

CHINA: Systematic Psychiatric Torture of Falun Gong Practitioners in Hospitals

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By Falun Gong Human Rights Working Group

Twelve years ago, in Beijing, approximately 10,000 Chinese citizens peacefully gathered in Zhongnanhai (central headquarters of the communist government), to appeal for the right to practice Falun Gong, an ancient Chinese exercise and meditation practice.¹ Under the then dictator, Jiang Zemin, the Chinese Communist Party was ordered on July 20, 1999 to “eradicate” Falun Gong practitioners financially, physically and mentally by any means. Since then, this nonviolent group has undergone the most horrific persecution in modern history. The depth of the darkness of this genocide of good people continues to be exposed.

One of the most inhuman and notorious torture methods used in China in the attempt to eradicate Falun Gong practitioners is psychiatric torture. This form of torture is used routinely by staff of detention centers, labor camps and jails to coerce Falun Gong practitioners to give up their beliefs. These horrifying acts are also regularly occurring in modern, reputable hospitals, by or overseen by, professional and skilled staffs who are trained to heal—not to hurt.

This report summarizes findings on psychiatric torture in China against Falun Gong and includes a never before widely published listing of hospitals known to use psychiatric torture. The report’s purposes are to educate and reinforce the need for action to be taken to stop these atrocities.

History of the Soviet Union’s Use of Psychiatric Torture

From the 1960s through the 1980s, hundreds of stories surfaced about psychiatric torture on mentally healthy individuals held against their will in mental hospitals under the Soviet Union’s communist authorities. As the evidence mounted through the media, in autobiographies, and by debates among psychiatrists and physicians, so did global outrage against it, particularly from the psychiatric and mental healthcare fields. The outcry eventually led to the withdrawal, in 1983, of the Soviet All-Union Society of Psychiatrists and Neuropathologists from the World-Psychiatric Association.²

In the 1950’s, the Chinese psychiatric field adopted the Soviet Union’s psychiatric theory and practice which included classifying religious or other dissentients as dangerous and mentally ill to subject them to psychiatric abuse in hospitals.² Thus, it should not have been a great surprise when similar cases of psychiatric torture began surfacing in China. Yet, when these cases were reported they were often

¹Falun Gong/Falun Dafa is a traditional Chinese cultivation practice of exercises and meditation. Practitioners live daily by the principles of truth, compassion, and tolerance and are known for their peaceful nature even when persecuted. Falun Gong became immensely popular in China due to its health benefits and the improvement of character it promotes. Its popularity was the prime factor prompting the persecution as the number of Falun Gong practitioners exceeded the number of registered communist party members.

² Munro, R. (2000). Judicial psychiatry in China and Its political abuses. *Columbia Journal of Asian Law*, Vol.14, 1.

dismissed under the assumption there was a lack of past and current evidence.² However, studies by Munro (2006) indicate that these practices are even more widespread in China than in the former Soviet Union.³ Evidence from the last decade definitively depicts the depth and systematic nature of psychiatric torture in present day China. This evidence is hard to ignore.

China's Psychiatric Torture against Falun Gong

Reports of psychiatric torture of healthy Falun Gong practitioners in hospitals, under the direction of the Chinese Communist Party, surfaced immediately after the persecution of Falun Gong began in 1999. Less than a year later, the first known case of a Falun Gong practitioner dying in a mental hospital from injections of nerve-damaging drugs was revealed:

Su Gang, a computer engineer, mentally and physically healthy and 32 years old, living in Shandong Province, was forcibly taken from work to Changle Mental Hospital in Weifang because he refused to renounce Falun Gong. In the hospital and against his will, Su was subjected to daily injections of an overdose of drugs which, if improperly administered, can damage the central nervous system. After nine days of psychiatric abuse at the mental hospital, Su was released to the care of his father. He was in an extremely weak and deplorable state and exhibited signs of mental and physical damage due to the psychiatric abuse. He died ten days later of heart failure.⁴

Since then, evidence has been compiled of "1,089 Falun Gong practitioners who have been subjected to various forms of psychiatric torture resulting in a variety of conditions including hallucinations, severe pain, paralysis and even death."⁵ Cases, such as the one below, exemplify the misery inflicted in hospitals where drugs are used to punish and destroy individuals.

We were held in the Xuzhou City Mental Hospital for over three months. We were forcibly tied to a bed and the so-called medical staff gave us injections and forced "medicine" down our throats. They injected us with unknown drugs as well. We passed out and were unconscious shortly after receiving the injections. When the injections were taking effect, we suffered from extreme pain. It was so severe that we writhed in pain, cried out miserably, and slammed ourselves against walls in a desperate attempt to knock ourselves unconscious in order to be rid of the pain.

³ Munro, R. (2006). *China's Psychiatric Inquisition: Dissent, psychiatry and the law in post-1949 China*. Wildy, Simmonds & Hill Publishing. London, UK.

⁴ FGHRWG. *Sun gang Died after torture in Changle Mental Hospital*.

<http://www.falunhr.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1102&Itemid=0>

⁵ FDIC (25 2010 Mar) *Psychiatric torture of Falun Gong practitioners widespread, says UN submission*.

<http://www.clearwisdom.net/html/articles/2010/3/31/115791p.html>

After the affects of the injections wore off, we questioned the medical staff, “Why did you give injections and other harmful substances to us even though we are perfectly healthy?” They replied with shame, “We have no choice. It’s per instructions from above. We have to obey our bosses if we want to keep our jobs. We don’t want to treat you this way, but we don’t want to lose our jobs.”⁶

According to Drs. Lu and Gilli, mentally healthy Falun Gong practitioners are:

“involuntarily admitted (to hospitals) because they practice Falun Gong exercises, pass out flyers, refuse to sign a pledge to renounce Falun Gong, write petition letters to expose the abuse of psychiatry, go on hunger strikes in the labor camps, or appeal to the government. Others are admitted because detention sentences have expired or the detainees have not been successfully “transformed” in the brainwashing classes. Some have been told that they were admitted, not because they had a mental problem, but because they had a so-called “political problem”—that is, because they appealed to the government to lift the ban of Falun Gong.”⁷

The aim of this abuse in China is to make the person renounce their beliefs by “altering the personality to the point of even breaking their will,” according to a United Nation report.⁹ Often well-educated Falun Gong practitioners are told they are deemed harder to break through other means (such as forced labor), so they are sent to psychiatric hospitals for torture.

Psychiatric torture against religious believers or other prisoners of conscience¹⁰ is prohibited by international legal standards and medical ethics. The Human Rights Council of the United Nations reiterates the ethic role of medical and other health personnel, particularly physicians in the protection of prisoners and detainees in a 2009 report.¹¹ Specifically, “it is a gross contravention of medical ethics, for medical and other health personnel to engage, actively or passively, in acts which constitute participation in, complicity in, incitement to or attempts to commit torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment pursuant to the Principles of Medical Ethics.” Furthermore, it is “the duty of all medical and other health personnel to report or denounce acts of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment of which they are aware to relevant medical, judicial, national or international authorities as appropriate under and consistent with their respective professional codes of ethics.”

⁶ WOIPFG. (23 2004 Feb). *Investigation report on spiritual persecution of Falun gong Practitioners*. http://www.zhuichaguoji.org/en/sites/zhuichaguoji.org/en/files/record/2004/08/106-en_106.pdf

⁷ Lu, S.Y. & Galli, V.B. (2002) Psychiatric abuse of Falun Gong practitioners in China. *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 30:126–30.

⁹ United Nations, (2 2006 Mar) Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Manfred Nowak. Mission to China. 62 session.

¹⁰ Prisoners of conscience is a terms coined by Amnesty International to mean “a person imprisoned for their political, religious or other beliefs, or for their ethnic origin, sex, color, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth or other status, who has not used or encouraged violence.”

¹¹ United Nations. (20 March 2009). *Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment: the role and responsibility of medical and other health personnel*. Human Rights Council. 10 session. Agenda item 3.

In a 2008 report by the United Nation's Committee against Torture regarding China, the committee stated that China "should take measures to ensure that no one is involuntarily placed in psychiatric institutions for reasons other than medical. If for medical reasons, it should be only on the advice of an independent psychiatric expert and an appeal process should be available."¹²

Psychiatric Torture's Methods and Outcomes

Evidence has shown that psychiatric torture in hospitals used against Falun Gong practitioners consists of, but is not limited to: a combination of being forced to ingest or be injected with massive amounts of psychiatric drugs, unknown drugs or toxic substances; undergoing a massive number of electroshock procedures (also known as electro-convulsive shock); or the use of electric needles at the temples to shock the brain and produce seizures.

The overall outcome of these methods often leaves victims in an irreparable mental and physical state; as noted, it may even lead to death. Once a person is mentally and physically destroyed, they are sent home to be cared for by family. They are reduced to a semi-comatose, "zombie," lifeless state, or cannot walk, talk, or care for themselves. Some are reduced to insanity. They may also suffer from a variety of other health problems that they did not have before being tortured.

Reports of damage to the central nervous and the peripheral nervous systems include, but are not limited to: mild to severe memory loss; dry eyes; blurred vision; dry mouth; constipation; incontinence; muscle cramps; spasms; twitching and/or weakness; muscle atrophy; paralysis; burning skin; insomnia; extreme fatigue; constant drooling; uncontrollable shaking; loss of control of the limbs, bladder and/or bowels; heart palpitations; severe headaches; unbearable pain; sizable bloating; organ damage (often to the liver); pronounced speech delay; hallucinations; irritability; anxiety; depression; or other mental and physical conditions not present before the persecution.

Mental Hospital Settings

Included at the conclusion of this report is a partial listing of more than 200 known hospitals in China that have administered psychiatric torture between 1999 and the present to mentally and physically healthy Falun Gong practitioners.

Hospitals engaging in psychiatric abuse can be categorized into two types. The first type is in the psychiatric field, and they constitute approximately half of hospitals on the listing. These facilities have names such as Psychiatric Prevention and Treatment Hospital; Psychiatric or Mental Illness Rehabilitation Hospital; Mental Health Prevention and Recovery Hospital; Psychiatric, Mental Health, or Mental Disorder Prevention Center; or Mental Illness Hospital; Mental Illness and Treatment Hospital; or Mental Hygiene Hospital. Several hospitals are associated with medical schools or universities in the profession, as well as several Red Cross mental hospitals.

General city, county, and province hospitals constitute the other half of the listing, and are the second type of hospitals involved in psychiatric torture. Several medical schools or universities, military or police

¹² United Nations. (21 November 2008). *Concluding observations of the Committee against Torture CHINA. Committee against Torture*. 41 session, Geneva, 3.

hospitals, veteran's hospitals, prison hospitals and specific industry hospitals are also implicated in certain cases.

Recommendations:

The crimes committed in these health and medical facilities should not continue to be overlooked. They cause great suffering, and for the majority of the victims, irreversible mental and physical damage, or even death.

Due to the magnitude of this evidence, the Falun Gong Human Rights Working Group ask professional associations, agencies and organizations in the health fields, world governments, and concerned citizens to take action. Taking action can include passing this information along to others; raising the issue in conference meetings, with elected officials and in public reports; and by formulating and enforcing sanctions.

Specific global sanctions for consideration include, but are not limited to:

- Banning hospitals known to participate in psychiatric abuse from international academic exchanges, collaborations, medical training and publishing articles.
- Banning health care personnel involved in psychiatric torture from publishing research articles.
- Urging arrest and prosecution of health care personnel involved according to Article 5 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- Urging officials to deny visas to enter your country of health care personnel involved in psychiatric torture, and directors and board of directors of the hospitals involved.
- Asking organizations representing human rights, spiritual and ethnic groups, or representing other prisoners of conscience (lawyers, journalists) being persecuted in China to gather details on psychiatric torture cases against their own members.
- Releasing psychiatric torture cases information to the media, other interested parties and/or through other formats to get the news out to a broader audience.

Any of these measures can help create an "objection" larger than what was heard when the Soviet Union was under scrutiny for psychiatric torture of its citizens.

In conclusion, the victims of this persecution against Falun Gong and the unimaginable suffering it causes goes beyond the tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners and their loved ones; it extends into the lives of health professionals and to the Chinese population as a whole. It is time for a unified outcry and associated sanctions to stop these atrocities!