

Revelations of Torture Spur Wife of Chinese Lawyer to Action

Geng He, wife of missing Christian lawyer Gao Zhisheng, is demanding answers from the Chinese government following new revelations of torture of her husband.

"This is the first time that I heard about the details," Geng, now living in the United States, told Radio Free Asia last week. "My husband did not tell me—would not tell me—how he was tortured."

After consulting with Geng, The Associated Press (AP) on Jan. 10 published an interview with Gao, an outspoken human rights campaigner, during his brief release from captivity last April, in which he revealed details of the torture he had suffered during the previous 14 months.

Speaking with the AP in a Beijing teahouse on April 7, closely watched by police, Gao described many forms of torture, including a period of 48 hours when he was stripped bare, beaten continually with handguns and subjected to other excruciating abuse.

The AP released the interview in advance of an official visit this week (Jan. 18-21) by Chinese President Hu Jintao to the United States, stating its hope that "publicizing his account will place renewed pressure on the government to disclose Gao's whereabouts."

Geng planned to travel to Washington this week to further highlight her husband's case. At a U.S. State Department dinner at the White House tonight for Hu, she planned to wait outside to draw attention to Gao's disappearance.

Gao had asked that his account not be made public unless he disappeared again or “made it to someplace safe like the U.S. or Europe,” according to the AP.

Initially seized by public security officials on Feb. 4, 2009, shortly after his wife and two children fled China to seek asylum in the United States, Gao was held virtually incommunicado for more than a year before police staged his brief reappearance in Beijing last April 6. (See , “Christian Rights Activist Gao Zhisheng Released,” April 9, 2010.)

After speaking with the AP and other journalists, Gao made a supervised visit to his in-laws in northwestern Xinjiang Province. During that visit, he again vanished on April 20 while in the company of Chinese police, according to a report by The New York Times on April 30, 2009. He has not been seen or heard from since, but China watchers such as Bob Fu of the China Aid Association (CAA) believe he is “definitely in the hands of Chinese security forces.” (See , “Human Rights Lawyer Gao Zhisheng Missing Again,” May 7, 2010.)

New Account

In his interview with the AP, Gao explained that police had moved him from his birthplace of Yulin to Beijing, then back to Yulin, and from there to Urumqi, where the most excruciating moments of torture occurred.

Allowed out on an evening walk on Sept. 25, Gao was approached by several Uyghur men, members of a minority ethnic group who claimed to be part of a counterterrorism unit. They punched him in the stomach, handcuffed him and took him to the upstairs room of a building. There they tortured him for a full week, culminating in a period of 48 hours when they stripped him bare and “took turns beating him [with pistols] and did things he refused to describe,” the AP reported.

Gao said this was the darkest point in the 14 months since authorities had seized him in February 2009, and far worse

than the torture during a previous disappearance in 2007. At that time, he said in a previous report, security officials gave electric shocks to his genitals and held burning cigarettes close to his eyes to cause temporary blindness.

When Gao in 2007 asked Beijing police why they didn't put him in prison, they replied, "You're not good enough for that. Whenever we want you to disappear, you'll disappear," according to the AP.

"Words from the Heart"

Fu of CAA on Friday (Jan. 14) also called on the Chinese government to give an account of Gao's whereabouts, besides imploring President Obama to address the fate of Gao and other prominent Chinese rights defenders during his meetings with Hu.

Fu also released a previously unpublished statement written by Gao on Jan. 1, 2009, shortly before his family's escape from China, entitled "Words from the Heart."

Carried out of China by Gao's wife, the document claimed that authorities had invested a huge amount of manpower, physical resources and funds to silence him.

"Not only is it now extremely difficult for me to make my voice heard, but it is also extremely dangerous," Gao wrote.

His faith, however, had enabled him to endure under pressure, he stated.

"I am optimistic by nature, and I am a Christian," he wrote. "Even when I was tortured to near death, the pain was only in the physical body. A heart that is filled with God has no room to entertain pain and suffering."

Gao expressed concern for his wife and children, who had suffered greatly from police harassment. He said authorities even banned his daughter from attending school, another factor

prompting the family's flight to the United States.

Gao urged friends both inside and outside China to defend other human rights advocates imprisoned or harassed by the government, adding that "Heroes like Guo Feixiong who sacrifice and risk their lives to defend religious freedom, are the true hope of China."

He also urged that a network be established within China to report on "countless" abuses of human rights.

"The publication of this article will cause me to be kidnapped again," Gao concluded. "Kidnappings are a normal part of my life now. If it comes again, then let it come!"