



July 27, 2022

VIA OVERNIGHT DELIVERY SERVICE & EMAIL

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
United States Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

RE: Request to secure the immediate release of U.S. national, Pastor Cao Sanqiang (John Cao) being wrongfully held in China

Dear Secretary Blinken:

On July 19, 2022, President Biden issued an Executive Order bolstering efforts to bring wrongfully detained U.S. nationals home. One of the goals of the order is “to secure the release of those...wrongfully detained.” The ACLJ represents Ms. Jamie Powell, who is the wife of U.S. national, Pastor Cao Sanqiang (John Cao), and we would like to once again bring the case of Pastor Cao to your attention.

Pastor Cao, a United States lawful permanent resident for over 30 years, has been married to Jamie Powell, a U.S. Citizen and resident of North Carolina, since 1988. They have two adult sons who are also U.S. Citizens. As a missionary, Pastor Cao faithfully served the people of China for over two decades without incident. In 2013, Pastor Cao focused his humanitarian efforts on the impoverished Wa area of Northern Burma, where he provided basic necessities and established 16 schools serving more than 2,000 students.

Pastor Cao conducted his commendable humanitarian work openly in front of both the Chinese and Burmese governments. This work continued without any problem until March of 2017 when Pastor Cao was suddenly and wrongfully targeted, arrested, convicted, and sentenced to seven

years in prison. Although Pastor Cao appealed, he was denied an appeal hearing on July 25, 2019, in violation of China's own law, and transferred to Kunming Prison.

The following month, on August 12, 2019 the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) adopted Opinion 35/2019 (China) regarding Pastor Cao's unlawful detention. They found in favor of Pastor Cao, stating that "[t]he deprivation of liberty of Cao Sanqiang (John Cao), being in contravention of articles 7, 8, 10 and 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, *is arbitrary* and falls within categories II, III and V." The WGAD further requested that the Government of China "remedy the situation of Mr. Cao without delay" stating that "the appropriate remedy would be to release Mr. Cao *immediately* and accord him an enforceable right to compensation and other reparations, in accordance with international law."

In addition to the WGAD decision, Pastor Cao's case was one of the cases highlighted at the 2018 U.S. State Department's Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, and former Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Sam Brownback, repeatedly made requests for Pastor Cao's release. Additionally, Pastor Cao's case was the first one presented to President Trump in a January 14, 2020, letter from the Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) requesting that the president meet with Pastor Cao's family and persistently raise his case in discussions with Chairman Xi Jinping and other senior Chinese officials (to date, 3 of the 7 people referenced in the CECC letter have been released back to the U.S.). Pastor Cao's wife has personally presented her husband's plight before the U.N. Human Rights Council, and Pastor Cao is a Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Prisoner of Conscience. Unfortunately, to date, Pastor Cao remains in Kunming Prison, and has already served over five years of his seven-year sentence, despite the many efforts to effectuate his release.

Given President Biden's renewed call for increased efforts to secure the release of wrongfully detained U.S. nationals, we respectfully request that the administration work to secure the safe and immediate release of Pastor Cao, who is being wrongfully detained in China. Additionally, we respectfully request, as stated in the Executive Order, that the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs share, in coordination with the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, relevant information, either in person or via phone, on any developments in Pastor Cao's wrongful detention case with his family, as soon as possible.

Secretary Blinken, we look forward to working with you in this matter and are hopeful that you will be able to effectuate the release of Pastor Cao. Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have.

Respectfully,



CeCe Heil
Senior Counsel

Encls. WGAD Opinion
CECC Letter