

Practicing Law under Ubiquitous Pressure

Li Xiongbing

My name is Li Xiongbing, and I am male of Han nationality. I was born in Hubei, China, on September 18, 1973, and I'm currently residing in Tongzhou District, Beijing Municipality, People's Republic of China. Since 2005 I have been working as a practicing attorney at Beijing Globe-law Firm.

After the registration of my attorney license was postponed in 2008 by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice on the grounds that I had "handled sensitive cases," my qualification as an attorney and my right to practice law has again been arbitrarily revoked by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice since June 2009. However, I have never committed any violations of law or regulations, and my work as an attorney has never been blamed or criticized by my clients. On the contrary, many of my clients and members of the general public often call me or write to me to praise my work, encouraging me to overcome the pressure from public powers and become an outstanding human rights attorney.

The frequent suppression and persecution I have suffered while working as an attorney are directly linked with my advocacy for human rights. Precisely on the morning of May 31, 2009, the day when my work as an attorney was about to be illegally terminated, two police officers from Domestic Security Protection Squad from the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau made an appointment to talk with me. They expressly gave me two warnings. First, that I should not defend Falun Gong practitioners ever again. Second, that I should not participate again in the relevant work of a non-governmental organization dedicated to pushing for the rule of law and human rights progress. I persisted in practicing my profession independently in accordance with law and rejected their unreasonable demands.

As expected, soon afterwards, I failed to pass the annual evaluation for my attorney license, and I was unable to practice law. Starting from June 2, I was monitored and followed by police officers or police cars for eight days in a row and was not allowed to go to any place without prior approval from the police and meet with anyone without prior approval of the police. It was not until the evening of June 9 that I regained my freedom. In addition, on the evening of June 5, at the request of the police, the owner of the house that I was renting came to my home, asking us to move out and leave Beijing. The kindergarten my child was attending was also harassed by the police and had to relocate to a place far away from my residence. My pregnant wife was also questioned and investigated several times by the relevant departments due to her lack of a so-called "pregnancy permit" and, she received warnings and threats.

Over the past few years, my work as an attorney has been mainly concentrated on these areas: advocacy of civil rights such as citizens' right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of religion, and equal rights as well as public legal services. It is exactly for the work in these areas

that I was repudiated and treated with hostility by the government. My work includes the case of Qi Chonghuai, a journalist for Legal Times, involving the freedom of speech; the case of Yuan Xianchen, a human rights worker in Heilongjiang province, involving instigation of the subversion of the government; the case of providing legal assistance to victims of Sanlu poisonous milk powder; the case of providing legal assistance to victims of child slavery in "illegal brick kilns" in Shanxi, as well as legal defense cases involving religious persecution of believers such as those of "Falun Gong" and the faction of "Three Grades of Servants."

At the end of 2008, because I provided legal assistance to the victims of toxic Sanlu milk powder, I was warned and threatened several times by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice, Beijing Lawyers Association, and other departments. In the summer of 2008, I was also suppressed and threatened several times by Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice, because I had provided legal assistance to the families of children victimized in the earthquake disaster area, and was forced to stop providing legal aid.

As recently as the morning of June 30, 2009, Huang Weizhong, a believer of Falun Gong in Jiamusi Municipality of Heilongjiang Province, was detained and tried. I took the case in April 2009 and acted as a defense attorney for Huang Weizhong. However, when the court trial started on the morning of June 30, the People's Court in the suburbs of Jiamusi Municipality blocked me from entering the court to perform my job as an attorney on the grounds that I failed to pass the annual evaluation Beijing Municipal Bureau of Justice. Without having me present as his defense attorney, Huang Weizhong was sentenced to three years of imprisonment.