

# LegalTimes

LAW AND LOBBYING IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

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## Lobbying Freedom



**GLOBAL REACH:** Jared Genser, president of Freedom Now, successfully lobbied Congress for a resolution calling on China to release imprisoned activist Yang Jianli, husband of Christina Fu (right).

Christina Fu, the wife of Chinese prisoner and activist Yang Jianli, has spent many days this year on Capitol Hill with her 11-year-old daughter, going from office to office seeking support for a resolution calling for the release of her husband from a Beijing prison.

Other days, she has meetings at the White House or the State Department. At home in Boston, she spends hours writing thank you cards for the outpouring of support she receives both locally and abroad.

Fu's husband was initially arrested for illegally entering China and later charged with espionage. Yang had been blacklisted by the Chinese government since 1989, after his involvement in the Tiananmen Square uprising and continued political activity in the United States.

After being held incommunicado for over a year, Yang, who had been subjected to some 120 interrogations, was granted access to a lawyer. Together, they had just four hours to prepare for his Aug. 4 trial in Beijing, Fu says. A decision is expected shortly.

Freedom Now President and Piper Rudnick associate Jared Genser offered to help Fu soon after Yang was detained in April 2002, and has played a key role in the campaign to win his freedom.

Freedom Now is a D.C.-based nonprofit composed of lawyers committed to freeing political prisoners. Currently, Freedom Now's board members are all under age 32, and many are associates at firms around town.

For Genser, the case is personal. In 1997, he met Yang during a political protest at Harvard University. Both were graduate students at the John F. Kennedy School of Government.

"It was that experience that persuaded me to go to law school. . . . In some ways, [the Yang campaign] is bringing my human rights work full circle," Genser says.

Also joining the fight is retired Paul Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison partner Jerome Cohen. Cohen works pro bono in his capacity as a New York University School of Law professor.

A former Chinese business lawyer, Cohen says his Chinese scholarship and law practice has "worked out with great satisfaction . . . getting people out of jail." While these types of human rights cases have not made up the bulk of his practice, Cohen feels strongly that "as a lawyer you have an obligation to help out."

Together, Fu, Genser, and Cohen managed to secure passage of a resolution calling for Yang's release. In late June, the measure passed the House in a 421-0 roll call vote, while the Senate passed the resolution in late July.

The trio also secured a favorable decision from the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in June.

Cohen, now in China monitoring the case, says the problem is that China's courts fall below its prosecutors and police in power, and that many defendants in similar cases are convicted.

Sometimes, Cohen says, prisoners are convicted to vindicate the judicial process and then released to uphold American goodwill.

Fu has received warnings from her relatives in China to not pursue the issue, but she is convinced that her lobbying efforts are helping. In the meantime, she has trouble sleeping and calls her husband's lawyer in China for updates.

However, Fu says her work on the Hill has been encouraging. "[Congressional staff members] were very sympathetic to me and to my children," she says. Without that support, she adds, she believes the Chinese court would have already handed down a guilty verdict for her husband.

—ALICIA UPANO