

# Chinese rights lawyer's wife relieved he's alive

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WASHINGTON (AFP) – The wife of Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who has been missing for more than a year, voiced relief Sunday that he was alive after their children spoke to him by telephone.

"I am tremendously relieved that my husband is alive," said Geng He, who lives in the United States and listened in as her children spoke to him.

"I just want Zhisheng to be with his family again. My children and I need him," Geng said.

Geng and their children, now ages 16 and six, staged a dramatic escape in January 2009, heading by land into Thailand from where they sought asylum in the United States.

Gao has defended some of China's most vulnerable people including workers seeking redress, underground Christians and the banned Falungong spiritual movement.

His fate became a mystery and a topic of global concern after police took him from his home in February last year. Despite repeated questions by foreign journalists, the Beijing government has not commented on his whereabouts.

Li Heping, a friend and fellow lawyer, earlier told AFP that Gao has been staying at a sacred mountain in northern Shanxi province and said he was in good health.

But Li indicated that Gao may be closely watched by officials as he said he had to hang up and had not told friends exactly where he had been for more than a year.

Beth Schwanke, who serves as international counsel for Gao as part of the Washington-based group Freedom Now, urged China to let him come to the United States on humanitarian grounds.

"We hope that it will allow Gao to receive medical treatment and to be with his family in the United States," she said.

Gao's biggest problems came after 2005 when he renounced his membership of the Communist Party and openly called for an end to the crackdown on the Falungong spiritual group.

In December 2006, Gao was convicted of subversion and given a suspended sentence of three years in prison, immediately placed under house arrest and put on probation for five years.

After he wrote an open letter to the US Congress in 2007, Gao said he was subjected to several weeks of torture including suffering electric shocks to his genitals and having his eyes burned by cigarettes.