
Chinese Christian Attorney Tortured, Disappeared - by Lord David Alton

Sunday, 12 April 2009

During a recent visit to China I met lawyers representing Chen Guangcheng, the blind human rights activist, jailed for four years after exposing China's one child policy.

Chen lived in the city of Linyi in Shandong Province where more than 120,000 women had been forcibly aborted or sterilized. Chen is known as a bare-foot lawyer – someone who has taught himself the law and then been willing to go into the courts to defend plaintiffs unable to hire professional lawyers.

Being willing to stand before the Chinese courts and to challenge unjust laws is itself a dangerous business. Chen's own lawyer, who is based in Beijing, told me that when he traveled up to Shandong to represent Chen he was himself beaten up and left for dead by the roadside.

After Chen first exposed the coercive population policy he was put under house arrest, physically abused, and then disappeared for a time. Human Rights Watch said: “His case is a text book example of how little the rule of law really means in China.”

Chen's lawyer, and the group I met, told me that the situation in the capital is often better than outside of Beijing. Nevertheless, they regularly find that the guarantees of personal rights and liberties are not worth the paper on which they are written.

Chen should, for instance, have had regular access to his lawyer yet he has only been allowed to see him once. His health has been deteriorating but, despite repeated requests by Chen's wife and his lawyers, Chen has not been examined by doctors. His wife should have been allowed to have regular access to the prison. In fact, she has only been allowed to see him on one occasion since 2006.

When I spoke to her on the telephone she told me that Chen has had a shocking loss of weight and that he has been given a diet of little more than bread and water. He shares a cell with seven or eight other prisoners and they have been told never to communicate with him. Chen's wife is herself kept under virtual house arrest.

And all this for telling the outside world how thousands of women had been forcibly aborted or sterilized as part of China's draconian one child policy – a policy which has been indirectly financed by British taxpayers via the Department for International Development. Quite what we are doing using any of our development funds in China (a country whose economy, even in recession, can hardly be compared to many other less well off countries) is itself a mystery to me.

While we have been collaborating in coercive population control, a number of Chinese Christians have trained as lawyers and have been struggling to build a society based on the rule of law. For doing so, they have been particularly targeted. On Good Friday I was contacted about one of them.

Christian lawyer, Gao Zhiseng, who has been missing for over 60 days, regularly represents persecuted Christians and has undertaken human rights advocacy. This has led to him being repeatedly kidnapped and tortured. China Aid

Association and Voice of the Martyrs have begun an electronic petition on his behalf. They tell Gao's story of 50 days of unspeakable torture which he experienced in 2007. The petition and story appear at www.freegao.com

The courage of men like Gao and Chen stands as a rebuke to those of us who enjoy so many freedoms but do little to act on behalf of those who are not so blessed.

An outstanding American lawyer has now turned film maker in order to tell the world something about the cruelty of the policies which we in the West have supported and the bravery of those who have stood against it. Reggie Littlejohn is a feisty woman with a burning determination to expose this colossal abuse of human rights and when I met her in London recently I had no doubt that she will not rest until the world knows this story and hangs its head in shame.

She drew my attention to a recent article in The South China Morning Post.

A young woman, Jin Yani, was drifting off to sleep one night when the Family Planning Police smashed down her front door, dragged her out in her nightclothes. She was screaming, terrified, frightened for her life and that of her unborn child. Her crime was to get pregnant without a birth permit. For this, even though it was her first pregnancy, she was forcibly aborted. She was nine months pregnant.

Five people held Jin Yani down on her hospital bed as they ripped off her clothes and injected saline solution. She spent 44 days in hospital because of severe hemorrhaging and she is now infertile. She went to court to challenge the officials – no action was taken against the officials responsible and she has had to go into hiding in fear of her life.

In addition to the abuse of human rights Littlejohn points to some of the other consequences of the one child policy:

- * Gendercide – the targeting of little girls has now led to a population imbalance of 117 boys to 100 girls
- * Human Trafficking and Sexual Slavery – triggered by the absence of potential wives for between 20 and 30 million men.
- * Stolen Children – now estimated at 70,000 a year in a burgeoning black market.
- * Illegal children – a twilight world of unregistered children, ineligible for education and health, born above permitted quotas.
- * Forsaken children – abandoned after divorce so that the parents can have another child in a new marriage.
- * Rioting and violence - there have been violent clashes with family planning officials in places like Guangxi after a crackdown on families.
- * Health problems – many women have suffered physically as a result of butchered attempts at sterilisation.
- * Female suicide – one of the highest in the world and the only country where more women than men kill themselves.
- * Aging population – in 25 years there will be insufficient young people to sustain those beyond retirement age.
- * Ethnic targeting – Tibetans, Uigars and other minorities have been targeted and population balances deliberately distorted even though they are supposed to be exempt from the policy.

So these are some of the consequences of the one child policy promoted by the Chinese Communist Party's Womb Police – and it is significant that a blind man like Chen Guangcheng – whose spirit remains strong in prison despite all that has been done to him - has seen clearly what the world has chosen to look away from.

I have yet to hear from Barack Obama and Gordon Brown how they can justify pouring taxpayers money into the organizations who fund the Chine Population Association. I know that Chen Guagnchen's lawyers would like to hear their answers too.