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## **Chinese Rights Lawyer Disappears Again**

By [MICHAEL WINES](#)

BEIJING — Gao Zhisheng, a prominent human rights lawyer whose 13-month disappearance at the hands of Chinese security agents stirred an international outcry until [he resurfaced in March](#), has again vanished, his friends said Friday.

Associates said Mr. Gao failed to return to a Beijing apartment on April 20 after spending more than a week in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang region in western [China](#), where he had been visiting his father-in-law. Mr. Gao telephoned his father-in-law as his plane left Urumqi, saying he would call upon his arrival in Beijing, they said.

That appeared to be his last contact with the outside world. Li Heping, another Beijing human rights lawyer and a close friend, said he had visited Mr. Gao's apartment repeatedly, but had not found him. "No one had been there for a while," said Mr. Li, who last went to the apartment on Thursday. "I have no idea who to call, or who has taken him."

Others said they were sure that the government had again removed him from public view and that the authorities' earlier decision to allow him to resurface briefly had been a ploy to try to demonstrate to the outside world that he had not been mistreated.

"Now we understand that the freedom was arranged by the authorities just for a show," Jiang Tianyong, a Beijing lawyer and rights activist, said by telephone. "He is missing again; he is still under their control. We must continue to pay attention to his case."

An official of [Amnesty International](#) said Friday that the organization was "seriously concerned" for Mr. Gao's safety.

"It's a matter of serious concern when he loses contact with his family and friends," the organization's deputy director for Asia and Pacific programs, Catherine Baber, said in a telephone interview from London.

Mr. Gao, whose outspoken approach has made him a contentious figure, is one of the nation's best-known activists. He has also been a ceaseless gadfly to Chinese authorities.

In the early 2000s he earned international attention, and the government's enmity, for his legal work on behalf of marginalized citizens, including members of underground Christian churches and practitioners of [Falun Gong](#), the spiritual movement that Chinese authorities say is an antigovernment cabal.

After Mr. Gao sent letters to President [Hu Jintao](#) and Prime Minister [Wen Jiabao](#), accusing the government of persecuting Falun Gong members, he was stripped of his law license and sentenced to prison in late 2006 on charges of inciting subversion.

After being released, Mr. Gao [said he had been tortured](#), adding that he had also been warned that discussing his torture publicly would result in his death.

China's foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, denied those claims at a news conference in March. "There is no such thing as him being tortured," he said.

Mr. Gao and his family were under constant surveillance and harassment after his release. Early last year his wife and two children [escaped from China](#), eventually gaining asylum in the United States.

Mr. Gao disappeared shortly afterward. Despite pleas from the United States, the [European Union](#) and the [United Nations](#), he was not seen again until he appeared in March at a Buddhist monastery in northern China.

In [a telephone interview](#) then with The New York Times, he said he had given up his work as a human rights defender and merely sought "to calm down and lead a quiet life."

He refused to say whether he had suffered mistreatment while in captivity. In [an April 7 interview](#) with The Associated Press, he said simply, "I don't have the capacity to persevere."

But The South China Morning Post, based in Hong Kong, which [first reported](#) Mr. Gao's disappearance on Friday, said in an article that he had been "quite outspoken" during an April 6 interview in his Beijing apartment, despite the near certainty that security agents were recording his conversation.

But the article said he had asked that details of his treatment by the authorities while in captivity not be made public. "If this is reported," he was quoted as saying, "I'll disappear again."

Xiyun Yang contributed reporting, and Zhang Jing contributed research.