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## High-profile Human Rights Attorney Seized by Chinese Police After Sending Letter to U.S. Congress

Sept. 23, 2007—Renowned Chinese rights lawyer Mr. Gao Zhisheng was taken from his home by police on Saturday, Sept. 22; his present whereabouts are unknown. It is believed that Mr. Gao's arrest is related to the 16-page letter he sent to the United States Congress last week expressing his deep concerns over the worsening deterioration of human rights in China ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

In his letter, Gao explains that China's promises to the IOC in 2001 were hollow and deceitful: "Under the name of securing the success of the Olympic Games, all kinds of evils have been committed openly, including forced evictions, illegal arrests and persecution of people who petition to the authorities, and the suppression of religious people. It is plain as day to all Chinese people that, by successfully hosting the Olympic Games, the communist regime is trying to [appear as a] legal government despite all the tyranny and all the horrible crimes against humanity the Party has committed during the past decades, at the cost of at least 80 million Chinese lives."

U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Edward McMillan-Scott, Vice-President of the European Parliament and ranking member of the EU Foreign Affairs Committee; and David Kilgour, former Secretary of State of Canada, Asia-Pacific, held a press conference in Washington, D.C., after receiving Gao's letter.

Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen praised Gao as a voice for the "dislocated, the abandoned, and the oppressed." The 10-term Representative said the Chinese regime had passed up the opportunity to make the Olympics a time for greater openness. Instead, the regime sees the Olympics as "a mandate for further control and repression of the Chinese people."

Gao was arrested on Aug. 15, 2006, a few months after the U.S. Congress had unanimously passed a resolution supporting him. After his arrest, Gao was forbidden by the Chinese regime to communicate with the outside world. Gao decided to break the silence after seeing that the Chinese communist regime had not improved human rights in China, as promised to the International Olympics Committee, but instead, had intensified its persecution of the Chinese people, including rights advocates and religious believers.

Gao was well aware of the danger such a letter might bring to him and his family, but he said, "Someone's got to do it." Gao's letter is enclosed for your reference.

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## **Background**

Mr. Gao Zhisheng has been featured on the cover of *The New York Times*. He authored “A China More Just: My Fight as a Rights Lawyer in the World’s Largest Communist State.” He was named as one of China’s top ten lawyers in 2001 and has worked for the gamut of China’s vulnerable groups—coal miners, home-demolition victims, and house church members.

While facing surveillance, house arrest, detention, interrogations, threats, and even attempts on his life, Gao managed to rally China’s activists and legal community around the cause of human rights like no one before him. He has publicly renounced his Chinese Communist Party membership, along with 26 million other Chinese people.

Gao has dealt with many high-profile cases. He wrote open letters to the National People’s Congress stating that the prison terms and fines imposed on Falun Gong practitioners are in complete violation of basic legal principles and contemporary legal norms. He revealed the suppression of Christian house churches, challenged corruption by local officials, and provided legal assistance to Chen Guangcheng, a blind rights advocate working on rural poverty, forced abortion, and forced sterilization.

Gao is widely regarded as the “conscience of China” and “the symbol of China.” He volunteered to be an investigator for CIPFG (the Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong) despite the danger of carrying out such mission in China.