**Chen Guangcheng: Obama ‘Soft’ on China Amid Widening Human Rights Crackdown**

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By Daniel Wiser

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http://freebeacon.com/national-security/chen-guangcheng-obama-soft-on-china-amid-widening-human-rights-crackdown/

President Barack Obama has emboldened China’s Communist Party by failing to publicly condemn its human rights abuses, according to Chen Guangcheng, a prominent Chinese dissident who spoke with the *Washington* *Free Beacon* amid a widening crackdown on dissent in the country.

Chen, a blind dissident and former human rights lawyer in China who now resides in the United States, said in an interview that the sweeping persecution of his colleagues “just happens to be a larger wave within the ongoing repression” that has occurred since the mid-2000s.

After China passed a new national security law this month that critics say is aimed at curbing dissent, more than 200 lawyers and activists have been [detained or harassed](http://freebeacon.com/national-security/rights-groups-urge-obama-to-cancel-meeting-with-chinese-president-amid-crackdown/). While most have since been released, security officials are likely still holding at least two-dozen lawyers.

Chinese state media  [recently reported](http://www.wsj.com/articles/human-rights-lawyers-detained-in-china-confess-state-media-reports-1437307686) that some of the detained rights advocates have confessed to being part of a criminal gang that promoted sensitive cases to reap profits—an admission that rights groups say was likely coerced from the lawyers to sway public opinion.

Although U.S. officials have issued statements denouncing the crackdown on China’s rights lawyers, Chen said, “we need to see them act on their words.” Obama and other top administration aides have generally avoided measures that would impose costs on China for human rights violations, including  [Beijing’s denial of free elections to Hong Kong](http://freebeacon.com/national-security/hong-kongs-democrats-face-uncertain-future/).

Vice President Joe Biden previously told Xi Jinping, China’s president and party leader, that supporting human rights in the United States is “a political imperative” that “doesn’t make us better or worse,” the  *New Yorker* has  [reported](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red).

“When it comes to Obama, I feel that for a long time he’s been softer on the issue of human rights,” said Chen, who has previously criticized the administration for not taking a harder line with China. “He always seems to be caving into demands—that has a result of making the Communist Party that much more brash in their actions.”

“They don’t worry about any [U.S.] response when it comes to human rights violations,” he added.

Chen, who recently published a  [memoir](http://freebeacon.com/culture/into-the-light/) about his dramatic escape from house arrest in China and eventual passage to the United States, said the party has been increasingly concerned about the burgeoning influence of human rights lawyers and activists in the country.

In May, an indigent man who was traveling to Beijing to seek federal assistance for his family was  [killed by a police officer](http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/05/12/world/asia/ap-as-china-police-shooting.html) at a train station, in front of his mother and three children. Police at the station in northeastern China said the man, Xu Chunhe, accosted the officer and attempted to steal his gun, but a private video released online appeared to show the security official beating Xu. Wu Gan, a popular grassroots activist in China who has been  [detained by authorities](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/05/29/police-detain-wu-gan-chinese-activist-known-as-super-vulgar-butcher/), promised a reward to anyone who would reveal the truth about Xu’s death—a proposal that made authorities “extremely anxious,” Chen said.

“These are the kinds of things that are going on that has caused the party’s [repression],” he said.

Among the rights advocates detained in the latest crackdown is  [Li Heping](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/11/world/asia/china-detains-rights-lawyers-prompting-talk-of-a-crackdown.html), a former lawyer for Chen. He said Li has “been a good friend of mine for a long time” and helped bring a case against local Chinese security officials in 2003. Li has not been able to meet with his lawyer, who lives in another province, due to pressure from police, Chen said.

Chen called on the Obama administration to consider actions that would punish Beijing for human rights abuses, including imposing sanctions on top Chinese officials who have committed violations. They should also be denied access to the United States and its financial system, he said.

“This would give pressure where it hurts most,” he said.

He also urged administration officials to publicly convey their concerns about human rights to their Chinese counterparts. Some rights groups have said the White House should  [postpone the Chinese president’s first state visit to Washington](http://freebeacon.com/national-security/rights-groups-urge-obama-to-cancel-meeting-with-chinese-president-amid-crackdown/) in September until the lawyers are released, a step that Chen said could be “extremely important.”

“For many years, the American government has been operating according to a policy where they talk about [human rights] behind closed doors,” he said.

“It appears that this is not working … they need to change this method.”