

By Grace Geng
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Please Return My Father

Activist Chinese lawyer Gao Zhisheng has been missing since he was kidnapped by the government in April.

Six months ago last week, the Chinese government kidnapped my father, Gao Zhisheng. He was abducted for exercising his right to freedoms of speech and association, rights enshrined in the Chinese constitution. My father's exercise of these most fundamental of freedoms cost our family our livelihood, our country, and now, I fear, my father's life. As President Barack Obama heads to the Group of 20 meeting in Seoul next month and meets with Chinese President Hu Jintao, I beg him to raise my father's case.

My father is a lawyer, an increasingly dangerous profession in China. As all lawyers should, he defended his clients vigorously. He exposed the torment faced by oppressed religious minorities in China. He demanded rights guaranteed by law for disabled children, coal miners and other vulnerable groups. But in return, the government shut down my father's law firm. They took away his access to the courts, effectively taking away his livelihood. But even that wasn't enough.

The government placed our entire family under constant, humiliating surveillance. Police beat my mother, tearing her clothing and calling her a beast. Police beat me too; I was 12 years old. Security agents soon arrested my father and charged him with inciting subversion. They tortured him for weeks. My mother tried to protect me from knowing what happened. But I knew enough. I knew that when my father came home to serve his suspended sentence, his skin had turned black. I knew that my father couldn't get out of bed in the morning without my mother's help. And I knew that my father was scared.

My father wasn't scared for himself alone—he was scared for our family. Security agents moved into our apartment building in Beijing. Four policemen escorted me to school every day, calling me a slut in front of my friends and monitoring me as I sat in my classroom. They even followed me into the bathroom. Then, when I was 15, the government stopped allowing me to attend school. My mother knew that we had to escape. Last January, my mother smuggled my brother and me out of China. Fortunately, the three of us were granted asylum in the United States.

We never said good-bye to my father. It was too dangerous. In February 2009, shortly after we left, security agents took my father away again. The government refused to admit to detaining him. I thought he was dead. My mother and I couldn't bear to talk about it, but I know she thought he was dead too.

Over a year later, at the end of this March, my father suddenly reappeared and was allowed to return to our old home in Beijing under strict surveillance. He wasn't allowed to talk about what happened to him or where he was during that terrifying year. But I was able to tell my father that I love him over the phone.

On April 20, my father was again taken by security agents from my grandfather's home in western China. He was supposedly placed on a plane back to Beijing. But my family's apartment in Beijing is still empty. And no one has heard from my father since.

China experts tell my mother it is likely that the government released my father in March to quiet the increasing international pressure surrounding his disappearance. The experts believe that the government detained him again once it judged that the international community was no longer paying attention.

This is why I must ask my new country for help. The Chinese government must know that the international community is still paying attention to my father's disappearance. President Obama, as the father of two girls yourself, please ask President Hu to tell this daughter where her father is. I know my father is just one man. But I also know that if the Chinese government is allowed to blatantly violate its own law with respect to my father, it is only a matter of time before the next father disappears.

If the Chinese government has murdered my father, I beg President Obama to ask President Hu to let us bury him. I am 17 now. I'm old enough to understand that it might be better for my father to be dead than for him to undergo more unspeakable torture. But for my brother, Peter, who is only seven, not knowing whether our father is alive or dead is an unfathomable cruelty. I can hardly stand to hope that Peter and I will see our father again.

Ms. Geng is the 17-year-old daughter of Chinese human-rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. A related editorial appears nearby.