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American Physical Society

17 March 2021

The Honorable Merrick B. Garland  
Attorney General of the United States  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

Dear Mr. Attorney General,

We write on behalf of the American Physical Society (APS) concerning Prof. Gang Chen, the Carl Richard Soderberg Professor of Power Engineering of the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. APS is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the advancement of physics, with more than 50,000 members in the United States and worldwide. Prof. Chen's case raises concerns about possible broader implications for scientific and academic freedom within the United States.

Prof. Chen, an APS Fellow, was arrested on January 14, 2021, for allegedly "failing to disclose contracts, appointments and awards from various entities in the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the U.S. Department of Energy." APS recognizes the seriousness of these charges, but notes that the allegations include descriptions of what appear to be normal activities and exchanges that occur within the global scientific community. The fact that similar charges against other scientists have subsequently been dropped without explanation adds to our concern.

The Society appreciates the legitimate concerns related to national and research security, as well as to economic espionage and intellectual property rights. We acknowledge that the United States faces these threats and that governments must address national and economic security risks. At the same time, the Society also stresses the essential nature of scientific inquiry and the necessity to balance scientific discovery with security concerns.

Global scientific collaboration is essential to scientific discovery, as scientific discovery knows no national boundaries. U.S. institutions such as MIT understand that working with counterparts around the world is necessary to address global problems and for the United States to remain competitive both scientifically and economically.

In addition to being troubled by the charges against Chen, APS members have expressed concern with what they perceive as scientists, particularly those of Chinese descent, being targeted for federal investigation for seemingly normal academic activities. The appearance of targeting academics who are from or who have collaborated with colleagues in China has racial overtones that deeply affect our community.

APS asks that the Department of Justice take these points into consideration as it moves forward with Prof. Chen's case, and also as it assesses the activities and international collaborations of scientists in the United States.

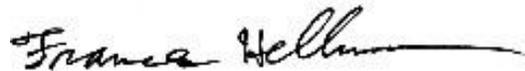
Sincerely,



Dr. Sylvester James Gates, Jr.  
APS President



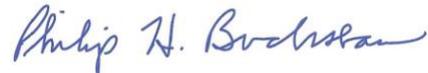
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