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From: Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, May 2, 2012 10:21 AM
To: H
Subject: FW: Friend says Chinese activist pressured into deal

FYI

From: Toiv, Nora F
Sent: Wednesday, May 02, 2012 10:16 AM
To: Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J; Hammer, Michael A; Smith, Dana S (PA)
Subject: Friend says Chinese activist pressured into deal

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May. 2, 2012 9:26 AM ET
Friend says Chinese activist pressured into deal

BEIJING (AP) — A close friend of Chen Guangcheng says the blind legal activist agreed to stay in China only to protect his family after receiving threats that his wife would be beaten to death if he left the country.

Beijing activist Zeng Jinyan told The Associated Press on Wednesday via Skype that she had just finished talking to Chen, who is in a Beijing hospital with his wife and children.

Zeng said Chen told her that he wanted to go to abroad but was forced to accept a deal to remain in China and go to law school in order to protect his family.

Zeng says Chen was told his wife would be beaten to death if he didn't accept, but she didn't say who made the threat.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. Check back soon for further information. AP's earlier story is below.

BEIJING (AP) — A blind Chinese activist who fled persecution by local officials in his rural town and sparked a diplomatic standoff by holing up in the U.S. Embassy for six days emerged Wednesday after U.S. officials said China had assured his safety.

Chen Guangcheng's escape from illegal house arrest in eastern China and his flight into the protection of U.S. diplomats in Beijing last week had threatened to derail annual U.S.-China strategic talks with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton starting Thursday.

U.S. Ambassador Gary Locke escorted Chen to Chaoyang Hospital, where he was reunited with his family as he awaited medical treatment for injuries suffered during his escape. On the way, the activist called his lawyer, Li Jinsong, who said Chen told him: "I'm free. I've received clear assurances."

Chen, 40, also received a call from Clinton, whom he thanked in Chinese for raising his case, a U.S. official said. Chen then told Clinton in halting English, "I want to kiss you," the official said.

Chen's case has been the most delicate diplomatic crisis for Washington and Beijing in years. He had become an international symbol for human dignity after running afoul of local government officials for exposing forced abortions carried out as part of China's one-child policy.

As part of the agreement that ended the fraught, behind-the-scenes standoff, U.S. officials said China agreed to let Chen and his family be relocated to a safe place in China where he could study at university, and that his treatment by local officials would be investigated.

Clinton said in a statement that Chen's exit from the embassy "reflected his choices and our values" and said the U.S. would monitor the assurances Beijing gave. "Making these commitments a reality is the next crucial task," she said.

In a fit of face-saving pique, the Chinese Foreign Ministry demanded that the U.S. apologize, investigate how Chen got into the embassy and hold those responsible accountable.

"What the U.S. side has done has interfered in the domestic affairs of China, and the Chinese side will never accept it," Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin said in a statement.

The apparent resolution shelves, at least for now, a predicament that threatened to move human rights to the front of a U.S.-China agenda crowded with disagreements over trade imbalances, North Korea and Syria.

With Chen out of the way, Clinton, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and their Chinese counterparts can focus on the original purpose of their two-day talks starting Thursday: building trust between the world's superpower and its up-and-coming rival.

However, leaving Chen in China is risky for President Barack Obama because Washington will now be seen as party to an agreement on Chen's safety that it does not have the power to enforce.

The negotiations over Chen's fate also included the option of sending him to the U.S., activists said.

Senior U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the intense negotiations that led to Chen leaving the embassy, said the U.S. helped Chen get into the embassy because he injured his leg escaping from his village. In the embassy, Chen did not request safe passage out of China or asylum in the U.S., the officials said.

The officials refused to say if Washington would apologize. One official said that embassy staff acted "lawfully" and in conformity with policy, suggesting that the U.S. does not believe it has anything to apologize for.

Another official would say only that "this was an extraordinary case involving exceptional circumstance, we do not anticipate that it will be repeated."

The officials said they expected that Chinese officials would raise Chen's case during a Wednesday dinner that State Councilor Dai Bingguo is hosting for Clinton and again during the strategic portion of the high-level talks on Thursday and Friday.

Chen served four years in prison on what supporters said were fabricated charges and was then kept under house arrest with his wife, daughter and mother, with the adults often being roughed by officials and his daughter searched and harassed.

His dogged pursuit of justice and the mistreatment of him by authorities brought him attention from the U.S. and foreign governments and earned him supporters among many ordinary Chinese.

The prison term and abusive house arrest he suffered had long been seen as the work of vengeful local officials that Beijing was either unable or unwilling to stop.

As news spread that he had been taken to Chaoyang Hospital, in the eastern part of the city, media crews and a few supporters gathered outside. A man stood in front of the gate at the hospital and held up a sign saying "Freedom for Guangcheng, Democracy for China" for a minute before police took him inside. The hospital's name became a banned search term on the much-censored Chinese Internet, joining a long list of permutations for Chen's name.

In a video statement he recorded while in hiding last week, Chen demanded that the Chinese government guarantee his family's safety. He told fellow activists that his preferred option was to stay in China and continue his legal advocacy as long as his family is safe.

Bob Fu of the Texas-based ChinaAid said earlier Wednesday that Chen was conflicted.

Chen "wants to participate for the progress in China in this moment of history, and he is afraid of course he will lose touch and could not return if he chooses to come to the U.S.," said Fu, who was in touch with the activists who spirited Chen to Beijing.

Aside from his wife, daughter and mother, other family members remain at risk. Chen's elder brother, Guangfu, was detained Thursday after officials discovered the activist missing. A nephew, Kegui, was wanted for injuring local officials when he fought back during a raid, though his whereabouts Wednesday were not known, said Liu Weiguo, a lawyer who volunteered to defend him.

The arrangements for Chen carries risks as well for China's government, which worries about encouraging activists and government critics.

The U.S. officials said Chen would be settled outside his home province of Shandong and have several university options to choose from. They also said that the Chinese government had promised to treat Chen "like any other student in China" and would investigate allegations of abuse against him and his family by local authorities.

Chinese activists and lawyers called the arrangements unprecedented and worried if Beijing would abide by them.

"After all, there is still a lack of rule of law. Think about how long they were able to hold him under illegal house arrest," said lawyer Li Fangping. I think we have to monitor the situation to see if he really does gain freedom after this stage. But I personally don't have a lot of confidence."

Associated Press reporters Charles Hutzler, Alexa Olesen and Gillian Wong in Beijing contributed to this report.