
For Immediate Release

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The Law Society of Upper Canada Expresses Grave Concerns about the Disbarment and Disappearances of Human Rights Lawyers in China

Toronto, ON – The Law Society of Upper Canada continues to condemn the persecution, ill-treatment and escalating human rights violations against lawyers in China through letters of intervention to Chinese authorities and the release of public statements. Most recently, the Law Society denounces the revocation of the practice licences of lawyers Tang Jitian and Liu Wei and the disappearance of Gao Zhisheng.

Reports indicate that on 12 April 2010, Beijing lawyers Tang Jitian and Liu Wei received a notice from the Beijing Municipal Justice Bureau informing them of an administrative punishment to permanently revoke their legal practice licences. The imposition of a revocation was predicated on the grounds that they had disturbed the order of the court while defending a Falun Gong practitioner. On 7 May 2010, it was reported that the licences of Tang Jitian and Liu Wei were revoked and they were barred from practising law for life.

Tang Jitian and Liu Wei had been active in defending the rights of those persecuted for their beliefs, the rights of victims of illegal requisition and home demolition, the rights of those discriminated against for being HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B positive and the rights of parents of children victims of melamine-tainted milk powder. The revocation of the licences of Tang Jitian and Liu Wei represents the escalation of tactics to deter lawyers from taking on politically sensitive cases.

Similarly, the disappearance of Gao Zhisheng, one of China's leading human rights lawyers further represents efforts to restrict and weaken the independence of the legal profession in China and undermines China's commitment to the rule of law.

In the past, the Law Society of Upper Canada has repeatedly condemned the persecution and ill-treatment of lawyers in China, including the treatment of human rights lawyers Gao Zhisheng, Zheng Enchong, Chen Guangcheng, Li Jianqiang, Teng Baio, Li Heping, by raising its concerns with the Chinese authorities about the ongoing human rights violations against lawyers.

International human rights instruments, including the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary* state that judicial independence and human rights are necessary to advancing the rule of law.

The Law Society urges the Chinese authorities to,

1. reinstate Tang Jitian and Liu Wei and other lawyers whose licences have been suspended or revoked for taking on sensitive human rights cases, and discontinue the practice of

suspending or disbaring human rights lawyers based on political considerations or other arbitrary factors;

2. immediately and unconditionally release and guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Gao Zhisheng and other human rights lawyers whose detention is arbitrary and is aimed at penalizing them for their human rights activities;
3. ensure that all lawyers be allowed to carry out their peaceful and legitimate activities without fear of arbitrary detention, torture or ill treatment or other human rights violations;
4. put an end to all acts of harassment and intimidation against human rights lawyers in China;
5. ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with national human rights standards and international instruments ratified by China;
6. uphold the Constitution of the Republic of China and the rule of law; and
7. take immediate steps to promote the independence of the legal profession.

The Law Society of Upper Canada is the governing body for some 41,000 lawyers in the Province of Ontario, Canada and the Treasurer is the head of the Law Society. The mandate of the Law Society is to govern the legal profession in the public interest by upholding the independence, integrity and honour of the legal profession for the purpose of advancing the cause of justice and the rule of law.

The Law Society urges the legal community to intervene in support of members of the legal profession in China in their effort to maintain the independence of the legal profession, to advance the respect of human rights and to promote the rule of law.

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For further information about the Law Society's Access to Justice and Equity initiatives, please visit our website at www.lsuc.on.ca or call Josée Bouchard, Equity Advisor, at 416 947-3984 or jbouchar@lsuc.on.ca.