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For immediate release

## **CHINA SHOULD FREE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS: LEGAL NETWORK**

**TORONTO, March 13, 2006** — The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network joined the China AIDS Solidarity Network (CASN), an international coalition of AIDS and human rights groups, public health experts and scholars, in calling on China to release human rights activists who are being detained for participating in a peaceful hunger strike.

Since mid-February, Chinese authorities have detained over 12 activists taking part in a rotating hunger strike to protest the arbitrary detention and beatings of fellow human rights activists in China. Participants, including AIDS activist Hu Jia, have either been detained or have simply disappeared as they announce their intention to join in the hunger strike. Hu Jia disappeared on February 16. Police refuse to release information on his detention, even to his wife.

“The harassment, detention and disappearances of activists in China are clear and scandalous violations of international human rights. That’s why over 100 civil society organizations, eminent academics and experts from around the world are protesting these unwarranted actions,” said Joanne Csete, Executive Director. “Chinese activists are being silenced at a time when they are most needed to fight social injustices, including those related to HIV/AIDS. We’re speaking up for them and demanding their release.”

In an open letter to Chinese President Hu Jintao, CASN, which works in solidarity with Chinese AIDS activists, is asking for information on the detainees’ whereabouts, assurances of their safety and well-being, and, ultimately, their release. The full text of the letter is available at [www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca).

### **About the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network**

The Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network ([www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)) promotes the human rights of people living with and vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, in Canada and internationally, through research, legal and policy analysis, education, and community mobilization. The Legal Network is Canada’s leading advocacy organization working on the legal and human rights issues raised by HIV/AIDS.

For more information, please contact:

*Disponible en français*

Leon Mar  
Director of Communications  
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
Telephone: +1 416 595-1666 ext. 228  
E-mail: [lmr@aidslaw.ca](mailto:lmr@aidslaw.ca)  
Website: [www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)

Hu Jintao, President of the People's Republic of China  
c/o Zhou Wenzhong  
Chinese Ambassador to the United States  
Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
2300 Connecticut Avenue NW  
Washington DC 20008

Dear President Hu:

As scholars, lawyers, and human rights advocates, we, the undersigned, write to express our grave concern about the reports of recent abductions and detentions of our colleagues—lawyers and rights defenders in China who are engaged in a peaceful hunger strike.

We understand that a number of Chinese human-rights defenders who supported or participated in a hunger strike that started February 4, 2006 are being arrested or have gone missing. We urge you to clarify their exact whereabouts, ensure their safety, and release them unless they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

It has been reported that Gao Zhisheng, a prominent defence lawyer, launched the hunger strike to protest recent beatings and detentions of human-rights activists and their defence lawyers. Showing their solidarity, dozens of supporters from various parts of China have quickly joined the relay hunger strike in turn. On March 4, police detained Gao Zhisheng in Beijing.

Multiple reports describe the detention and abduction of several of those who have participated in or supported the hunger strike. China does not permit independent human rights groups to work openly in the country, and the following list is based on available information:

HIV/AIDS activist Hu Jia was closely followed by police until he disappeared on February 16. Police have repeatedly refused to give his wife information about his detention.

Qi Zhiyong, a pro-democracy activist, went missing at around 11 p.m. on February 15. He reportedly sent a text message to friends at the time saying that he was being kidnapped.

Zhao Xin, Executive Director of the Empowerment and Rights Institute, a Chinese human-rights NGO, has been detained in Yunnan. His family was given no formal notice of his detention, but police warned his father not to tell anyone about his detention.

Yu Zhijian, a pro-democracy activist who was prominent in the 1989 demonstrations, joined the hunger strike; he has been charged with subversion.

Artist and activist Yan Zhengxue was taken away by police on February 12, after his meeting with Gao Zhisheng.

Mao Hengfeng, a Shanghai-based activist, was detained by police on February 13. The police reportedly refused to disclose to her husband where she was being detained.

Shanghai housing rights activist Chen Xiaoming was detained on February 15 or 16 by police, who cited his participation in the hunger strike.

Wen Haibo and Ma Wendu, assistants to Gao Zhisheng, were reportedly detained on February 16 and interrogated for 48 and 20 hours, respectively, before being placed under tight police surveillance in their homes.

Ouyang Xiaorong, a computer software programmer who also went to Beijing to assist Gao

Zhisheng with the hunger strike, was reportedly detained at the same time.

Shanghai police detained housing rights activist Ma Yalian on February 15.

Professor Wang Lizhuang, who has been active in protesting forced evictions in Shanghai, was detained by police on February 21.

In Guangxi, lawyer Yang Zhaixin has been placed under house arrest.

Anhui activist Hou Wenbao was detained on March 1, the same day he announced plans to join the hunger strike.

We are also concerned about reports from many regions of the country of the beatings, intimidation, and harassment of rights defenders and supporters of the protest.

The right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to peacefully protest, is a fundamental human right protected both by China's constitution and by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed. A hunger strike is a peaceful form of protest. As scholars, lawyers, and human-rights advocates, we urge you to ensure that our colleagues in China are able to enjoy their right to freedom of expression.

We call on you to ensure that all human-rights defenders, including those named above and others supporting or participating in the hunger strike, are allowed to continue their peaceful activities without fear of arbitrary detention, harassment, or other human-rights violations.

Yours sincerely,

#### **ORGANIZATIONS**

AIDS Policy Project, USA

Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Canada

Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University, USA

China AIDS Solidarity Network, USA

China Labor Watch, USA

Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological Association, USA

Human Rights Watch

Independent Chinese PEN Center

Initiatives Femmes Enfants et Développement (IFED), Democratic Republic of Congo

International Advocates for Justice, USA

Liberty Now, Nigeria

Olympic Watch, Czech Republic

Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group, Thailand

#### **ACADEMICS**

Professor Geremie R. Barmé

Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies

The Australian National University, Australia

Professor Jagdish Bhagwati

Columbia University

New York, NY, USA

Professor Jerome Cohen  
New York University School of Law  
New York, NY, USA

Dr. Gloria Davies  
Monash University

Professor Michael C. Davis  
J. Landis Martin Visiting Professor of Law  
Northwestern University Law School  
Chicago, IL, USA

Professor Theodore De Bary  
Columbia University  
NY, NY, USA

Professor Anne Donchin  
Emerita Professor of Philosophy  
Indiana University  
Indianapolis, IN, USA

Professor John Gershman  
Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service  
New York, USA

Dr. Gerry Groot  
Senior Lecturer in Chinese Studies, CAS Post Graduate Coordinator  
Centre for Asian Studies  
The University of Adelaide  
Adelaide, Australia

Professor Victoria Tin-bor Hui  
Department of Political Science  
University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame, IN, USA

Professor Sandra Hyde  
McGill University  
Montreal, Quebec Canada

Professor Perry Link  
Princeton University  
Princeton, NJ USA

Professor Samuel Martinez  
Dept of Anthropology  
University of Connecticut  
Former Chair (2003-04) Committee for Human Rights of the American Anthropological  
Association  
CT, USA

Professor Andrew J. Nathan  
Department of Political Science [his dept was not included in the info I have]  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Cynthia R. Pearson, Ph.D.  
University of Washington  
Seattle, WA, USA

James D. Seymour, Ph.D.  
Honorary Senior Research Fellow  
Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Hong Kong

Patricia Siplon, Ph.D.  
Political Science Department, Saint Michael's College  
Colchester, VT, USA

Dorothy J. Solinger  
University of California, Irvine  
Irvine, CA, USA

Arlene Stein, Ph.D.  
Rutgers University  
New Brunswick, NJ, USA

Professor Carol Vance  
Columbia University School of Social Work  
New York, NY, USA

Professor Peter Van Ness  
Contemporary China Centre, RSPAS  
Australian National University  
Australia

Professor Eileen Rose Walsh  
Luce Assistant Professor of Asian Studies  
Skidmore College, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work  
Saratoga Springs, NY, USA

#### **INDIVIDUALS WITH ORGS/TITLES**

Marce Abare  
Student Global AIDS Campaign

Innih Archibong  
Executive Director, Liberty Now  
Uyo, Nigeria

Abu A. Brima  
Network Movement for Justice and Development  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Christine Clarke  
China Labor Watch

Sara L. M. Davis, Ph. D.  
Writer  
New York, NY USA

Lidia Alpizar Duran  
Program Manager  
Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)  
Mexico City, Mexico

Carolyn Hsu  
Human Rights in China  
NY, NY, USA

Tshiswaka Masoka Hubert  
Action Contre l'Impunité pour le Droits Humains, ACIDH  
Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Chris Hufstader  
Reporter/Writer/Editor  
Salem, MA, USA

Jia Ping, Beijing China

Edouard Kabazimya  
Initiatives Femmes Enfants et Developpement - IFED  
Bukavu, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Tim Kingston  
HIV/AIDS Journalist  
Oakland, CA, USA

Kate Krauss  
Somerville, MA USA

Dinah Lee Küng  
La Ferme Sous-les-Roches  
St-Cergue, Switzerland

Sharonann Lynch  
Health GAP (Global Access Project)  
New York, NY USA

Kevin Mccready  
Translator

Edith Mirante  
Author  
Portland, OR, USA

Heddy Nam  
Amnesty International USA  
New York, NY, USA

Bess Rothenberg, Ph.D.  
Center for the Study of Human Rights  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

K. Sukumaran  
Advocate  
Gudalur, Tamil Nadu, India

Chris Thurlow  
Empowerment and Rights Institute  
Beijing, China

Laurie Wen  
ACT UP New York  
New York, NY USA

### **RANDOM INDIVIDUALS**

Jeton Ademaj  
New York, NY, USA

Craig B. Brush  
BA, Princeton University; MA and PhD, Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Erkanda Bujari, Ph.D. Candidate  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Lesley Carson  
Brooklyn, NY, USA

Maggie Chan  
Barnard College  
New York, NY, USA

Samantha Chan  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Margaret Childers  
New York, NY, USA

Aditi Chokshi  
Student, Economics and Political Science, Human Rights  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Sarah K. Chynoweth, MA  
New York, NY, USA

Kathleen Cioffi, Ph.D.  
Claremont, CA, USA

Katrina J. Ciraldo  
Miami Beach, FL, USA

Sean Colenso-Semple  
New York, NY, USA



Adrian R. Coman  
New York, NY, USA

Matthew Dunne  
Columbia Law School, class of 2007  
Brooklyn, NY, USA

Ana Echague  
Madrid, Spain

Samantha Elghanayan  
Columbia College  
New York, NY, USA

Bede Eziefule, MA  
Lagos, Nigeria

Amy Fettig, J.D.  
Washington, DC, USA

Wendy Francois  
Columbia College  
Miami, FL, USA

Meghan Gallagher  
Columbia University Law School

Ganriella Geanuleas  
Columbia Law School  
NY, NY, USA

Jenny Chao  
Columbia Law School  
New York, NY, USA

Angelica Chazaro  
Columbia Law School  
New York, NY, USA

Joy Chia  
Columbia Law School  
New York, NY, USA

Allen Durgin  
CUNY Graduate Student  
New York, NY, USA

Misty Duvall  
Columbia Law School  
New York, NY, USA

Grace Harbour  
Amazing Grace

Susanna Heinz  
New York, NY, USA

Matt Hoover  
New York, NY, USA

Jane Huang  
Graduate student

Alex Jung  
St. Petersburg, FL, USA

Karyn Kaplan, Bangkok, Thailand

Thomas Kara  
Norwood, Missouri, USA

Randy Klein  
Jersey City, NJ, USA

Devon Knowles

Emily Kutolowski  
New York, NY, USA

Stephanie Lazar  
New York, NY, USA

Kimberly Lehmkuhl  
Columbia University School of Law, Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs  
New York, NY, USA

Richard Madsen  
University of California, San Diego  
San Diego, CA, USA

Laura J. Marks  
Forest Hills, NY, USA

Tanaz Moghadam  
Columbia Law School  
New York, NY, USA

Fatmira Myeteberi  
New York, NY, USA

Abigail D. Ortega  
Social Work Student  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Ashling Pearson  
London, ENGLAND

Shiba Phurailatpam  
Belgium

Eva Pils

New York, NY USA

Gene Richardson  
Cornell Medical School  
New York, NY, USA

Elise Serbaroli  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

Mary F. Sexton  
Brooklyn, NY, USA

Judith Shampanier, Esq./JD  
Pelham, NY, USA

Anuja Singh  
Columbia College  
Ocala, FL, USA

Onkar Singh  
Master of International Affairs

Anne C. Stephens, MIA, SIPA  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

James Mead Stephenson  
New York, NY, USA

Keith Supko  
Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, 1992 graduate  
Boston, MA, USA

Jennifer Tsai  
New York, NY USA

Amy Weber  
New York, NY, USA

Rob Wile  
Columbia University  
New York, NY, USA

William T. Wilson  
Chicago, IL, USA

Diana Wong  
New York, NY, USA

Asrat Tesfayesus  
Columbia Law School  
New York, NY, USA

Loretta Wong, Hong Kong

Andrea J. Worden  
Washington, DC USA

Michele Wray Khateri, MIA  
East Rutherford, NJ, USA

Julia Wright  
Fordham Law student  
New York, NY, USA