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First UA 106/24 Index: ASA 17/8821/2024 China of December 5, 2024

## **CHINA CALL FOR THE RELEASE OF ARTIST GAO ZHEN**

On August 26, 2024, Gao Zhen, a prominent Chinese artist, was detained by authorities while traveling in China with his wife and son. He has been charged with "*slandering China's heroes and martyrs*," (侵害英雄烈士名譽榮譽罪) a crime that carries a penalty of up to three years in prison. His formal arrest has been approved, and his wife and son have been barred from leaving China. The Chinese authorities must release Gao Zhen immediately and unconditionally and end the misuse of such laws to suppress creative expression.

### **Write to the Chinese authorities urging them to:**

- Immediately and unconditionally release Gao Zhen;
- Pending his release, ensure that Gao Zhen has regular, unrestricted access to his family and lawyers, and is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment;
- Stop harassing and threatening his family and ensure that they can enter and leave China freely
- Ensure that Chinese artists can express their views without fear of persecution or arbitrary detention.

### **Write to:**

Director Pan Jiqiang,  
Sanhe Public Security Bureau in Langfang City, Hebei Province  
No.3, Dingsheng West Street,  
Sanhe City, Langfang, Hebei Province,  
065200, People's Republic of China  
*Salutation: Dear Director Pan,*

### **And copy:**

His Excellency Di WANG  
Ambassador  
Embassy of the People's Republic of China  
515 St. Patrick Street  
Ottawa, ON K1N 5H3  
Tel: (613) 789-3434,3513,8422/762-3769 (24h) Fax: (613) 789-1911  
Email: [chineseembassy.ca@gmail.com](mailto:chineseembassy.ca@gmail.com)

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Gao Zhen, a 68-year-old artist, is a key figure in modern Chinese art and part of the well-known Gao Brothers duo. Since the 1980s, the Gao Brothers have used humor and satire to expose the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and criticize the rule of former Chinese leader Mao Zedong. Their bold work, which often pushes boundaries, sheds light on topics that remain highly sensitive and often avoided in

China. This courage in their art has earned them respect worldwide but also close monitoring by the authorities.

On August 26, 2024, Gao Zhen was detained while traveling with his wife and 6-year-old son. That same day, about 30 police officers raided his studio in Yanjiao, Hebei province. They photographed his artworks, confiscated sculptures—many over ten years old—and sealed the studio. The next day, officials informed Gao's wife that he had been taken into custody. He is being held in the Sanhe City Detention Center, charged with "slandering China's heroes and martyrs."

This charge is based on a 2018 law intended to promote "*patriotism and socialist values*." However, the law is vaguely written, giving authorities wide power to target individuals and limit freedom of expression. Gao's arrest seems to be based only on his past artworks criticizing the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong—artistic expressions that are protected under free speech rights in China's Constitution.

Gao Zhen's detention highlights an alarming trend of using unclear laws to silence artists and limit their freedom to create. Gao's family has strong ties to the U.S.—he has been a U.S. permanent resident since 2011, and his son, a U.S. citizen, attends school in New York. His case raises serious concerns about the growing risks faced by artists who question government narratives.

Artists play a vital role in encouraging discussions, preserving history, and inspiring new ideas. Punishing creative work or personal views harms not only the artists but society as a whole. Gao Zhen's situation is a clear call to defend freedom of expression and protect the rights of those who bring important issues to light through art.

***Please take action as soon as possible until March 30, 2025! The UA will be duly updated should there be the need for further action.***