



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 3, 2012

Report: China Coerced Chen to Leave U.S. Embassy

Barely a day after major news sources reported that pro-life Chinese dissident Chen Guangcheng had left the U.S. Embassy in Beijing voluntarily to be reunited with his family and live at peace in China, reports surfaced that Chen was actually coerced into returning to the custody of the repressive Chinese government under threats that his family would be harmed — and even killed — if he did not give himself up.



According to the *Los Angeles Times*, a close friend of Chen, Chinese activist Zeng Jinyan, “said the deal with U.S. officials to keep the dissident in China was forced on him to avoid harm to his family and supporters. Zeng said she was told by Chen’s wife that if her husband didn’t leave the embassy, she and her children would be forced to return to their village, where thugs armed with sticks were waiting to beat them to death.”

On May 2 the *New York Times* reported that Chen had left the U.S. Embassy only after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had intervened and Chen had been assured that he and his family would be safe. U.S. officials involved with the negotiations between Chen and Chinese officials said Chen had emphasized that he wanted to stay in China with his family, and to continue his studies at a university in that country.

But later in the day Zeng wrote several tweets that confirmed Chen had only agreed to stay in China to assure the safety of his wife, Yuan Weijing, and their children. Zeng confirmed to the *Los Angeles Times* that the tweets were genuine, and “said Chen explained in a phone conversation that he wanted to leave the country but wouldn’t see his family again if he did,” reported the *Times*. “‘Guangcheng didn’t want to leave the U.S. Embassy, but he had no choice. If he hadn’t left, Yuan Weijing would have been sent back to Shandong immediately,’ Zeng said of Chen’s wife and the province where the family sustained beatings and threats throughout Chen’s 19 months under house arrest. Zeng said Chen’s wife pleaded for her help, saying ‘Jinyan, I am so scared.’”

Additionally, Bob Fu of the U.S.-based [China Aid Association](#), a Christian human rights group, confirmed that he also had gotten reliable reports that Chen had left the U.S. Embassy because “serious threats to his immediate family members were made by the Chinese government.” Fu said the reports he had received indicated that, despite assurances to the contrary, the U.S. had “abandoned Mr. Chen” to an angry Chinese government.

As reported by [The New American](#), “the blind Chen, who has suffered severe persecution for his role in exposing China’s repressive one-child policy for families — and its record of forced abortion for mothers who insist on giving birth to more children — slipped away from Chinese authorities April 22 and was given refuge in the U.S. Embassy because of the ‘exceptional circumstances, including his disabilities,’ an American official traveling with Clinton told reporters in Beijing. ‘On humanitarian grounds we assisted him and allowed him to remain on a temporary basis’”

But during a phone conversation May 2 between Chen and a good friend, Teng Biao, a noted professor and law scholar in China, Chen indicated that during negotiations U.S. officials appeared to be



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pressuring him to leave the embassy.

In Washington, D.C., a State Department spokesperson said that U.S. officials involved in the negotiations had not heard anything about threats to Chen or his family. "At no time did any U.S. official speak to Chen about physical or legal threats to his wife and children," Victoria Nuland, the chief State Department spokeswoman, said. "Nor did Chinese officials make any such threats to us."

But Nuland conceded that U.S. officials made it clear to Chen that if he chose to stay at the embassy, "Chinese officials had indicated to us that his family would be returned to Shandong, and they would lose their opportunity to negotiate for reunification."

Nuland insisted that throughout the negotiations Chen had "expressed his desire to stay in China, reunify with his family, continue his education, and work for reform in his country. All our diplomacy was directed at putting him in the best possible position to achieve his objectives."

Bob Fu said that from the beginning he and others at China Aid Association were skeptical about Chen's desire to return to China, and about the government's assurances that he and his family would be able to live freely in the country. "We are deeply concerned about this sad development if the reports about Chen's involuntary departure are true," Fu said. He added that Chen "has the admiration of the world right now and that will perhaps help keep him safe in the short-term, but I am fearful what could happen if the world loses interest."

Renee Xia, director of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, speculated that the U.S. "may have acted hastily" to broker a deal between Chen and Chinese officials, "on the basis of an empty promise from the Chinese government to protect his safety. When the U.S. diplomats leave town, what is preventing the government from disappearing him?"

According to another report, *more than a few human rights activists "fear that the U.S. and China pressured Chen to make a quick deal before a round of talks called the Strategic and Economic Dialogue, scheduled to begin [May 3]."*

U.S. Representative Chris Smith picked up on that concern, calling an emergency hearing on Capitol Hill to discuss Chen's plight. "Smith said he was concerned that State Department officials had rushed to broker an 'artificial deal' without any guarantee that Chinese officials will abide by the terms," reported the *Times*. Smith chided the State Department for what now appears to be a lost opportunity to pressure China on its dismal human rights record. "If ever there was a test of the U.S. commitment to human rights, it should have been at that moment, potentially sending him back to a very real threat," Smith said.

House Speaker John Boehner also weighed in on the situation, challenging President Obama to follow up on Chen's safety and to ensure that China follows the agreement brokered through Secretary of State Clinton. "Having handed Chen Guangcheng back over to the Chinese government," Boehner challenged in a statement, "the Obama Administration is responsible for ensuring his safety. While our economic relationship with China is important and vital to the future of people in both countries, the United States has an obligation to use its engagement with China to press for reforms in China's human rights practices, particularly with respect to the reprehensible 'one-child' policy."

Photo of Chen Guangcheng: AP Images



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