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World Organization to
Investigate the Persecution
of Falun Gong
追查迫害法轮功国际组织

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Establishment of the China Mental Health Watch

Announcing the Establishment of the China Mental Health Watch, part of the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong

On November 21, 2003 at 1:00 p.m. a press conference was held to announce the establishment of China Mental Health Watch.

China Mental Health Watch (CMHW) is a new international non-governmental organization mainly composed of mental health professionals, lawyers, and victims of the persecution, their families and friends. As part of the World Organization to Investigate the Persecution of Falun Gong (WOIPFLG), the mission of CMHW is to investigate and bring to light the on-going persecution of Falun Gong practitioners with particular focus on the effects of psychiatric abuse and psychological torture in mental institutions, labor camps, and the greater public. CMHW recognizes that this persecution, unlike many others in history, is aimed directly and indirectly at the human conscience, the mind, and freedom of belief.

The press conference opened with a statement read by Dr. Viviana Galli that provided a brief explanation of CMHW goals and information currently available regarding the abuse (full text follows this article). Dr. Abraham Halpern, Professor Emeritus Department of Psychiatry, New York Medical College and Honorary Chair of CMHW delivered an impassioned address concerning previous efforts by himself, the American Psychiatric Association, and the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) to seek an end to the psychiatric and psychological abuse of Falun Gong practitioners in the People's Republic of China (PRC). He further mentioned that the abuse specifically targets people like Falun Gong practitioners and others whose beliefs may be considered threats to the government's rule.

Dr. Daniel Monti, an assistant professor and chief of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, Department of the Psychiatry at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia also presented an address in which he said, "I am deeply disturbed by the blood curdling events we have heard about and I am concerned by the relative lack of a strong response by some organizations and governments that profess to protect human rights. ... What the Chinese government is doing is an outrage. Torturing people regardless of beliefs is despicable, but it is especially unsettling that they are targeting those whose main doctrine is one of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance. ... As a psychiatrist and an American citizen, I am making a plea to all individuals, organizations and governments to unite in sending a strong message to the Chinese government that these abuses to humanity must stop NOW."

Dr. Declans Lyons of the Irish College of Psychiatrists, in a written communication to the group, had this to say. "Virtually every global professional psychiatric association has expressed concern that such practices exist in China and European psychiatrists in particular deplore such practices when ever their occurrence has been confirmed. The Irish College of Psychiatrists fully supports the proposed investigation to be undertaken by the World Psychiatric Association and calls on the Chinese Authorities to cooperate and allow unfettered access to state psychiatric hospitals. At stake is public confidence in the discipline of psychiatry and the safety and impartiality of it's remit and therapies. If weakness allows cruelty to thrive and silence is the voice of weakness then all of us are compelled to speak ever more loudly."

Three courageous practitioners bore witness to the persecution through their own experience of harm at the hands of the PRC government. Mr. Chen Gang described both the physical and psychological torture he endured while illegally detained in a labor camp and his subsequent anguish after signing a renunciation statement to ease the pain inflicted. He shared, "In addition to physical tortures, these police guards destroyed my confidence and dignity. They forced me to become a person that I despise, tarnished my soul and destroyed my hope. ... I once promised to follow the principle of "truth, compassion and tolerance", but I betrayed my consciousness under extreme pressure! I could not imagine how to face my family, friends, and people I know. I did not want them to know that I was a coward. I was suddenly overwhelmed by anxiety, depression and helplessness."

Ms. Amy Li spoke of the torture she experienced in a psychiatric institution and the lengths the Chinese authorities went to in order to have her give up her belief. In addition to the physical and mental pain she endured in the institution, her husband was also forced to divorce her and she was denied access to her 10-year-old daughter.

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Ms. Fu Yeongching expressed the pain and suffering of her fiancé, Dr. Charles Lee, an American who is being tortured in China even now because he practices Falun Gong. She is one of many practitioners who suffer peripherally because a family member or loved one is being persecuted by the Chinese government.

Additional support and interest was expressed in encouraging letters from Professor Ahmed Okasha, president of the WPA, Professor V. Krasnov, director of the Moscow Research Institute of Psychiatry and others.

All in all, the event was quite successful and members of China Mental Health Watch, as well as other professionals in the international community, want China to know that "we are watching."