

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Lucinda Underwood  
E-mail: [lunderwood@abfn.org](mailto:lunderwood@abfn.org)  
Phone: 312.988.6515  
Fax: 312.988.6579  
Online: [americanbarfoundation.org](http://americanbarfoundation.org)  
Facebook: [American Bar Foundation](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanBarFoundation)  
Twitter: [@ABFResearch](https://twitter.com/ABFResearch)

**China's Abuse of Lawyers Alarms Notable Jurists: American Bar Foundation expert Terence Halliday contributes to open letter to President Xi Jinping on China's crackdown**

CHICAGO, Jan. 18, 2016 — China's harsh crackdown on lawyers has taken a dark turn in the last few days as prominent criminal defense and rights lawyers have been charged by the government with the crime of "subverting state power." If convicted, which almost certainly will be the case, these lawyers face jail sentences of up to life in prison.

In an [open letter](#) to China's president Xi, co-drafted by American Bar Foundation scholar Terence Halliday and published January 17 in the *The Guardian*, eminent jurists from around the world have publicly called on the president to adhere to U.N. conventions and universal legal standards. The signatories call on President Xi to honor China's international commitments to provide the whereabouts of forcibly disappeared lawyers, to provide immediate access to legal counsel, and to assure the world that those detained are not subject to torture. Halliday is an internationally recognized researcher specializing in criminal and rights lawyers in China and helped to draft and organize the letter.

These charges are the latest act, observes Halliday, in an unprecedented program of attacks on China's rights lawyers that began on July 9 of last year. Such attacks have led to the interrogation and detention of more than 300 lawyers and their staffs across China. Law firms have been shut down. Client files have been seized.

Brutal tactics have been used to pressure lawyers in this crackdown, notes Halliday, who has been researching Chinese criminal defense and human rights lawyers for over a decade. Such tactics include character attacks by the state media, using children against their parents, husbands, wives and siblings against one another, the withholding of medical care or medicine from detainees to threaten their health or lives, and snatching family members from foreign countries to ratchet up pressure on detainees. Just days ago Wang Yu, the eminent lawyer whose disappearance marked the onset of the anti-lawyer campaign, was charged with "state subversion" and her husband charged with "incitement to state subversion."

What is most remarkable, said Halliday in an interview with the [New York Times](#) is that (American Bar Foundation) "research over many years demonstrates these lawyers are defending rights in ways thoroughly familiar to rule-of-law societies across the world." He added, "extensive research shows that these supposed 'crimes' are nothing more than energetic defense by zealous lawyers for China's most vulnerable populations, including criminal suspects."

In his ongoing observation and study of rights lawyers in China, Halliday notes that, "an 'Alice in Wonderland' world is emerging in China where words mean their opposite. 'Rule of Law' has become repression through law. Those seeking restraints on arbitrary police and security powers get accused of 'subversion of state power.' Lawyers' speech in social media becomes 'causing a disturbance.'

Some lawyers, such as notable criminal defense and rights attorney, Li Heping, are entirely "disappeared" with no information on their whereabouts. Based on evidence from earlier crackdowns in 2011 and 2007, Halliday worries that it is entirely likely that detainees without access to their families, legal counsel, or the outside world are suffering severe psychological duress and quite probably physical torture.

Halliday states that it is gratifying that the international spotlight remains focused on China's retreat from the rule of law. He says, "The internationally renowned jurists signing this letter to President Xi are reinforcing the call by international and national bar associations, governments, human rights organizations, and publics for China to protect the most basic legal freedoms of its citizens and the lawyers that represent them."

Halliday's activities have been covered extensively by major media outlets, including the [New York Times](#), [ABA Journal](#), [The Guardian](#), and [Al Jazeera](#).

### ***About the American Bar Foundation***

*The [American Bar Foundation](#) (ABF) is the nation's leading research institute for the empirical study of law. The ABF seeks to expand knowledge and advance justice through innovative, interdisciplinary, and rigorous empirical research on law, legal processes, and legal institutions. To further this mission the ABF will produce timely, cutting-edge research of the highest quality to inform and guide the legal profession, the academy, and society in the United States and internationally. The ABF's primary funding is provided by the [American Bar Endowment](#) and the [Fellows of The American Bar Foundation](#).*

###