



freedom to write...
freedom to read

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His Excellency Hu Jintao
President of the People's Republic of China
State Council
Beijing 100032
The People's Republic of China

Your Excellency,

Sydney PEN is deeply concerned for the well-being of Gao Zhisheng, an author, lawyer and human rights activist, who was arrested in Beijing on 22 September 2007 and is being held incommunicado. We fear he may be held for his dissident writings and activities and we call on Chinese authorities to provide information about his whereabouts, and immediate assurances of his wellbeing. We also call for his immediate and unconditional release if detained in violation of Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory.

Given Gao's previous arrest, we have little doubt this latest arrest is also due to his critical writings. In September last year, Gao was charged with "suspicion of inciting subversion of state power" for his critical writings and sentenced to three years prison (suspended for five years) and one year's deprivation of political rights. The official statement leaves no doubt that this was for his critical writings, citing nine "seditious" articles he wrote and ten interviews he conducted with overseas media in which he "defamed" China's central government. This, in the court's view, amounted to agitation aimed at overthrowing the state.

Gao Zhisheng's latest arrest follows the publication on 12 September 2007 of an open letter to the United States Congress in which he criticised China's human rights record and its hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Gao Zhisheng is known for his writings on social justice, democracy and the suppression of the religious movement Falun Gong. A leading dissident lawyer, in 2005 his law firm was shut down by the Chinese authorities and he was placed under heavy surveillance. In September 2007 he published a book about his experiences entitled *A China More Just* (Broad Press USA, 2007).

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You will know about Sydney PEN from our previous correspondence regarding other writers in China. As writers ourselves, we have a firm conviction in the sanctity of freedom of expression. We know that when writers have restrictions placed on what they can write, the body of work across all genres – from reportage to fiction – suffers and society is endangered. It is out of profound respect for our fellow writers and for Chinese culture and society that we write to you today and on other days, hoping that action will be taken to secure these writers' safety and that one day these arrests and imprisonments will belong to history.

Yours truly,

Chip Rolley
On behalf of Sydney PEN

cc: Procurator General Mr. Jia Chunwang, Supreme People's Procuratorate
Dr Geoff Raby, Australian Ambassador to the People's Republic of China