

Defending Rights in Hardship and on a Thin Line

Wen Haibo

Personal resume: Wen Haibo is a male of Han nationality. He was born in Liaoning, People's Republic of China in 1980. Currently, he resides in Chaoyang District, Beijing Municipality, PR China. He started his career as an attorney in 2004 and once worked at Shengzhi Law Office and Yitong Law Firm. Currently, he is a practicing attorney in Shunhe Law Firm of Beijing.

From November 2005 to March 2009, Shengzhi Law Office and Yitong Law Firm, both places where I once worked, were given administrative penalties of "suspending business for reorganization" due to different but groundless reasons given by judicial authorities of Beijing. The true reasons were none other than that these law firms had gotten involved with or had participated in some cases and incidents with which the authorities were not pleased.

I started working with Attorney Gao Zhisheng in April 2004 until the law firm was shut down in November 2005, and I was forced to leave. During this time, both Attorney Gao and I represented a large number of people from socially disadvantaged groups in defending their rights. When we began to defend the rights of Falun Gong adherents in 2005, the suppression we suffered escalated gradually. At first, the judicial authorities or the people working in Beijing Lawyers Association constantly made appointments with us for talks where they gave us a warning of "not allowing you to accept Falun Gong cases." After that, the police constantly harassed, stalked us and videotaped us without permission. At the end of 2005, after Attorney Gao launched a campaign of "hunger strike to fight against violence," I and several other people working in the law firm were one by one placed under house arrest. When I was under house arrest, several plainclothes policemen stayed downstairs 24 hours a day, and they did not allow me to go out. When I had to go out (such as for shopping), someone shadowed me closely. This lasted 45 days.

I left Shengzhi Law Office at the end of 2005 and went to work at Yitong Law Firm. During this time, besides defending the rights of Falun Gong adherents, I also signed in with the attorneys' delegation to provide legal assistance for the Tibetans arrested during the March 14 Incident in Tibet. The signatures for that delegation brought such a great repercussion that about 10 attorneys who joined the delegation all received warnings from the judicial authorities and the police. The police station in charge of my area also made an appointment with me for a talk. They threatened me and told me to leave Beijing. I flatly refused. In the second half of 2008, I also joined the movement of calling for "the direct election of Beijing Lawyers Association." The mention of "direct election" obviously touched the frail nerves of some people in the judicial departments. They counterattacked in a high profile way, and denouncing us as "linking up with each other in private, using democratic election as a signpost, publishing seditious remarks, spreading rumors among the lawyers in Beijing to bewitch the people," "attempting to break away from the supervision and guidance of the judicial administrative departments and the

administration of the Lawyers Association in order to deny full-scale the current administrative system on attorneys, the judicial system and even the political system.”

As many attorneys from Yitong Law Firm joined in calling for “direct election,” the judicial authorities intended to “kill one as a warning to many others” and suspended Yitong Law Firm for reorganization.

When Yitong Law Firm was shut down at the end of 2008, I was again forced to transfer, this time to Shunhe Law Firm. Since I did not stop getting involved in various cases of human rights and mass groups defending their rights, I brought suppression here, too. Since I did not pass the annual evaluation by Beijing Lawyers Association, I cannot practice normally at this time, and several cases I have accepted before were forced to stop.

Though I have met temporary (possibly long-term or permanent) difficulties in my work, I have received the encouragement and support from my clients and other friends. With this encouragement and support, I do not feel lonely and will continue walking along this road!