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**GLOBAL LEGAL COMMUNITY URGES CHINA'S PRESIDENT TO RESPECT RULE OF LAW  
IN TREATMENT OF RIGHTS LAWYERS**

CHICAGO, Jan. 26, 2016 – In [a letter](#) published Monday to China's President Xi Jinping, distinguished members of the international legal community express their grave concern for China's continued detainment and mistreatment of [human rights lawyers and activists](#). The letter, entitled "[China must respect lawyers' human rights](#)," was published in [The Guardian](#) and coauthored by [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) researcher [Terence C. Halliday](#). It is a follow up to [a letter](#) to President Xi published one year ago, which was also coauthored by Halliday, an expert on Chinese criminal defense law.

China's [unprecedented crackdown](#) on criminal defense and human rights lawyers began in July 2015, with the disappearance of lawyers [Wang Yu and Bao Longjun](#), and their [sixteen-year-old son](#). Since then, hundreds of lawyers, their staff and family members have been subject to "intimidation, interrogation, detention as criminal suspects, wrongful criminal convictions and forced disappearance," according to the letter. The detained lawyers have been charged with "subversion of state power" or "inciting the subversion of state power," and several have been denied access to their appointed lawyers.

The public letter condemns the abuses of rights lawyers, including lawyers being held incommunicado, the use of physical and psychological violence against them while in detention, and the firing of lawyers chosen by the detainees (and subsequent replacement with lawyers chosen by the authorities). It criticizes the growing practice of forcing detainees to provide written, oral and video statements of self-incrimination and self-renunciation, and the broadcasting of those public confessions. It also expresses concern at the practice of targeting the families of detainees and subjecting them to further persecution. The letter, signed by 29 international legal notables, urges President Xi to release the whereabouts of unlawfully detained lawyers, provide them fair legal representation, and guarantee that those detained are not subjected to torture. It includes the names of lawyers who have been forcibly "disappeared"



Professor Halliday and Wang Yu, a prominent Chinese human rights lawyer, at a Beijing coffee shop in June 2015. This photo was taken a few weeks before she was taken into custody on July 9, 2015.

Photo courtesy of Terence C. Halliday

and still remain criminally detained, including [Jiang Tianyong](#), [Li Heping](#), [Wang Quanzhang](#), and [Xie Yang](#), who has [described the torture](#) he faced in China's secret jails. Wang Yu, Bao Longjun, and [Zhao Wei](#) are claimed to have been "released" from custody, but are still closely monitored and wholly isolated from family and friends.

"May we respectfully remind you that China has signed and ratified the Convention against Torture and signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," the letter states. "By detaining and disappearing these lawyers and law firm staff, China is in breach of its international obligations as well as Chinese domestic criminal law and constitutional principles." The signatories ask the president to honor China's commitment to international conventions and human rights.

The [first letter](#), published in *The Guardian* in January 2016, was released a few months after the crackdown began. Also signed by renowned lawyers, jurists, and judges from around the world, the letter called on President Xi to adhere to universal legal standards. It had a significant impact on the international legal community and was effective in raising global awareness of the crackdown. A 12-state coalition called on China for the release of the detainees, and international bar associations and jurists were mobilized in their efforts to protect the work of human rights lawyers.

Since the release of the 2016 letter, Halliday has been consulted as an expert in pieces for [The New York Times](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Bloomberg Law](#), [BuzzFeed](#) and [Le Monde](#). In June 2016, he wrote an op-ed for *The Guardian*, entitled "[My friend Li Heping, a man China thinks is 'more dangerous than Bin Laden'](#)." Li, one of China's top human rights lawyers and a father of two, was abducted during the government's July 2015 crackdown, along with his 24-year-old legal assistant [Zhao Wei](#). This week's letter describes how Li, who has been detained for more than 500 days, was denied access to his appointed lawyer by the authorities. When Li's family attempted to hire their own representation, the lawyer was "dismissed" and replaced by a lawyer chosen by the authorities. Li's parents were forced to record a video statement persuading Li to admit guilt, and his wife and daughter have been subject to extensive police monitoring and harassment. One of the most recent developments in the crackdown was the release of Li's younger brother, [lawyer Li Chunfu](#), who has also spent more than a year in custody. He had [reportedly](#) been injected with drugs and showed obvious signs of induced mental disorder after his release.

In November 2016, Halliday published a book, "[Criminal Defense in China: The Politics of Lawyers at Work](#)," with co-author [Sida Liu](#), an ABF Faculty Fellow and assistant professor of sociology at the [University of Toronto](#). The book is the first comprehensive social science study of the everyday work and political mobilization of criminal defense lawyers in China's justice system. Several of the lawyers who were subject to the July 2015 crackdown contributed their insights to Halliday's research for the book.

The follow up letter published Monday coincides with the seventh annual "[Day of the Endangered Lawyer](#)" by the [International Association of Lawyers](#) (UIA). It was signed by 29 preeminent human rights lawyers, judges and jurists from around the world. The signatories include [Robert Badinter](#), former French Minister of Justice; [Dominique Attias](#), vice president of the [Paris Bar](#); British human rights lawyers [Michael Mansfield QC](#) and [Clive Stafford Smith](#); [Laurence Bory](#), president of the UIA; [Reed Brody](#), counsel and spokesperson for [Human Rights](#)

[Watch](#); [Rechtsanwalt und Notar Ulrich Schellenberg](#), president of the [German Bar Association](#); [Sonia Gumpert](#), president of the Madrid Bar Association; [Andrea Mascherin](#), president of the [Italian National Bar Council](#); [Asma Jahangir](#), former president of the [Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan](#); and [David A. Collins](#), immediate past president of the ABF.

[Read](#) coverage of the letter in *The Guardian*.

### **About Terence C. Halliday**

[Halliday](#) is a research professor and sociologist at the [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) and the co-director of its Center on Law and Globalization. He is a specialist in globalization and law and has conducted extensive research on China's law and lawyers. He is adjunct professor of sociology at [Northwestern University](#) and [honorary professor](#) in the [School of Regulation and Global Governance](#) at [Australian National University](#). He holds a Ph.D. from the [University of Chicago](#) and is co-author, with [Sida Liu](#), of the book, "[Criminal Defense in China: The Politics of Lawyers at Work](#)."

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