

Statement by Harrison Li
Congressional-Executive Commission on China
Hearing
“Bringing Home Americans Detained in China”
September 18, 2024

Today marks 2,932 days — more than 8 years — since my dad, Kai Li, was arrested in Shanghai. He spent two months under “residential surveillance at a designated location” during which he was held at a secret location and interrogated without any access to legal counsel. Then almost a year passed before he was subject to a closed-door trial, and then another year went by before he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for stealing so-called “state secrets” — even though according to his attorney, said “secrets” are freely searchable even on the firewalled Chinese Internet. More than 3 years ago now, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention demanded his release in a landmark decision. Yet despite all this, we have not seen any positive movement in his case.

Over the last two and a half years, I am fortunate to have gotten to know a large number of families of American hostages and wrongful detainees through the Bring Our Families Home Campaign. In that time, the Campaign has shrunk dramatically from 18 families to just six today, with Americans coming home from Afghanistan in September 2022; Venezuela and Iran in October 2022; Russia in December 2022; Niger and Rwanda in March 2023; Iran again in September 2023; Venezuela again in December 2023; Russia again last month; and then finally, just three days ago, just as I was taking the train down to DC, David Lin arrived back home in the United States from China. With each of those successes, my mom and I have experienced a strange mix of emotions: joy and excitement for the reunited families, but also growing frustration and doubt about my dad’s case. When will it be his turn?

One thing that is clear in light of recent developments is that when the various parts of our government, from the working level in the State Department and National Security Council on up to the President, put their heads together to come up with creative solutions, American hostages and wrongful detainees

come home. It's hugely impressive how last month's Russian prisoner swap materialized despite the monumental level of coordination that we now know it took. That, along with the ability of the administration to finally get a wrongfully detained American home from China last week, has shown us that there's no reason why my dad, who has now spent more time behind bars than Paul Whelan, Alsu Kurmasheva, and Evan Gershkovich combined, cannot also be released.

But time is running out. No matter who wins November's presidential election, we will have a change of administration. We know (from experience, unfortunately) that that means months or years where absolutely no progress will be made as communication channels are re-established and reworked. The goodwill that the Chinese government has built up by releasing Pastor Lin on Sunday will fade. The next few months before President Biden leaves office are thus a critical window for getting my dad home.

I have now spent a third of my life missing my dad. Every day, I wake up and shudder at the thought of him crammed into a tiny cell with as many as 11 other people and no climate control, experiencing the mental and physical anguish that Peter [Humphrey] here can unfortunately tell you about firsthand, as someone who spent two years in the same prison. In the last 8 years, my dad's suffered a stroke, lost a tooth, and endured draconian COVID-19 lockdowns that had him essentially locked in his cell 24/7 for more than three years. I ask President Biden, how much longer does he have to suffer?