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CHINA | Commentary by Detained Human Rights Lawyer Released

A new commentary by Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng said the human rights situation in China has deteriorated to an unprecedented level in the “harshest and most brutal political oppression since the end of Mao Zedong’s rule.”

Gao Zhisheng was “disappeared” in August 2017 and is believed to be in custody in Beijing. His commentary, written in 2016 and published this month, is believed to be the first comprehensive human rights commentary written by a human rights lawyer still living in China.

It comprises 14 sections covering a wide range of human rights abuses, including violations against the right to freedom of religion or belief. Gao believes that in 2016 the Communist Party of China “conspicuously intensified its control and suppression of religious faith.” The English version of the commentary on human rights in China was jointly facilitated by China Aid, Human Rights Foundation and Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW).

Gao Zhisheng is a prominent human rights lawyer who is best known for his work defending Christians, Falun Gong adherents, and other vulnerable groups. As a result of his work on sensitive cases and his open letters to Chinese political leaders, the authorities closed down his law firm and revoked his lawyer’s licence. On Dec. 22, 2006, he was sentenced to three years in prison and one year’s deprivation of political rights, with a probation period of five years on the charge of “incitement to subvert state power.” On Dec. 16, 2011, the Chinese news agency Xinhua reported that Gao had violated the terms of his probation and had been returned to prison for three years. He was released Aug. 7, 2014 with serious health problems.

Gao’s daughter, Grace Gao, is in the UK this week to talk to policy makers about her father’s case and the wider human rights situation in China. She will be participating in a panel event at the Frontline Club on Oct. 17 entitled, “Disappearing Acts. Meet The Families at the Forefront of

China's Human Rights Violations." In recent years, Grace has spoken publicly about her father's work, his Christian faith, and his time in prison, and has called on the international community to pay more attention to the human rights situation in China.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW is honored to host Grace Gao in the UK and to raise awareness of her father's case and this remarkable commentary on human rights in China. We share many of the concerns raised in the report, which includes examples of grave violations against Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, Uyghur Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners. We join Gao in calling on the international community to press China to end policies and practices which perpetuate human rights abuses, and we further call on the Chinese authorities to release lawyer Gao Zhisheng immediately and without condition."