

## **Chen Guancheng Launches Defending Freedoms Project**

By David Gonsalves for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (20.05.2013) - Chen Guancheng, a Chinese lawyer and activist who dramatically escaped house arrest last year in China, marked the anniversary of his passage to freedom by helping to launch a transatlantic initiative for parliamentarians to adopt individual human rights defenders.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, the Defending Freedoms Project was officially launched at the European Parliament in cooperation with Amnesty International. Chen and MEP Edward McMillan-Scott, the European Parliament Vice-President responsible for democracy, human rights and transatlantic relations, had done a similar launch in Washington on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March. The Defending Freedoms project links Members of the US Congress and Members of the European Parliament in an effort to defend individual dissenters and human rights activists around the world.

Blind from an early age and self-taught in law, Chen advocates for women's rights, land rights, and the welfare of the poor and disabled. He is best known for exposing abuses in family planning practices in China, often involving cases of violence and forced abortions.

In 2005, Chen gained international recognition for organizing a landmark class-action lawsuit against authorities in Linyi, Shangdong Province, for excessive enforcement of China's one-child policy. As a result he was placed under house arrest until his 2006 trial and sentencing to four years and three months in prison. Chen's attorneys had been barred access to the court, leaving him without legal defense throughout the trial.

He was released in 2010 after serving a full sentence but retained under house arrest at his home in Dongshigu Village.

In 2012, Chen escaped with the help of human rights activists. Former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton played a key role in getting Chen, his wife and two children US Visas and safe passage to America. Chen is presently a visiting scholar at New York University.

At the hearing in Brussels, Chen spoke of the harsh treatment to which his extended family has been subjected because of his criticism of the policies of the Beijing government. He called for the creation of a list of Chinese officials who are known violators of human rights to restrict them from travel to EU countries and to freeze their bank accounts.