

Date _____

Ambassador Xie Feng
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
3505 International Place NW
Washington DC 20008



Dear Ambassador Xie Feng,

I am writing to express my grave concern for artist Gao Zhen (高甄), who is currently detained at Sanhe City Detention Center on charges of ‘slandering China’s heroes and martyrs’ (侵害英雄烈士名譽榮譽罪) — a crime punishable by up to three years in prison. His formal arrest has been approved, but these charges are baseless; he has merely exercised his right to freedom of expression, especially artistic expression and creation.

My distress is heightened by concerns that Gao’s wife and their 6-year-old son, a United States citizen, were barred from leaving China when they attempted to return to New York following Gao’s detention in August 2024. Gao’s wife was subsequently warned by police not to speak to the media about her husband’s detention.

I fear that Gao Zhen’s case may signal a more robust use by authorities of the vague crime of “slandering China’s heroes and martyrs” to target freedom of artistic expression and creation. Gao and his brother’s works, most of which were made over a decade ago and presented bold critiques of the Cultural Revolution and former Chinese leader Mao Zedong, are reported to be the sole basis for his arrest. It is furthermore concerning that this crime seems to run contrary to protections for freedom of speech set out in China’s Constitution.

Given the critical role that artists play in facilitating discussion in society, in shaping historical memory and in inspiring new ideas and work, legal efforts to suppress artists and artistic expression are deeply concerning. No one should be punished solely for their creative work or for expressing their personal views.

I urge you 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.

Yours sincerely,

