

Why the ruthless treatment of a blind man?

--Prospects not bright for a way out for Chen Guangcheng

Testimony of Bob Fu, founder & president, China Aid Association
to

U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs (COFA)
Hearing of the
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health & Human Rights

“Chen Guangcheng: His Case, Cause, Family, and Those Who are Helping Him”

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It has now been more than three weeks since Chen Guangcheng’s miraculous escape on April 22 from his family home in Dongshigu village (Yinan county, Linyi district) in Shandong province where he had been imprisoned for 19 months. After his escape, Chen Guangcheng managed to make his way to Beijing with the help of some netizens, then took refuge in the U.S. Embassy for six days, after which he was sent to Beijing Chaoyang Hospital where he was put under house arrest. On May 3, using my phone, Chen was able to speak live to a hearing of the Congressional-Executive Committee on China and to tell Chairman Chris Smith directly that he and his family wished to come to the United States. The following day, the Chinese and U.S. governments expressed their willingness to work together on this. The entire Chen Guangcheng incident has been full of dramatic ups and downs and has captured the attention of the world. But in the days since the phone call, there has been no substantive progress toward a resolution. The Chinese government has yet to issue a passport to Chen Guangcheng.

1. Chen Guangcheng's cause

Chen Guangcheng, 41, is a blind self-taught human rights lawyer who began in the early 1990s to use legal means to protect his own fundamental rights as well as that of his fellow villagers, including the villagers’ land use rights, and the right of disabled persons to enjoy tax exemptions and fare exemptions on public transport. He had some success in winning cases of this kind. In 2001, he graduated from Nanjing University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in 2001, and in

2002, he tried but failed to set up an association for the rights of the disabled in Beijing. In 2003, the local government named him one of its Ten Outstanding Young Persons, and in July and August of that year, he and his wife visited the United States.

In 2005, Chen Guangcheng led a team of human rights lawyers in an investigation that exposed 130,000 cases of forced abortions and tubal ligations in the Linyi district of Shandong province—for which he became the target of government attacks and oppression. That same year, he was named “Person of the Year” by the Hong Kong-based magazine Asia Week, and in 2006, Time Magazine named him one of its 100 most influential figures in the world. In August 2006, Chen Guangcheng was sentenced to four years and three months imprisonment. In August 2007, while he was serving his prison term, Chen was awarded the Philippines’ Magsaysay Award. Following his release from prison on September 9, 2010, Chen and his wife, Yuan Weijing, were imprisoned at home where they were beaten and abused and forbidden to seek medical treatment.

In the face of such harsh persecution, Chen Guangcheng has never given in: he has kept up his fight against the forces of evil, even to today.

2. Chen Guangcheng’s family

Chen Guangcheng’s wife, Yuan Weijing, is a former high school English teacher, and they have a son and a daughter. Yuan Weijing has made great sacrifices for Chen Guangcheng and his cause. She once said: “I am Guangcheng’s eyes.” When Chen was in prison for more than four years, all family’s burdens fell on her, and she was allowed only three prison visits. After Chen’s release from prison, their children became the victims of guilt by association and have been unable to lead normal lives. Chen’s aged mother was the only person allowed to go to Chen Guangcheng’s home, and she has been the steady supplier of the basic supplies to keep the couple alive. Chen’s brother Chen Guangfu has been the victim of local government persecution since the beginning of 2006 because of his relationship to Chen Guangcheng. Chen’s wife, aged mother and brother have all been brutally beaten.

After Chen Guangcheng's escape last month, the local official who has been directing the persecution of Chen, town mayor Zhang Jian, led a group of people in a dawn break-in of the home of Chen's brother, Chen Guangfu. Without showing any IDs, they broke down the door and jumped over the walls of Chen Guangfu's home, then savagely beat Chen Guangfu and his wife, Ren Zongju. Their son, Chen Kegui, thought bandits had come to rob them when he was violently attacked, and he injured several of them with a kitchen knife. He is now being held under criminal detention for "intentional homicide." According to Chen Kegui's lawyer, Liu Weiguo, Chen Kegui's actions were entirely in line with legitimate self-defense. Nevertheless, Chen Guangcheng has made clear that he is worried that the local government will seek to retaliate through Chen Kegui. Furthermore, Chen Guangfu and his wife, Ren Zongju, have also been criminally detained. They have been released on bail for the crime of "harboring and sheltering" [a criminal or fugitive] but could be sentenced at any time. Even worse, almost all of the lawyers who were willing to handle Chen Kegui's knifing case have lost their freedom of movement, or had their lawyer's license revoked, or simply been kidnapped.

Chen Guangcheng's family and relatives stand firmly with him. Even though they have suffered intense persecution, they have never abandoned him nor given up their support of his noble cause. This is truly a family of heroes.

3. Chen Guangcheng's supporters

Chen Guangcheng has a band of loyal supporters who have united around him because of their shared sense of responsibility for advancing human rights and the rule of law in China. Among them, there are some well-known personages like lawyers Teng Biao and Jiang Tianyong, lawyer and dissident Hu Jia and his wife, as well as some ordinary netizens like the key figures in the rescue operation Miss He Peirong, Guo Yushan and others. In addition, American movie star Christian Bale, of Batman fame, as well as a steady stream of hundreds of ordinary Chinese went to visit Chen Guangcheng in 2011. They were illegally blocked, beaten, arrested, robbed, and verbally abused. Recently, when lawyers Jiang Tianyong and Teng Biao tried to visit Chen

Guangcheng in hospital, they were both beaten and Jiang lost the hearing in one ear.

Here in the United States, I and many people from different countries and different ethnicities have all been supporting Chen Guangcheng and his cause. They include Congressmen Chris Smith and Frank Wolf, Commission chairperson Ms. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, many mainstream reporters, and many people living in Midland, Texas, where ChinaAid is based. Zhang Min, a news show host on Radio Free Asia's Mandarin service, was the first and has been the most comprehensive in reporting on Chen Guangcheng's great deeds, and she is a true friend Chen Guangcheng and his wife.

But let me remind everyone here, there is one longterm supporter of Chen Guangcheng who has paid a heavy price for following his conscience whom we should not forget, and that is the constitutional law expert and pioneer of the Christian rights defense movement, Dr. Fan Yafeng.

Beginning in 2005, Fan Yafeng and a number of other lawyers and dissidents (many of whom are Christians), including Gao Zhisheng, Hu Jia, Li Fangping, Xu Zhiyong, Li Jinsong, helped and supported Chen Guangcheng's cause: to expose the atrocities of forced abortion and forced tubal ligations. On September 20, 2010, Fan Yafeng hosted a Beijing lawyers forum that was attended by Li Subin, Zhang Kai and other Beijing human rights lawyers to discuss how to help win the freedom of Chen Guangcheng, who had served his time and been released from prison only to find himself imprisoned at home. Three days later, he and two other Christian human rights activist went to the Shandong provincial government's representative office in Beijing and held up banners protesting the persecution of Chen Guangcheng. Less than three months later, from Dec. 9 to 18, Dr. Fan Yafeng was taken into custody and tortured. After he was released, he was held in "Chen Guangcheng-style house arrest"—with communication with the outside world completely cut off, even to today.

If the persecution of Chen Guangcheng is considered "the actions of the local government," then we can't help but ask, how do you explain Fan Yafeng's 15 months of house arrest in Beijing, or the beatings of Chen Guangcheng's two Beijing lawyers who tried to visit him in Chaoyang

Hospital in Beijing? What I want to make clear to the American government and the American people is this: Do not be easily misled and deceived.

4. Where is the way out for Chen Guangcheng?

The power struggle among China's senior leaders in advance of the 18th Communist Party Congress that has been intensified by the Wang Lijun - Bo Xilai case has already clearly revealed that the central government has split into two. Against the backdrop of these unique circumstances, the fact that Chen Guangcheng was still able to take calls on his phone and to call out after he was handed over by the U.S. Embassy to Beijing Chaoyang Hospital had without doubt upset the plans of many players in this incident. And it also increased the dramatic variables at play.

Despite the fact that the two sides have reached a beautiful agreement on and are committed to Chen Guangcheng's freedom and security, Chen Guangcheng remains under house arrest in hospital, and his visitors are barred, tailed and beaten. All of this shows that the implementation of the agreement and the realization of the commitments are far more important than the agreement and commitments themselves.

I also hope that Congress will do more in monitoring and urging the Obama-Clinton administration to ensure that the civil rights of Chen Guangcheng and his family members are protected by law. Chen Guangcheng was allowed to enter the U.S. Embassy, but then the Obama administration handled this incident inappropriately; therefore, our country is responsible for the outcome and for the fate of Chen Guangcheng.

Conclusion

Chen Guangcheng has paid an extremely heavy price to defend the rights of the disadvantaged groups who were the victims of coercive population control measures (mainly women). His conscience, courage and spirit has been like a light shining in the long dark night of China's human rights, and also inspiring people around the world who are struggling for human rights and justice.

He is blind, yet he sees and speaks the truth. And he is willing to pay the price for doing so.

The time is now—for the free world to provide a way out for this great blind man.

Thank you.

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