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Blind Activist Chen Guangcheng: The Price Paid for Exposing and Opposing Forced Abortion and Involuntary Sterilization Under China's One Child Policy

**Testimony of Reggie Littlejohn, President
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Congressional-Executive Commission on China
Hearing of December 6, 2011
"One Year After the Nobel Peace Prize Award to Liu Xiaobo:
Conditions for Political Prisoners and
Prospects for Political Reform"**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for holding this timely hearing about conditions of political prisoners in China. It is a truly humbling opportunity to testify about one of the most courageous individuals, not only in China, but also in the world: blind, self-taught lawyer, Chen Guangcheng. I begin by commending the Chairman, Congressman Chris Smith, for his recent attempt to go to China to visit Chen. Mr. Chairman, your tireless efforts to raise the visibility of Chen's case are having an impact.

Chen Guangcheng was arrested in 2006 for helping to expose the Chinese government's use of forced abortion and involuntary sterilization to enforce its "One Child Policy." He amassed evidence that forced abortions and involuntary sterilizations were used extensively on women in Linyi City, Shandong Province in 2005. Time Magazine named him one of "2006's Top 100 People Who Shape Our World" and he was given the 2007 Magsaysay award, known as Asia's Nobel Prize.

Simultaneous with this testimony, I am submitting a report from Chen Guangcheng's 2005 investigation into coercive family planning in Linyi County, Shandong Province. A member of Chen's team, human rights attorney Teng Biao, drafted the report. This report

contains extensive witness statements from cases Chen and his team were investigating before Chen was jailed. In this report are detailed accounts regarding:

- a woman forcibly aborted and sterilized at seven months;
- villagers sleeping in fields to evade Family Planning Officials;
- Family Planning Officials who broke three brooms over the head of an elderly man
- Family Planning Officials who forced a grandmother and her brother to beat each other; and
- The use of quota systems and the practice of “implication” – the detention, fining and torture of the extended family of One Child Policy “violators.”

The Chen Guangcheng report makes clear: the spirit of the Cultural Revolution lives on in China’s Family Planning death machine. WRWF has chosen to release the names of the perpetrators of these crimes against humanity, so that they can be held accountable before the world.

Things may not have improved in Linyi since 2005. Earlier this year, Family Planning Officials stabbed a man to death.ⁱ A woman, six months pregnant, recently died during a forced abortion in Lijing County, also in Shandong Province.ⁱⁱ

For exposing and opposing coercive family planning in China, Chen spent four years, three months in prison. His defense lawyers were detained on the eve of trial. Since his September 2010 release, he has continued to serve a sentence of home detention. Both in prison and under house arrest, Chen has experienced mistreatment and beatings. He suffers from a chronic, debilitating intestinal illness for which he has not been allowed treatment.

According to a February, 2011 video, which Chen and his supporters managed to smuggle out of China, sixty-six security police surround his home constantly. He and his wife are not allowed sufficient food and are isolated from all outside contact. No one can enter or leave their home, except officials, who can enter at any time, without notice.

We received evidence that blind activist Chen Guangcheng’s health was in serious jeopardy because of repeated beatings and the malnutrition he suffers in house detention. According to a June 15, 2011 letter written by Chen’s wife, and smuggled out of China, Chen has faced constant physical and psychological abuse, does not get sufficient food or nourishment, and is denied proper medical treatment. Foreign journalists have been forcibly denied access to him, and lawyers who tried to help Chen were beaten and detained in February 2011, including Jiang Tianyong and Teng Biao, who were detained for two months or more.ⁱⁱⁱ

In September and October 2011, human rights campaigners and visitors seeking to see Chen were beaten and detained.^{iv} Also in September, police detained Chen’s brother, who was meeting with activists.^v

Women's Rights Without Frontiers and the China Aid Association are spearheading an international effort to free Chen Guangcheng. Thus far, we have collected 6463 signatures from 28 countries.^{vi}

WRWF congratulates Rep. Chris Smith on his successful sponsorship last July of an amendment to the State Department Appropriation Bill, in support of Chen Guangcheng and his family. This amendment, which passed unanimously, urges the Chinese government to stop harassing the Chen family, to release them from house arrest, and to arrange for immediate medical treatment. It further urges the Obama administration to arrange diplomatic visits to the Chen family. Beyond this, it highlights the tragedy of forced abortion and coercive family planning in China.^{vii}

In early October, we received an unconfirmed report through Voice of America that villagers had said that Chen had died. All efforts to confirm that report failed, as it was impossible to gain access to Dongshigu Village in Linyi to verify it.

Relativity Media, however, was able to gain access to Linyi, in order to film the feature-length comedy, "21 and Over." When challenged on its choice of Linyi out of the thousands of possible locations in China, and urged to apologize for its lack of sensitivity to Chen Guangcheng and human rights, Relativity Media issued a statement defending its action. Women's Rights Without Frontiers has called for a international boycott of "21 and Over."

November 12, 2011 was Chen's 40th birthday. Although no one knew for sure whether Chen was dead or alive, brave citizens from many areas of China attempted to visit Chen's village to wish him a happy birthday. All of them were turned back from the village, some violently, by thugs and plain-clothes police.

Finally, just this weekend, Women's Rights Without Frontiers received a credible report that Chen is indeed alive. In fact, according to a key activist in China, the conditions of Chen's detention have improved slightly.

According to this source, who requested anonymity, "Now his mother is allowed to go outside to buy food although escorted by three guards, and his health also is getting better."

The source attributed the improved treatment of Chen to the fact that "Chen's situation was exposed and got huge public attention." One campaign that brought considerable visibility to Chen's plight was the flow of concerned citizens attempting to visit him, leading up to his 40th birthday on November 12.

In addition, the Chen Sunglasses Campaigns inside and outside of China have raised the visibility of his case. These campaigns post photos of people wearing sunglasses in support of Chen. The source stated, "I think it's very helpful for people all over the world to show they care about Chen through the Sunglasses Campaigns. I think it's very important to show support inside and outside the country – we can work together."^{viii}

Women's Rights Without Frontiers is collaborating with the Dark Glasses Portrait Campaign headed by a courageous Chinese political satirist and cartoonist, whose pen name is Crazy Crab.

The source continued, "Chen's situation has indeed improved. I have just sent him some medicine and covered the expenses for his family in the market . . . Some relatives can visit his mother and deliver some items under surveillance."

The source cautioned, however, that the slightly improved condition of Chen's house arrest is not a reason to relax the campaign to free him. Most relatives of Chen and his wife are not allowed to visit, including their son and his wife's parents. We do not know what his medical condition is. Moreover, the source indicated, the fact that Chen is now allowed food and medicine "is still far away from our basic request, that is, Chen should be freed right away, according to China's own law."

According to the source, the persecution of Chen supporters continues. An activist who announced that she would wear sunglasses in Linyi's central square this past weekend was detained on December 1. That same day, another activist from Yantai and a writer from Beijing, were arrested in Shandong attempting to distribute plastic bags and balloons bearing Chen's image, in honor of International Day of Persons with Disabilities, celebrated December 3.

Women's Rights Without Frontiers is thrilled and relieved to receive a credible report that Chen is alive and his health is improving. This improved treatment demonstrates the power of the collaborative effort inside and outside China to raise the visibility of his case. We greatly admire the brave citizens inside China, who are risking their safety to stand up for Chen.

We commend the courageous and persistent efforts of Rep. Chris Smith to visit Chen and urge the Chinese government to grant him a visa. We also urge U.S. Ambassador to China, Gary Locke, to visit Chen directly. We demand the immediate, unqualified release of Chen Guangcheng and his family. Chen's ongoing house arrest is illegal and his medical condition remains weak.

The Chinese Communist Party has attempted to silence Chen, but they cannot silence the voices of millions in China crying for his freedom. The report that Chen is alive and in improved condition should not be a reason to relax efforts on his behalf. To the contrary, these efforts are having an impact and should intensify until Chen is free.

Recommendations

- The international community should make official interventions on behalf of Chen with the Chinese government and raise Chen's case in bilateral discussion and multilateral institutions in which China is a member.

- Diplomats from the U.S., E.U., Norway, Canada, Australia, Switzerland and other countries with human rights dialogues with China – including U.S. Ambassador to China Gary Locke -- should seek access to Chen and his wife Yuan Weijing and press the Chinese government to stop its mistreatment of Chen, allow for proper medical attention and arrange for his immediate and unconditional release.
- Organizations and individuals concerned with human rights, women’s rights, and religious freedom should call and write Chinese embassies and consulates around the world and sign the petition to Free Chen Guangcheng at:
www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/index.php?nav=chen-guangcheng#petition

ⁱ <http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/blog/?p=147>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/blog/?p=429>

ⁱⁱⁱ A copy of the original letter in Mandarin can be obtained by emailing ChinaAid at bobfu@chinaaid.org or by calling 267.205.5210. An English translation can be found here:

<http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/index.php?nav=yuan-weijing>

Here is a three minute video calling for urgent action:

Free Chen Guangcheng! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpVJidDqVJo>

^{iv} “Chen Supporters Attacked,” 9/19/11

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/attacked-09192011123000.html>;

HRIC Testimony at CECC Hearing on Chen Guangcheng, 11/1/11

<http://www.hrichina.org/content/5611>

^v “Police Detain Nanjing Activists,” 9/8/11

<http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/activists-09082011152203.html?searchterm=None>

^{vi} The petition to free Chen Guangcheng can be found here:

http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/index.php?nav=sign_our_petition

^{vii} “Amendment for Blind Activist Chen Guangcheng Passes Today,” 7/22/11

<http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/blog/?p=316>

^{viii} These campaigns, spearheaded by Women’s Rights Without Frontiers and Dark Glasses Portrait, can be found at

<http://www.womensrightswithoutfrontiers.org/index.php?nav=chen-guangcheng> and

<http://ichengguangcheng.blogspot.com/>.