

16 August 2017

## China: Human rights defender Gao Zhisheng reported missing

On 13 August, 2017, human rights defender **Gao Zhisheng (高智晟)** was reported missing by his brother, following the latter's visit to the defender's home in Yulin City, Shaanxi Province. Gao Zhisheng has been kept under close surveillance by Yulin authorities following his release from detention on 8 August 2014.

[Gao Zhisheng](#) is a human rights lawyer who regularly takes on cases involving persecution of religious minorities, including Falun Gong practitioners and those associated with the unofficial 'house church' movement. For this, and other human rights defence work, Gao Zhisheng has been forcibly disappeared a number of times, and brutally tortured. His law practice was shut down in 2005 and the following year he was placed under house arrest having been found guilty of '*inciting subversion of state power*'.

On 13 August 2017, at approximately 8:00am, Gao Zhisheng's brother visited the human rights defender's home and notified local police when he was unable to find Gao Zhisheng. Local police failed to locate the human rights defender in the vicinity. Gao Zhisheng's wife, who fled to the United States in 2009 after repeated instances of harassment and abuse by Chinese authorities, has also reported being unable to reach her husband by phone. No news of Gao Zhisheng's whereabouts have been reported as of 16 August 2017.

Front Line Defenders has reported on previous instances of the forced disappearance of Gao Zhisheng, who has been held alternatively under residential surveillance, incarceration, and incommunicado detention in black jails since 2006. In August 2014, Gao Zhisheng had spent eight years in and out of detention, during which time he was subjected to torture and other cruel and inhuman treatment. In June 2017, Gao Zhisheng's written memoirs of his detention and torture by Chinese authorities were [published](#) in Taiwan, where local defenders following Gao Zhisheng's case have expressed concern that his present disappearance may be an act of retaliation by Chinese authorities, in response to this publication.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the disappearance of Gao Zhisheng. Given the past instances of forced disappearance and incommunicado detention, Front Line Defenders is concerned that the human rights defender may be detained by the authorities, in which case we urge Gao Zhisheng's arresting authorities to notify his family of his whereabouts and the reason for his arrest, as is required under Chinese law. If not, Front Line Defenders urges Chinese authorities to take all necessary steps to investigate Gao Zhisheng's missing persons case and effect his secure return to his family.

### Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in China to:

1. Provide all necessary support to identify the whereabouts of Gao Zhisheng, and in particular guarantee that the defender has not been subjected to another instance of illegal, incommunicado detention;

2. If the defender is being held in detention, ensure that the treatment of Gao Zhisheng adheres to the conditions set out in the '*Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment*', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. In accordance with Chinese and international law, refrain from all judicial harassment and surveillance activities against Gao Zhisheng, who has completed his prescribed criminal sentence;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in China are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions.