The Honourable Melanie Joly

Minister of Foreign Affairs

125 Sussex Drive

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0G2

January 18, 2023

Dear Minister Joly,

We are writing out of deep concern for the safety and well-being of **Dong Guangping**, a widely respected Chinese human rights defender who has been forcibly disappeared following his arrest in Vietnam on August 24, 2022. He has been missing for close to five months. It is feared he has likely been handed over to Chinese authorities where he is being held in incommunicado detention. We write to request that the Canadian government intensify efforts to press Vietnamese and Chinese authorities to disclose what has happened to him.

As you are aware, Dong Guangping had been residing in Vietnam since January 2020 while the Canadian government engaged with Vietnamese officials to secure permission for him to leave Vietnam and travel to Canada to join his wife and daughter. While there had been growing hope that Vietnam would cooperate, that was dashed on August 24 when he was unexpectedly arrested by Vietnamese police. Our concerns about his fate have deepened due to the refusal of the Vietnamese government to provide any information about what has happened to him, including when his case was raised at the highest levels of exchange by you and by Prime Minister Trudeau at summits in southeast Asia last November.

Beginning in 2001, Dong Guangping has been imprisoned three times in China because of his courageous human rights activism, much of which has related to his efforts to draw attention to the Tiananmen Square massacre. The most recent instance was in late 2015 after he had been unlawfully handed over to Chinese officials by Thai authorities, shortly before he was scheduled to travel to Canada, with his family, as resettled refugees, recognized by the UNHCR. After a period of incommunicado detention, he was sentenced to a 3½ year prison term at that time. He was eventually released from detention in August 2019. He then unsuccessfully tried, first, to reach freedom by swimming to a Taiwanese island off China’s coast before he subsequently crossed the border into Vietnam in January 2020.

We are aware and appreciative of the efforts taken by the Canadian government and you personally on behalf of Dong Guangping and his family, beginning with the resettlement of his wife and daughter as refugees in 2015 and the recent diplomatic efforts to facilitate his departure from Vietnam to be reunited with his family here. His daughter, Katherine Dong, a new Canadian citizen and a third-year student at the University of Toronto, has not seen her father for more than seven years. On November 17, 2022 , [she made an urgent and impassionate appeal](https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/i-fear-the-worst-canadian-says-missing-father-may-be-in-chinese-custody-for-speaking-out-1.6157592) to the Vietnamese and Chinese governments urging them to disclose where her father is. The family understandably fears the worst.

We are writing now with an urgent plea that Canada’s efforts not only be sustained, but intensified. Given his disappearance, there is grave concern that he may be at serious risk of torture, ill-treatment and other human rights violations. It is vital that pressure be maintained on both the Vietnamese and Chinese governments to disclose his whereabouts and allow him to travel to Canada.

What was happened to Dong Guangping is part of a deeply troubling pattern of extra-territorial harassment, intimidation and other human rights violations against Chinese human rights defenders and dissidents outside China. That is of course a serious concern for Canadians. This is reflected in such cases as pro-democracy activist Wang Bingzhang, a former McGill University student whose close family including children are Canadian citizens, who was abducted in Vietnam and illegally transferred to China in 2002, where he has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment for life following a secretive and unfair trial. Similarly, Uyghur-Canadian imam and community leader Huseyin Celil was unlawfully transferred from Uzbekistan, where he was visiting his wife’s family, to China in 2006 and is serving a twenty-year prison term, again following an unfair trial. By taking decisive action on behalf of Dong Guangping, Canada can convey a clear message of condemnation of such actions and an expectation that those types of unlawful activities must cease.

We recognize that it is almost certain that Dong Guangping is now in Chinese custody, and we urge that all possible channels be pursued, including with support from other governments, to press the Chinese government to provide full information about his whereabouts, and to allow him to travel to Canada.

It is vital as well that your government intensify pressure on the Vietnamese government to disclose what has happened to Dong Guangping. He was last seen in the custody of Vietnamese police. They must confirm whether they have in fact handed him over to Chinese authorities and, if so, when did that occur, on what legal basis, and to whom and to what location in China was he transferred?

Vietnamese officials have, to date, been unwilling to provide that information, including to Prime Minister Trudeau, to you and to Canada’s Ambassador in Hanoi. It is time, therefore, to make it clear to the government of Vietnam that there will be consequences for that continued affront to Canada and disregard for universal human rights.

2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Canada and Vietnam in 1973. It is an occasion that offers an opening and leverage to the Canadian government. It is simply not possible to celebrate that diplomatic relationship when Vietnam has so blatantly slighted Canada. We call on you to convey to your Vietnamese counterpart, Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son, that Canada is not prepared to mark and celebrate that anniversary unless and until Vietnamese officials provide a full account of what has happened to Dong Guangping and demonstrate that they are prepared to collaborate in facilitating his travel to Canada to be reunited with his family.

Steps that should be taken include:

* cancelling or significantly downgrading events that may be planned in both Canada and Vietnam to mark the anniversary;
* withdrawing or simply not extending invitations for senior Vietnamese officials to visit Canada and refraining from allowing senior Canadian officials to visit Vietnam in conjunction with the anniversary;
* cancelling or suspending the production of any materials marking the anniversary, including materials that may have been jointly produced and disseminated by the two governments;
* issuing a public statement noting that the anniversary instead marks a strain in the diplomatic relationship due to the Dong Guangping case; and
* clearly indicating that Canada is prepared to take further steps if Vietnam continues to be uncooperative about this case.

We look forward to hearing of these and other further steps Canada takes to ascertain the whereabouts of Dong Guangping and reunite him with his family.

Sincerely,

Winnie Ng, Chair Toronto Association for Democracy in China

Sheng Xue, President, Federation for a Democratic China (Canada)

Paul Mooney, Freelance Journalist, California

Alex Neve, Senior Fellow, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa

Farida Deif, Canada Director, Human Rights Watch

cc. Shaun Chen and Senator Victor Oh, Chairs, Canada-Vietnam Parliamentary Friendship Group

Ali Ehsassi, Chair, House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Sameer Zuberi, Chair, House of Commons Sub-Committee on International Human Rights

Senator Peter Boehm, Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade

Senator Salma Ataullahjan, Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights

Michael Chong, Conservative Party of Canada Critic for Foreign Affairs

Heather McPherson, New Democratic Party Critic for Foreign Affairs

Stéphane Bergeron, Bloc Québécois Critic for Foreign Affairs

Elizabeth May, Leader, Green Party of Canada