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March 4, 2009

H.E. Hu Jintao

President of the People's Republic of China
c/o Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
2300 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear President Hu:

We are writing to you on behalf of the nongovernmental International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies (ISC/CD), in solidarity with the Canadian Friends of Gao Zhisheng to support and reiterate their call in a March 2 letter for the immediate release of Mr. Gao. Mr. Gao's reputation as a leading advocate for the most vulnerable members of Chinese society and his courageous support for human rights in China have made his case a leading concern of the international community, and the knowledge that his suffering is endured regularly by the Chinese people at the hands of your own government is a source of continued concern.

The blatant abuse of Mr. Gao and his family, including police attacks on his wife and children and the horrific torture he has endured under state custody, reminds us that such experiences appear to be tragically common in China, as the same methods have been employed in your government's repression of Falun Gong practitioners. The Canadian Friends of Gao Zhisheng rightly note that as discussions to plan for a "harmonious society" are about to begin in the National Congress of People's Representatives, "you should realize the profound irony of your pursuit of 'harmony' in face of your government's violent offense against your own people, even on the basis of your own very narrow interpretation of human rights."

As the letter from the Canadian Friends of Gao Zhisheng makes clear, Mr. Gao is representative of the best that the Chinese people has to offer and "one of the truest patriots of your country." His continued imprisonment and the violent repression of the Chinese people is an embarrassment to your government that prevents China from assuming the role of a respected world leader. Mr. Gao's immediate release alone is insufficient to overcome this, but it is a necessary step to place China in conformity with recognized standards of human rights.

Sincerely,

Robert R. LaGamma
ISC/CD Secretariat

Enclosure: Open Letter to President Hu Jintao about Gao Zhisheng from
Canadian Friends of Gao Zhisheng

***The ISC/CD is a global network of civil society organizations committed to
democracy and human rights, related to the Community of Democracies.***

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Open Letter to President Hu Jintao about Gao Zhisheng

CANADIAN FRIENDS OF GAO ZHISHENG

March 02, 2009

Open Letter to President Hu Jintao
Zhong Nan Hai, Beijing,
P. R. China

Dear President Hu,

We are writing to appeal for the immediate release of Nobel Peace Prize-nominated lawyer Gao Zhisheng.

As you well know, in 2001, Gao was named one of China's top ten lawyers for his work representing vulnerable groups such as the poor, the disabled and others. Agents operating under your government have, however, repeatedly persecuted him since he wrote to you and other Chinese leaders, calling for a stop of human rights violations on Falun Gong practitioners and other faith groups and voices of dissent.

These persecutions included removing his permit to practise law, an attempt on his life, having police attack his wife and 14-year-old daughter and four-year-old son, denying the family any income, kidnapping and imprisonment, treatment that the agents of your party-state routinely apply to your own people.

In his most recent article a few weeks ago, Mr. Gao wrote about over 50 days of excruciating torture:

"Then, the electric shock batons were put all over me. And my full body, my heart, lungs, and muscles began jumping under my skin uncontrollably. I was writhing on the ground in pain, trying to crawl away. Wang [one of the lead torturers] then shocked me in my genitals."

Gao also described his ordeal in a separate incident: "Then two people stretched out my arms and pinned them to the ground. They used toothpicks to pierce my genitals. I can't use any language to describe the helplessness, pain, and despair that I felt then. At a point like that, language and emotion do not have the power to explain."

In his account, Gao said that the torturers mentioned they were using the same torture methods that they had earlier refined on Falun Gong practitioners. He admitted that he had tried to kill himself to stop the suffering, and that he believed God helped him to come back from the brink of death.

Since his recent letter, Mr. Gao has disappeared again, presumably re-arrested, to the great concern of many in China and elsewhere. For his full account, please see enclosed "Dark Night, Dark Hood and Kidnapping by Dark Mafia".

Your government has wrongly accused Mr. Gao and other critics of your human rights records of subversion, when in fact Mr. Gao is by far one of the truest patriots of your country. He follows the footsteps of Lu Xun, one of China's most outstanding modern authors, who argued against a cultural environment obsessed with saving face and repeatedly called for social change, democratic development and respect for human dignity.

By failing to stop gross and systematic human rights violations, or acting so often as the perpetrator of cruel abuses of your people, your government is acting like the lord of Cai in the legend of Bian Que. By allowing injustices of many kinds to spread, your party-state is working to the serious detriment of a country, which has made many great contributions to world civilization in its history.

This month, the Chinese Parliament, National Congress of People's Representatives, will meet in Beijing to discuss plans for what you call a "harmonious society." You should realize the profound irony of your pursuit of "harmony" in face of your government's violent offense against your own people, even on the basis of your own very narrow interpretation of human rights.

Well-wishers of China had long hoped that the country's economic growth would be accompanied by increased respect for human rights and the rule of law. The reality has been quite the contrary; instead of honouring the obligations prescribed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which China is a signatory, blatant human rights violations persist even since you took power in 2002.

As an emerging economic power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the government of China must stop the persecution and other systematic abuses of its own people. You should not take China's increased role in dealing with the current worldwide financial challenges as a license to continue aggression on the Chinese people.

President Hu, social cohesion cannot be achieved until you stop your government's violent repression of your own people. Instead of persecuting Mr. Gao, and people like him, you should protect these heroes. Please free Mr. Gao Zhisheng immediately!

Sincerely,

Canadian Friends of Gao Zhisheng