

# URGENT ACTION

## ARTIST DETAINED FOR ONE YEAR WITHOUT TRIAL

Chinese artist and US permanent resident Gao Zhen was first detained in August 2024 for “slandering heroes and martyrs.” According to reports, his trial is expected in mid-August 2025. His wife and child, who travelled with him to China, have also a *de facto* travel ban since his arrest. No artist or individual should be punished solely for their creative work or for expressing their personal views; Chinese authorities must release Gao Zhen immediately and unconditionally, and lift all extra-legal restrictions on his wife and child, allowing them to leave the country freely and safely.

### TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

**Secretary Ma Xiaojie,**  
Secretary of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission  
No. 17 Dingsheng East Street,  
Sanhe City, Langfang, Hebei Province,  
065200, P.R. China

Copy to: Chinese Embassy in [Your Country]

Dear Secretary Ma,

I am writing to express my grave concern for artist **Gao Zhen (高铮)**, who has been detained at Sanhe City Detention Center on charges of ‘slandering China’s heroes and martyrs’ (侵害英雄烈士名誉荣誉罪) for almost one year without trial.

His case has been submitted to the court by the prosecutor’s office, but regret that these charges are wholly baseless; Gao has merely exercised his right to freedom. I fear that Gao Zhen’s case reflects the ongoing criminalization of freedom of artistic expression and creation using vague charges such as ‘slandering China’s heroes and martyrs’. Restricting forms of expression with the only interest of protecting the ‘honour’ or reputation of public officials, institutions, symbols or flags exceeds what is allowed under international law.

My distress is heightened by concerns that Gao’s wife and young son have been banned from leaving the country, purportedly under the pretext of “national security,” though no formal charges have been filed or documentation provided to justify these measures. As a result, the 7-year-old boy has been unable to continue his education for a full school year.

This case is a clear example of the Chinese authorities using political censorship to stifle creative expression. No artist or individual 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’s right to communicate with his family is fully respected and protected, and he is not subject to torture or other ill-treatment;**
- **Stop harassing and threatening his family and allow them to leave the country freely and safely;**

Yours sincerely,

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Gao Zhen, 69 years old, is a prominent artist in contemporary Chinese art and a member of the renowned Gao Brothers duo. On 26 August 2024, Gao was detained while traveling in China with his wife and son. Around 30 police officers raided his studio in Yanjiao, a town in Sanhe City, Hebei province. The authorities photographed his artworks, confiscated and sealed several sculptures – most of which were created over a decade ago—before sealing the studio.

The following day, Gao's wife was informed by the Sanhe City Public Security Bureau of his detention. He has since been held at the Sanhe City Detention Center on charges of "slandering China's heroes and martyrs," a crime punishable by up to three years in prison. Reliable sources report that this case has already been processed by the prosecutor's office and submitted to the court and the trial is scheduled for mid-August.

In addition, from early May to late July 2025, Gao's family has been unable to receive any correspondence from him. This suggests that his legally protected right to communicate with his family has been unjustly restricted or denied.

His wife and young child have also suffered. Gao's wife is banned from leaving the country under the pretext of "national security," though no formal charges have been filed. Their 7-year-old son, a U.S. citizen, has the legal right to leave the country but is in practice unable to do so without being accompanied, ideally by his parents. The de facto travel ban has kept him out of school for a full year.

Since the 1980s, the Gao Brothers have employed satirical humor to shed light on the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution, consistently challenging the limits of social commentary. Their work offers a sharp critique of the Cultural Revolution and former Chinese leader Mao Zedong, exposing the extent of the authoritarian practices employed during Mao's regime. These subjects remain deeply sensitive and taboo in contemporary China.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** English or Chinese

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 30 December 2025

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PRONOUN:** [Gao Zhen] (he/him/his)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/8821/2024/en/>