

HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHINA-

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CHINA

Beijing puts dissidents under house arrest ahead of martial arts Olympics

Dissidents and democrats removed from the city or put under surveillance before Beijing hosts the sporting event. The powerful China increasingly afraid of any protest and "removes" dissidents several times a year.

Beijing (AsiaNews / Agencies) - Qi Zhiyong has been disabled since he was injured during the Tiananmen Square protests of 3-4 June 1989, when the army crushed the pro-democracy student protests. On 24 August the police loaded him into a car and secreted him outside Beijing to an unknown destination where he is being kept under "house arrest".

Qi Zhiyong on the night of the massacre was shot in the leg. He was taken to hospital three hours later. His leg became infected and doctors were forced to amputate it. Speaking to Radio Free Asia, Qi said that "the police say it is because of Sportaccord Combat Games".

The Sportaccord Combat Games, the first international martial arts competition will be held in Beijing from August 28 to September 4. It involves thousands of athletes around the world in 13 different disciplines, from Korean taekwondo to Chinese kung fu and Thai muaythai or kick boxing. They are called the "Olympics of martial arts" and aim to encourage the admission of new sports to the Olympic Games. The event will be covered by television worldwide. The Hollywood star Jackie Chan, a kung fu expert, travelled to Beijing this week to record a song that will be the anthem of the competition. Chan has recently filmed the movie *The Karate Kid*, set in a modern prosperous, and technological China, free from problems, due to be released.

Qi said that the police is forcibly removing all the democrats and dissidents from Beijing to prevent public protests. They said that "with all probability I'll be free in early September. They themselves do not know when". "Through Twitter I sent a message to Li Jinping, who wanted to hold a demonstration" for the rehabilitation of former premier Zhao Ziyang, the restoration of [guarantees provided by] the Chinese Constitution and for greater political power to the people".

Li is a dissident who for years has been fighting for the public rehabilitation of former premier Zhao, disgraced for opposing the use of the army against the student movement of 1989 and who died in 2005 under house arrest.

Qi also makes a long list of other democrats and dissidents who have been put under surveillance or house arrest in recent days, such as Wang Xueqin, Hu Shigeno, and Gao Hongming Liu Shasha. He notes that before these "raids" occurred only during major political events and anniversaries. Now they are also made for a sporting event such as the Combat Games.

"The police – he says - said it was an international event with many foreign visitors, which held for the first time in Beijing necessitating security measures."

The dissident Wu Tianli says that it has become common practise for police to put all possible dissenters under control prior to any event, "be it major or minor." "Before [the police] could put you under surveillance maybe twice a year. Now its 4 or 5 times. We are put under surveillance for everything. "

From Beijing, away from all this, Chan said the state newspaper China Daily that he loves wushu (kung fu) and that he hopes it will be included in the Olympics. It really is another China.

South China Morning Post

Inquiry urged into torture claims

Agence France Presse in Beijing

Aug 23, 2010

A group of mainland lawyers yesterday called on the nation's top prosecution agency to investigate allegations that torture was used to extract confessions from defendants in a high-profile crackdown on gangs.

In a letter to the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the lawyers highlighted the case of Fan Qihang , an alleged mobster who was sentenced to death as part of the crackdown in the southwestern city of Chongqing .

Prominent rights lawyer Li Fangping said more than 20 lawyers and scholars had signed it yesterday, including Teng Biao and Tang Jitian, two other well-known lawyers.

The letter says Fan's lawyer recently made public documents including photos and videos allegedly showing Fan was tortured after he was detained last year.

He was allegedly regularly beaten, deprived of sleep, and on one occasion hung from iron bars with his hands shackled behind his back for five days, the letter says.

Fan says he confessed to crimes he did not commit, and the Supreme Court is currently reviewing the sentence, according to rights group Amnesty International. The letter also says that the documents made public by Fan's lawyer allege other defendants were also tortured.

"We call on the Supreme People's Procuratorate to immediately investigate if torture was used in the Chongqing crackdown cases, including Fan Qihang's case, based on the constitution and relevant regulations," it reads.

The letter, which also calls on results of the investigation to be made public, comes just over two months after the mainland issued new rules banning courts from accepting confessions obtained via torture.

The mob crackdown in Chongqing, masterminded by party chief Bo Xilai , has riveted the nation with its sordid tales of abuses of power. It has resulted in more than 3,300 detentions and hundreds of prosecutions, including the trials of nearly 100 officials.

Wen Qiang, the former head of the judiciary in Chongqing and also an ex-deputy police chief, was executed last month on charges including rape and taking bribes to protect criminal gangs.

Los Angeles Times
latimes.com

**China's investigative reporters face harassment and worse
Beijing reporter Fang Xuanchang tackles medical fraud. Not long ago, two
thugs with lead pipes decided to tackle him.**

By John M. Glionna, Los Angeles Times
9:13 PM PDT, August 21, 2010
Reporting from Beijing

Fang Xuanchang is a gunslinger in the chaotic Wild West of journalism. And China has it all, from blackmailers posing as media types to legitimate reporters taking kickbacks not to go to print.

Then there's Fang, an investigative reporter who specializes in medical fraud: unscrupulous doctors promoting miracle cures and quack scientists who fabricate research results for bureaucratic kudos.

In a secretive and often paranoid culture where muckrakers are viewed as dangerous busybodies, Fang has been harassed by authorities and threatened with lawsuits and jail time. These days he considers himself lucky to be alive.

In June, as Fang was arriving home from work, he was set upon by two well-built men wielding lead pipes. It was a professional job, he says. They ambushed him from behind in a shadowy area near his apartment complex, a spot unseen by surveillance cameras.

The assailants worked efficiently, silently flailing away at his head and upper body, unconcerned by bystanders.

"They tried to kill me," said Fang, an editor at Caijing magazine.

Fang, a slight but physically fit 37-year-old who knows martial arts, fought his way into a taxi, his clothes soaked with blood. His attackers vanished.

Police have yet to make any arrests, but Fang thinks the men must have been hired by one of the doctors exposed by his stories.

He has reason to be suspicious. Since 1992, three Chinese journalists have been killed on the job, far fewer than in Russia and the Philippines, where scores have died, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, but still, activists say, China is no place for the squeamish.

Although statistics on attacks on journalists are scarce here, a December survey by the Committee to Protect Journalists showed that 24 Chinese journalists were in prison, including several Internet bloggers.

"For journalists who embarrass local government or otherwise powerful people, China is a very dangerous place," said Gilles Lordet, chief editor of Paris-based Reporters Without Borders.

In a nation where most news media are heavily controlled by the state, reports critical of the government vanish from the Internet and newsstands. Under a new law, journalists based in metropolitan areas are forbidden to independently report on national or international stories and cannot modify information provided by the Communist Party's propaganda department.

Free-speech activists have lodged protests over government actions against journalists, including one who was briefly placed on a most-wanted list for his negative story about a

major battery manufacturer and another who was sentenced to 15 years in prison for "threatening national security."

Fang's case suggests another adversary: vindictive story subjects who hire thugs to exact revenge.

The Hangzhou native has pursued academic fraud, exposing research plagiarists and others who fake professional awards and credentials. He's also shed light on the pressure bureaucrats exert on researchers to produce fraudulent results.

The government acknowledges that the field is rife with corruption. One state-sponsored study found that among 6,000 scientists at top institutions, a third admitted committing "plagiarism, falsification or fabrication."

Worse, Fang says, are the doctors who play the role of magic healer to an undereducated public. "They produce false hope in patients willing to pay anything and believe everything," he said. "In the end, there's no cure, only financial ruin."

Fang recently investigated a doctor who claimed he could cure a rare spinal cord condition that leaves patients without bowel control. His procedure takes a nerve from the patient's leg and moves it to the spinal cord. Fang showed that the operation not only offered no cure, but was dangerous.

"The doctor boasted an 80% success rate with 100 patients," Fang said, "but none of 70 people we contacted said they were helped. A third said they had lost use of their leg."

The physician is now the target of numerous lawsuits.

The men who attacked Fang left a 2-inch gash in his skull that took five stitches to close. The incident prompted a brief editorial in the state-run press urging that reporters not be harmed.

Fang calls such criminal attacks worse than party harassment.

"When you deal with the government, at least you know the rules," he said. "But threats from gangs are different."

Undeterred, he's at work on a new expose.

"As a journalist in China, you can't obsess about attacks," Fang said, "or you might as well quit."

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The Washington Post

If China can consider a death-penalty ban, why can't the U.S.?

Letters to the Editor

Sunday, August 22, 2010; A14

In his Aug. 16 op-ed, "Is mercy coming to China?," John Kamm noted that in the past decade China has reduced its rate of executing prisoners by half, from 10,000 per year to fewer than 5,000, with about 2,000 executions projected for 2012. The government has a stated goal of abolishing the death penalty. It abolished public executions some time ago.

It is not often that China can serve as a human rights model. But a stated goal of abolishing the death penalty is a step that we should be taking. It would do much to remove a barbaric relic from our judicial system.

We have reduced executions in the United States from about 100 a year 10 years ago to about 50 now. That is about the same percentage reduction as in China and with much smaller numbers. Still, even one execution is too many. And with an average of 15,000 murders per year in the United States and only 50 executions for murder, the penalty is so freakishly rare as to be "cruel and unusual." It should be abolished.

Herbert C. Puscheck, Alexandria

Big Brother widens his watchful eye in China

Millions of cameras trained on cities, particularly on dissidents and politically sensitive spots

Mark MacKinnon

Xining, China — From Friday's Globe and Mail

Published on Thursday, Aug. 12, 2010 7:38PM EDT

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East Riverside Road – better known to locals as Tibetan Street – is in fact a dusty and narrow alleyway across from the main bus station in this ethnically mixed city on China's Tibetan plateau. Lined with Tibetan shops and teahouses, as well as Muslim bakeries and a row of stalls selling fireworks, it's crowded and chaotic enough that few cars bother trying to enter.

But anxious local authorities watch the fray from above. Hanging at even intervals over the twisting 300-metre length of the road are seven domes containing closed-circuit television cameras – nicknamed “Global Eyes” by the Chinese company that makes them – recording nearly everything that goes on in the bustling alley below.

The use of such surveillance technology has skyrocketed in China in recent years – just as it has in many Western countries – with millions of cameras trained on cities around the country to watch traffic, prevent crime and to keep an eye on dissidents and politically sensitive spots such as Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. But the blanket coverage given to a narrow alley in the remote city of Xining highlights how cameras are also being used to closely monitor China’s restive ethnic minorities, especially since the 2008 riots on the Tibetan plateau and last year’s deadly ethnic violence in the predominantly Muslim Uighur region of Xinjiang.

The cameras along East Riverside Road were installed last year after a pair of murders on the street, which in addition to monks and traders also attracts gangs of beggars and, according to local shopkeepers, thieves. But while some say they’re glad for the added security that the cameras provide, many allege that the authorities have other goals in mind.

“We don’t like it because we know they’re only watching Tibetans. It’s political,” said Danjiang, the 36-year-old owner of a Tibetan restaurant on East Riverside Road.

Danjiang, who gave only his first name, said police had stepped up surveillance of Xining’s Tibetan population ever since the monk-led riots of March, 2008. Those were concentrated in the city of Lhasa and other parts of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, but spread to parts of neighbouring provinces, such as Qinghai, that have large Tibetan populations. At the time, Tibetan university students in Xining, the capital of Qinghai, demonstrated in support of the monks.

The use of video surveillance is common across China, though not excessive compared to some Western countries. (There are an estimated seven million cameras watching 1.3 billion people in China, compared to 4.2 million cameras watching 61 million Britons.) What’s troubling for human-rights activists is the overt focus on cities and neighbourhoods that are ethnically Tibetan or Uighur, as well as the specific targeting of political dissidents.

Following the March, 2008, riots in Lhasa, authorities awarded China Telecom – the maker of the “Global Eye” cameras – a \$6.5-million contract to install cameras at 624 locations, including the train and bus stations, and all hotels in the city. Similarly, a cluster of cameras has monitored the Tibetan neighbourhood around Beijing’s Yonghegong Temple since before the 2008 Olympics there.

The program in the Tibetan capital was named “Peace in Lhasa.” A press release distributed by China Telecom after winning the contract boasted that “the police only need to lightly click their mouse to direct the ‘electronic policeman’ around. Such a ‘Security Skynet’ will

leaves no place for criminals to hide, and ensures the citizens' peaceful life and work, as well as the stability and harmony of society."

In Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang and the site of deadly ethnic rioting last year between Uighurs and Han Chinese that left 197 people dead, there are already 47,000 cameras in place, with plans to install another 13,000 by the end of the year. Residents say a disproportionate number are trained on mosques and Uighur neighbourhoods of the city.

It's not just minorities, but anyone that gives the government trouble who gets the extra scrutiny. Human Rights Watch, the New York-based advocacy group, said that at least half a dozen prominent political dissidents have cameras trained on their residences. Amid growing expression of dissent online, video cameras have also been recently made mandatory in the country's Internet cafés, with direct feeds to the local police stations, making it easier for the government to trace those making anonymous comments on websites.

"Our concern is not surveillance cameras per se [but] the use of such surveillance to further enforce the ban on peaceful assembly and demonstration; the overt ambition by the Chinese government to marry video-surveillance data with a wide range of other government databases [and] the lack of any meaningful regulations to prevent uses that infringe on the right to privacy," said Nicholas Bequelin, a Hong-Kong based researcher for Human Rights Watch.

"The government is entirely free to do whatever it pleases for as long as it chooses with the data gathered through video surveillance, including mobilizing this technology to repressive political or religious ends. Such technology is already highly problematic in democratic countries with an independent judiciary – in China the counterweights are simply non-existent."

According to the official China Daily newspaper, the southeastern factory hub of Guangzhou – which is getting set this year to host the Asian Games – now has 2.6 million surveillance cameras in place around the city, likely making it the most-watched city on Earth. Beijing is believed to have the next highest number of any Chinese city with an estimated 470,000, followed by the heaving southwestern megalopolis of Chongqing with 310,000. (According to official figures, Xining will by the end of this year have a relatively modest 5,000 surveillance cameras watching its two million residents.) Those most closely watched by the cameras say it's a cheap and efficient way for the government to insert itself into their lives. "They use [cameras] to observe human-rights defenders and activists more and more often, rather than arresting us directly. It costs less than using human beings to watch us," said Zeng Jinyan, an outspoken blogger and the wife of jailed AIDS activist Hu Jia.

Ms. Zeng and her young daughter have lived with a camera trained on their Beijing apartment building for almost four years, since shortly before her husband was arrested. She said the biggest inconvenience has been that friends and family have become nervous about visiting her apartment since the cameras were installed.

“My apartment is like an isolated island in our compound. It’s very strange, but I try my best to carry on living a normal life.”

South China Morning Post

Writer challenges premier not to throw him in prison Author characterises Wen as being 'China's best actor'

Minnie Chan

Aug 06, 2010

A dissident writer has challenged Premier Wen Jiabao to prove he is an open-minded leader.

Yu Jie says the answer will be known in 10 days if he remains free after a controversial book he has written characterising Wen as "China's best actor", rather than the sympathetic "Grandpa Wen" portrayed in mainland media, hits the shelves in Hong Kong.

He said China's Best Actor: Wen Jiabao would go on sale in Hong Kong on August 16 despite a warning by Beijing police last month that he would be jailed if publication went ahead.

"I am concerned about my personal safety of course ... but the authorities have banned me from publishing on the mainland since 2004," Yu said. "I don't want my scant freedom to publish in Hong Kong to also be lost.

"If the central leadership decides to put me in jail because of my book, it would ruin the image of an open-minded administration that both President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen have pulled out all stops to build up over the past eight years."

Yu, 36, was interrogated for 4-1/2 hours by Beijing secret police on July 5. He said his interrogators told him that Wen was not "a normal citizen" and any book criticising him could have "grave consequences" because it would endanger "the ruling power and the interests of the nation".

Yu was told he could end up in prison like Liu Xiaobo , the writer and former professor sentenced to 11 years in prison on subversion charges in December, a year after he co-authored Charter 08, a bold manifesto calling for political reform on the mainland.

"Even without this book, the authorities still could find so-called evidence to charge me over the 1,500-odd critical articles I have written in the past decade," Yu said.

Yu's book contains 51 critical articles in five main chapters based on Wen's public performances and speeches carried by official mainland media outlets and international newspapers over the past eight years, the writer said.

In one of the articles, he describes Wen as a mediocre technocrat who climbed his way to the top by avoiding political conflicts and manipulating public sentiment.

"Among all previous directors in the General Office of the Central Committee ... Wen is so far the only one to be promoted as a top leader who holds real power without a background of outstanding achievements," Yu wrote, adding that Wen's ability to avoid being implicated in the downfall of former bosses - Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang , who were forced to step down in party power struggles - had played a key role in his promotion.

"Compared with Wang Zhaoguo and Hu Qili , the two former rising stars who lost opportunities to become top leaders ... Wen grabbed the chance because he is the master of political manipulation ... from the very beginning, he realised that Deng Xiaoping was his real master, not Hu and Zhao."

Yu cited Wen's refusal to sign off on a telegram to Zhao that could have led to an emergency session of the National People's Congress over the legality of imposing martial law in Beijing before the crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989, an incident mentioned in Zhao's memoirs.

In another article, Yu highlights the role Wen has played as the human face balancing Hu Jintao's serious style.

"Hu has a personality that is impersonal and cold; he prefers to give orders behind the scenes because he is not good at performing in public," Yu wrote. "Wen's character fills the gap because he likes going down to coal mines, visiting farmers and expressing emotions in public."

Hong Kong-based political commentator Poon Siu-to said politicians both in China and overseas needed to be good performers in public.

"The difference is, politicians in Western countries are elected by the public but Chinese leaders like Wen and Hu were anointed by their predecessors," Poon said. "That's why all Chinese officials should learn how to please their superiors."

"Western politicians have more space to maximise their acting abilities, as they are also directors of their shows. But, under one-party rule, there are so many directors, such as the Central Publicity Department, to conduct Wen's act."

Poon said the sympathetic image of "Grandpa Wen" and "the People's Premier" may be a product of the party's publicity department.

"I don't think we can see the real face of a top leader from news reports, because on the mainland all official reports about performances and speeches by a leader would be strictly censored and embellished before being published," he said. "Wen is playing a role, which the mainland public has expected since ancient China, while the party also needs such an image to maintain power."

Bao Pu , founder of New Century Press, which is publishing the book in Hong Kong, said 30 per cent of it was articles Yu had already published in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas or on the internet over the past six years, while the rest was new.

"We plan to print 5,000 copies in its initial edition," he said.

Bao's father - Bao Tong , the highest-ranking official jailed over the Tiananmen crackdown and a senior adviser to late party general secretary Zhao - had written an introduction for the book.

"The leaders and the led, everyone is passing their days inside a contradiction," Bao Tong wrote in the introduction, titled "The Virtual China and the Real China", saying Wen's role was the best example.

Yu said Wen's visit to Sichuan after the massive earthquake in 2008 reflected that.

"Wen was the first top official to arrive at the scene, where he cried, comforted families, and told parents of children who died inside crushed schools that the government would investigate why buildings collapsed," he said. "But already two years have passed and there's nothing ... Instead, volunteers who investigated the collapsed buildings, including Tan Zuoren and Huang Qi , have been arrested and jailed."

Los Angeles Times

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

Artist brothers test Chinese boundaries

One of Gao Qiang and Zhen's exhibits shows multiple Maos aiming rifles at Jesus. Another features Hitler and Saddam Hussein. They don't consider themselves dissidents, just artists seeking the truth.

By Michael Gold, Los Angeles Times

August 11, 2010

Reporting from Beijing

Their weapons are brushes; their battlefields are canvases. And here in China, where political dissent often leads to prosecution, the works of avant-garde artists can sometimes appear as threatening as a mass protest.

Enter the Gao brothers, Qiang and Zhen, soft-spoken siblings who have long used startling images of Mao Tse-tung as a focal point for their sculptures, paintings and performance pieces.

"I don't consider myself a dissident at all," said Gao Qiang, 48. "I never even think about this question. I just use art to express what I want to express."

Regardless, they have become two of the most incendiary figures in the Chinese contemporary art world.

Over the years, authorities have raided their exhibits, confiscated their pieces, jailed their associates, and turned off the electricity in their studio. The brothers — who are scheduled to have their first solo show in Los Angeles in September — have been denied passports and were forbidden from leaving the Chinese mainland for more than a decade, up until 2003.

"The truth is not always something rosy," said Gao Zhen, 54. "Often it involves conflict, strife. I hope we can get at the truth through our art."

The recent opening of "Portraits," their latest exhibition in Beijing, served as an unambiguous reminder of the brothers' delicate position in a country that still places tight restrictions on freedom of expression, including art.

It was an invitation-only affair that benefited from no promotion besides a few e-mails to trusted members of the Gaos' inner circle, and took place at a venue so nondescript and tucked away that guests were personally shepherded in SUVs from a nearby highly commercial art district.

As a result, the overall atmosphere was intimate rather than exuberant, cautious as opposed to celebratory, a natural result of having to operate below the official radar.

The exhibit featured a series of portraits of famous 20th century dictators and radicals next to portraits of them as babies, all adapted from photos. They included Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and Kim Jong Il.

Overlaid with subtly shaded lines, as though from a grainy television broadcast, the portraits act as a commentary on modern media, casting a new light on the iconic "media portraits [that] have made them who they are remembered as today," said Melanie Ouyang Lum, an art critic and close friend of the Gaos.

The brothers' previous show, in September, was also of the underground variety. A sculpture of Mao, still a sacrosanct figure in China, knelt on the ground, hand on his heart and face racked with sorrow. In another piece, Mao figures pointed rifles at an unarmed Jesus.

Though "Portraits" doesn't address the government as directly as the Mao show, the artistic purpose is very much in the same vein: recasting familiar political images in shocking and unfamiliar ways.

"It's fine if people get shocked by the work or think it's sensationalist, but that's not the intention," Gao Qiang said. "I personally never get shocked by art because life itself in China is shocking enough."

That's what puts the brothers at the fore, said "Portraits" curator Ai Weiwei, who is no stranger to controversy, having served as a design consultant for the famed "Bird's Nest" Olympic stadium until he became a vocal critic of Beijing's handling of the 2008 Summer Games.

"Most Chinese artists just want to make money," Ai said during an interview in June at his Beijing studio. "They're filled with internal cowardice.... They're just looking for material success, and because of that the work becomes so empty."

The Gao brothers' art, on the other hand, is a stark appraisal of some of the most sensitive elements of Chinese society, from politicians to prostitutes, Ai said.

The brothers turned to art as an escape after their father, a factory worker, died during the Cultural Revolution, which roiled China in the 1960s and '70s. The brothers say he was tortured to death; the government said he committed suicide.

Inspired by the melancholia of such artists as Edvard Munch, the brothers started producing risqué pieces in the 1980s, including "Midnight Mass," depictions of male genitalia made of condoms and balloons. Though the next 20 years saw a steady output of increasingly envelope-pushing work and frequent run-ins with authorities, the brothers said they've never been able to establish a sense of how far they can go, of what will or won't fly under official scrutiny.

"What might offend the government one day won't the next," Gao Qiang said. "There's no set rules or prescriptions."

Guests at the "Portraits" opening offered more specific theories of what might constitute a threat.

"Essentially, anything that offers different ideas and opinions to the single-party ideology," said Wu Wenjian, an artist who spent seven years in prison for taking part in the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

"There can only be one official voice in China."

* Gold is a special correspondent.

Canadian MP Calls upon China to Release Persecuted Religious Groups

By Gisela Sommer

Epoch Times Staff

Created: Aug 5, 2010 Last Updated: Aug 5, 2010

Hulan Prison in Heilongjiang Province where Li Zhigang is held. (Clearwisdom.net)
Canadian Foreign Minister says the Government of Canada has serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including continuing restrictions on religious freedom and persecution of religious groups such as Falun Gong practitioners, according to a Falun Gong website.

In a letter dated June 25, 2010, publicized by Clearwisdom.net, a website run by Falun Gong practitioners, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lawrence Cannon said, "The Government of Canada calls upon Chinese authorities to guarantee freedom of religion to all Chinese citizens in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, we call upon China to release Chinese citizens detained or imprisoned in retaliation for pursuing their right to freedom of religion, including Falun Gong practitioners."

Cannon's letter was in reply to a request by a Falun Gong practitioner in Canada, asking the Canadian government to help obtain the release of his friend, Mr. Li Zhigang, a Falun Gong practitioner who is imprisoned in China.

Mr. Li, a resident from Harbin, was given a five-year prison sentence by Chinese authorities in 2009 for refusing to give up the spiritual Falun Gong meditation practice. He is now in Hulan Prison in northeast province of Heilongjiang, where he has been subjected to torture--including violent beatings and shocking with electric batons--and is in critical condition.

Prison officials have forbidden family visitation.

Mr. Li's case was exposed by media in China and abroad in 2009, causing attention and concern in the international community.

Cannon said in his letter, the case of Li Zhigang "merits serious concern."

"The Government of Canada has serious concerns about the human rights situation in China, including continuing restrictions on religious freedom and persecution of religious groups such as Falun Gong practitioners. Canada consistently raises human rights concerns with the

Chinese government, calling on China to respect, protect and promote the freedom of expression, association, and spiritual belief of all Chinese citizens. Canada also continues to raise a number of human rights cases of concern. Furthermore, through high-level dialog and cooperation, Canada seeks to help China adopt and implement internationally agreed standards on issues including human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development.

"The case of your friend Li Zhi Gang merits serious concern. The Government of Canada calls upon Chinese authorities to guarantee freedom of religion to all Chinese citizens in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore."

The Falun Dafa Information Center, the official Falun Gong news and information website, said in its Executive Summary 2010 Annual Report:

"Though it is difficult to gauge the precise figure of Falun Gong practitioners inside China at present, both editors at Falun Gong's main Chinese-language website and Western media reports during 2009 placed the number in the tens of millions, pointing to the continued popularity and even growth of Falun Gong inside China.

"These millions of Falun Gong practitioners in China remain at constant risk of detention, torture, and death because of their religious identity. In 2009, the lawlessness and brutality of the Party's treatment of citizens who practiced Falun Gong remained staggering. Suffocating surveillance, late night raids on practitioners' homes, beatings with electric batons, and long-term imprisonment were routine features of the Chinese authorities' relentless efforts to identify and forcibly "transform" every single Falun Gong practitioner in China. Meanwhile, reports of deaths from torture or other abuses in custody continue to flow from China on a nearly daily basis..."

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