

**“Today we renew our efforts to free Gao Zhisheng...**

**“...with respect and a deep sense of urgency, I once again call on the Biden Administration to step up and lead a global effort to free China’s prisoners of conscience...”**

Congressional hearing remarks by Rep. Chris Smith, Chairman,  
Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations  
Washington, DC—April 20, 2023

Good morning. This hearing on China’s political prisoners will come to order.

Gao Zhisheng is a smart, tenacious, compassionate—a brilliant lawyer and writer—an absolutely courageous human rights defender who has been cruelly and unjustly detained by the Chinese Communist Party beginning in 2006.

Today is Gao Zhisheng’s 59<sup>th</sup> birthday—and we are honored to welcome his wife Geng He [*Gung Huh*] back to testify—for a third time.

Geng Huh is extraordinarily brave and persevering—and articulates to the world the urgent message of freeing her husband and all political and religious prisoners.

In [2012 Geng Huh](#) testified at a I hearing I chaired of the Congressional-Executive China Commission and told us how Gao Zhisheng was first convicted in 2006—the beginning of a never-ending nightmare of torture and abuse.

At the hearing, Geng Huh told us that she had asked to meet with Vice President Joe Biden—which didn’t happen—and for him to at least raise her husband’s case on the same day of our hearing (February 14, 2012) when Mr. Biden met with then Chinese Vice President (now President) Xi Jinping. That didn’t happen either.

She testified again in [2013](#) on behalf of her beloved husband.

When I chaired yet another hearing in [2013—Let our fathers go](#)—that included five daughters of prisoners of conscience, Gao’s daughter Grace told us

of her and her family's unspeakable agony of knowing that her father was being subjected to torture and how she and her family were harassed unceasingly and vilified by police before they escaped to America.

At the hearing, Grace—and the other four daughters—made a special plea and asked President Obama to meet with them. The daughters said that President Obama has two daughters that he loves so much and would empathize with their plight and advocate for their fathers. I tried for a year to make that happen. The White House told me that the President simply didn't have the time to meet with the five daughters.

Washington Post editorial page editor Fred Hiatt came to my hearing and wrote a great column [Five Chinese daughters speak up for their fathers](#) which without objection, will add to today's official hearing record.

Today we renew our efforts to free Gao Zhisheng.

Today, we appeal to Xi Jinping to free other political prisoners as well.

On April 10<sup>th</sup>, two of China's leading human rights defenders – Ding Jiayi whose wife is also here with us today as a witness—and Xu Zhiyong were sentenced to more than a decade in prison.

They were convicted on fabricated charges of “subversion,” just like Gao Zhisheng and so many others, because they bravely urged Chinese citizens to exercise their fundamental rights. The Chinese Communist Party finds these men so threatening that it is trying to silence their voices—but it cannot silence their hopes and dreams of democracy and respect for universally recognized human rights.

So we thank Geng He and Sophie Luo for being here today to speak about their experience of oppression under the CCP's rule. They speak on behalf of their husbands, Gao Zhisheng and Ding Jiayi who the CCP has imprisoned because of their brave advocacy for human rights in China.

Thank you both for being here to describe the torment your husbands are experiencing at the hands of the CCP and to tell the world about their heroic struggle against tyranny.

And let us be clear what that tyranny is.

In 1989, the world watched in horror as the Chinese Communist Party brutally crushed peaceful protestors in Tiananmen Square. China lost an entire

generation of idealists to the tanks that rolled in that June day—and the savage hunt for human rights defenders that followed—and in Congress we remember that massacre each year to honor the victims—who have never received justice.

I visited Beijing Prison #1 in 1991 and saw firsthand the consequences of the CCP's brutality at Tiananmen. I will never forget the gaunt faces of the Tiananmen peaceful democracy activists turned political prisoners, with shaved heads and tattered clothes, imprisoned for seeking universally recognized freedoms.

China today is blatantly and repeatedly violating its obligations under international law. China has ratified major international human rights conventions like the U.N. Convention Against Torture, U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and U.N. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights—and yet the CCP oppresses its citizens with impunity. Where is the accountability?

The United States must stand up to the Chinese Communist Party and make it clear that we will not ignore or trivialize these crimes.

So, with respect and a deep sense of urgency, I once again call on the Biden Administration to step up and lead a global effort to free China's prisoners of conscience.

In my years in Congress, including in my role as Chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Human Rights Committee, I have fought to ensure that human rights are kept at the forefront of U.S.-China relations.

We cannot afford to separate human rights from other interests—especially trade—sacrificing both Chinese victims and American values in the process.

That is why I sponsored the [Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act](#), the Global Magnitsky Act, and authored the [Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act of 2023](#) which passed the House on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, the [Frank R Wolf International Religious Freedom Act](#), the [Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000](#), [Laogai Slave Labor Products Act of 1997](#) which passed the House and was the lead Republican sponsor of [Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act](#).

I have again this year introduced the [China Trade Relations Act of 2023](#) to withdraw Normal Trade Relations from China unless a prescribed list of human rights protections are guaranteed in China including the release of political prisoners and an end of torture.

In his statement prepared before sentencing, Ding Jiaxi courageously wrote "...we are witnessing an unfolding battle between the forces of democracy and authoritarianism. The megalomania of dictatorship and the eternal one-party state is fast coming to an end, and the social transformation of China is growing closer, day by day....China is on the cusp of great change. Even from within my prison walls, I can feel it clearly. The advancing footsteps of civilization come like the awakening thunder of spring!"