

## **GAO ZHISHENG and “TRANSCENDING FEAR”**

**Panel Discussion Notes for David Kilgour**

**Free Thinking Film Festival**

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What an excellent film. Heartiest congratulations to Wenjing (Wendy) Ma, director and producer of this film. Ms. Ma has done an enormous service to Gao and his family, to the Chinese people, and to human dignity and the rule of law across China.



Here is part of what Geng He, Gao’s wife, said on March 5 of this year at an event on Capitol Hill in Washington on human rights in China. She and their two children earlier escaped from China and now live in the U.S.

*My husband ... has always fought for the rights of vulnerable social groups in China, including working pro bono for poor people... (L)awyers defending the abused party come under huge pressure and face threats from the powerful. Gao Zhisheng doesn't fear the powerful... His familiarity with the law and his eloquence have allowed him to win justice for many victims. Because of his work, he has also won his reputation and the love of the people. He was even praised by the official media and has won numerous prizes.*

*In 2005, he began... to defend persecuted Christians, Falun Gong adherents and other persecuted social groups... As a result, Chinese authorities openly attacked him and persecuted him. The government shut down his law firm and revoked his lawyer's license. In August 2006, the police illegally kidnapped him and on December 22, 2006, they sentenced him to three years in prison and five years probation on the charge of “inciting to subvert the state's power.” During the probation, he was disappeared at least six times and he once went missing for 20 months. Each time he went missing, he was tortured. Four days before his probation was due to end, Xinhua News Agency reported that Gao Zhisheng would “be in jail for the next three years.” At the end of 2011, they secretly transferred him to the distant Shaya County Prison in Aksu District of Xinjiang.*

*We were very worried as we couldn't get news on him. My family members in China made inquiries everywhere and were rejected by the authorities who said in a rude manner: "We don't know. Why do you ask us?" There was a period of 10 months between the first time he was jailed in a Xinjiang prison and the second time he was sent there. Finally, the police allowed his family members to see him. However, the police prohibited them from asking about his condition during the visit.*

*It has been seven years since Gao Zhisheng was first brutally persecuted. In that time, the police have stayed at my home. They have monitored me and my children and didn't let my daughter attend school, bringing us great mental and emotional trauma. We finally succeeded in escaping from China. The evil deeds committed by the Chinese authoritarian regime will forever be etched in our memory. They maintain their authoritarian rule with lies and violence. They are simply shameless...*

*A new administration of the Chinese Communists is taking power. I hope these new leaders will immediately release Gao Zhisheng and let him reunite with us in America...I also hope that U.S. Congressmen, parliamentarians in Europe and government officials of all countries will continue to provide help to Gao Zhisheng in any way they can. Whenever you write a letter to him, mention his name in speeches or request a meeting with him, you give him great support and lend him a measure of protection...*

### **NOBEL NOMINATION**

*In 2007, David Matas and I nominated Gao for the Nobel Peace Prize and we know others have done so too.*

*It was originally Gao who invited us to China to investigate allegations of organ pillaging from Falun Gong practitioners. We could not go to China, but we located 52 proofs that large scale trafficking in their organs was and is occurring. We continue Gao's struggle for justice on this issue.*

Here are a couple of excerpts from the letter Matas and I sent to nominate Gao:

*We, the undersigned, do hereby nominate Gao, Zhisheng, renowned human rights lawyer in China, for the Nobel Peace Prize....*

*Gao, 42, was born in the hillside cave in which his desperately poor family lived in north China. Starting as a migrant worker and then going underground as a coal miner at the age of 15, he later joined the People's Liberation Army, where he met his future wife, obtained a secondary education... On discharge, he became a street vendor, but also studied to become a lawyer, and was among the only one percent of the self-trained candidates who passed the bar exam in 1994.*

*Victims of official abuse were soon lining up at his office and he began to win cases against all odds in China's notoriously unjust court system. By 2001, the Ministry of Justice named him one of ten "honour lawyers" in a national television competition, although it rescinded the title four years later when he became a target of the regime.*

*His defense of farmers losing their land and Christians was serious enough, but doing the same for Falun Gong practitioners, when the regime had banned any lawyer from even representing them, was completely intolerable. It was Gao who wrote to (us) last summer, inviting us to come to China to investigate the stealing of vital organs from Falun Gong prisoners of conscience. Predictably, no visa was subsequently issued by its embassy in Ottawa to do so; he was detained not long afterwards.*

*His three open letters to President Hu and others, protesting a range of abuses, including specific cases of torture and murder, caused his law office to be closed by the government. Literally throngs of police soon began to follow him and his family day and night. In a characteristic response, he posted the details of this campaign on his website, resigned from the Party and later became a publicly-declared Christian.*

*It matters little to Party leaders that Gao's permit to practise law was revoked in 2005 because he wrote an open letter to them about the need for religious freedom, independent judges, democracy and the rule of law; or that his wife, Geng He, and two young children have since been constantly followed, harassed and intimidated by public security personnel; or that even their 13-year-old daughter, Gege, was recently beaten by police*

*Sincerely,*

*David Matas and David Kilgour*

## **CONCLUSION**

Our report on organ pillaging, released in its first form on July 6, 2006, came to the conclusion that the allegations were true, that there is wide scale organ pillaging from Falun Gong practitioners, killing them in the process. We did what little we could to protect Gao in the first version of our report by not mentioning him, his invitation or his open letters against the persecution of the Falun Gong. Nonetheless we were deeply indebted to him not only for his example but also for his analysis and insights.

When Gao was almost immediately thereafter arrested, tortured, convicted and sentenced, we were appalled. But, given what we had learned about the Communist Party of China, we far from surprised.

What is stunning about Gao is not so much that he has stood up for justice and the rule of law, as admirable as that is, nor that he was persecuted for it, as deplorable as that is. It is rather that he stood his ground as the persecution accumulated, as it accelerated. He could not help but know that what he was doing was going to bring disaster on him; but he did it anyways.

Thank you.