' persecution of the Falun Gong spiritual movement. The authorities had already suspended the operations of his law firm, the Shengzhi Law Office, and revoked his law license in late 2005. Unusually, the court ruled that his three-year prison sentence should be suspended for five years, meaning that he would not be imprisoned unless he commits a criminal offence during that period. For more information, see UA 14/06 (ASA 17/001/2006, 19 January 2006) and follow-ups.

In April 2007, Gao Zhisheng reported other Chinese activists that he had been treated harshly by police during a four-month period in custody in 2006, including being handcuffed and forced to sit in an iron chair or cross-legged for extended periods, and having bright lights shone at him. He said he only agreed to confess to his 'crime' in order to protect his family.

Annex II

PUBLIC AI Index: ASA 17/046/2007

UA 253/07 Fear for safety 03 October 2007

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA Li Heping (m), human rights lawyer

Li Heping, a Beijing-based human rights lawyer, was abducted and assaulted by a group of unidentified men on 29 September. They beat him with electro-shock batons and told him he should leave Beijing or risk further attack. He was released after about eight hours. Amnesty International is seriously concerned for his safety.

A group of around 12 men in plainclothes intercepted Li Heping at around 5.30pm on 29 September in the car park of his lawyers' firm. They put a hood over his head, bundled him into a car with no license plates and took him to an unknown location. He was held in the basement of a building where he was stripped to his underwear. The men then began beating him with bottles and electro-shock batons.

During the assault, his attackers reportedly shouted: "Get out of Beijing otherwise we will beat you whenever we see you". They told him he was a criminal and should practice law 'within permissible limits'. They also warned him not to report the beating to anyone.

Li Heping was subsequently dumped in the woods in a suburb outside Beijing at around 1am on 30 September. He managed to hail a taxi, but when he returned home, he found that several of his personal belongings had been stolen, including his lawyer's identification card. His computer had been re-formatted, making it unusable, and the files had been erased.

As a result of the attack, Li Heping sustained bruises all over his face, shoulders, hands and body and lost a significant amount of hair. He also developed a headache, his face became swollen, and he suffered loss of hearing in his left ear.

The incident occurred one day after police from the National Security Protection Unit (*guonei anquan baowei zhidui, guobao*) of the Beijing Public Security Bureau verbally told Li Heping that he and his family should leave Beijing during the 17th Communist Party Congress, due to begin on 15 October. After the assault, Li Heping released a personal statement describing his experience. He firmly rejected demands that he should 'leave Beijing'.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Li Heping had built a reputation for defending sensitive cases, including Christians arrested for unofficial house church activities, members of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement, alleged victims of forced eviction and independent writers. He was defence lawyer for dissident, Yang Zili, and imprisoned environmental activist Tan Kai, and has appealed to the authorities on behalf of lawyer Gao Zhisheng. As a result of such activities, he had been placed under tight police surveillance and his freedom of movement has been restricted.

While the space for civil society activities has grown over recent years in China, activists who take on politically sensitive cases or try to rally others to their cause remain a key target for repression. Abuses against human rights activists have escalated as the authorities tighten controls in the run-up to two key events: the 17th Communist Party Congress in October, and the Beijing Olympics of August 2008. Several human rights lawyers and legal advisors have been subjected to arbitrary detention and torture or ill-treatment. Some have been imprisoned, while others have been placed under tight police surveillance in their own homes. The crackdown flies in the face of official promises to improve human rights in the run-up to the Olympics.