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CHINA CSW calls for release of prisoners of conscience on 21st anniversary of Tiananmen Square massacre

Twenty-one years on from the Tiananmen Square massacre Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) remains deeply concerned about the state of human rights in China. Of particular concern to CSW are the cases of Alimujiang Yimiti, serving a fifteen-year prison sentence, and missing Christian human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, who disappeared for the second time in April 2010.

Mr. Yimiti has been detained since 12 February 2008. According to the China Aid Association (CAA) he was sentenced to fifteen years in prison on 29 April 2009 in a court case that did not follow due procedure under Chinese or international law.

Mr. Yimiti is a Uyghur Christian from Xinjiang province. He was convicted of “providing state secrets or intelligence to overseas organizations”. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention ruled that his detention is arbitrary and that he is being detained “solely because of his faith”. An appeal failed and Mr. Yimiti has since been moved to a prison in Urumqi, the provincial capital. Mr. Yimiti’s legal team plans to appeal to the Beijing Supreme Court.

The second case involves Mr. Gao, prominent human rights lawyer and Nobel Peace Prize nominee who briefly reappeared in April 2010 having been missing for over a year after being forcibly taken away from his home in Shanxi province by Chinese officials. He has been tortured in previous detention and his family, who have fled to the US, remain concerned about his status. His whereabouts are currently unknown.

Since 2005, Mr. Gao, a Christian, has been regularly arrested, beaten, imprisoned and tortured by Chinese authorities because of his work defending sensitive human rights cases, including detained house church Christians and practitioners of the banned spiritual practice, Falun Gong.

CSW’s Advocacy Director, Tina Lambert said: “Whilst recognizing the progress in human rights since the tragedy of Tiananmen Square twenty-one years ago, there are still significant concerns to be addressed before China meets internationally agreed standards. We urge the Chinese government to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is also imperative that we see the release of all prisoners of conscience including Alimujiang Yimiti and Gao Zhisheng, whose cases represent many other victims of ongoing repression.”