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CECC Hearing: “One Year After the Nobel Peace Prize Award to Liu Xiaobo”

Testimony of Harry Wu
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It has been one year since Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and now, just as then, he is still in jail. In 1960 I too was put in China’s Laogai prison camps because of my ideas, and I was there for 19 years. Fifty years later, China’s regime has not changed how it handles dissenting opinions. I hope that today’s hearing will draw renewed attention to Liu’s case and remind the world what China does to those who dare to talk peacefully about democracy.

Many people know that Liu was sentenced on charges of “inciting subversion”, but what crime did he really commit? Over the past few years, Liu has sent over 260 articles to our Observe China website for publication, and has also written on countless other overseas websites. His verdict mentioned several “subversive” articles by name, including three articles published on the Observe China website, including: “Can It Be That the Chinese People Deserve Only ‘Party-led Democracy?’”, “The Many Aspects of CPC Dictatorship”, and “Changing the Regime by Changing the Society”. Observe China is blocked by the “Great Firewall” and is inaccessible to most mainland Chinese Internet users. How does the CCP block controversial articles, while at the same time tracking their writers and readers? We have American technology companies to thank for this, and ultimately, for the arrest of great thinkers like Liu Xiaobo.

Last year I was in Oslo for the Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony. Although many Chinese tried to attend the ceremony in support of Liu, they were blocked from leaving China by the government. Not even his wife, Liu Xia, was there to fill his empty chair. Even so, I was very happy that a Chinese dissident was finally awarded the prize. It is a sign that the world will not sit quietly while the CCP cracks down on freedom of speech.

Many different people came to Oslo to honor Liu Xiaobo. When I opened up the program for the ceremony, I was surprised to see a message from John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, Inc. He noted that Cisco has been a sponsor of the Nobel Peace Prize Concert since 1999 and that, "Cisco is working to help individuals, companies, and countries to use the Internet to collaborate, educate, empower, and further the ideals and innovations inspired by Alfred Nobel and his legacy." I was shocked that Cisco could say this, when around the same time that the company began supporting the Nobel Peace Prize, it also began supporting China's authoritarian regime through its massive "Golden Shield Project". I realized that Cisco shows a different face to the international community than it does to its clients. Through its decade-long partnership with the Chinese government, Cisco technology and training has ensured that Chinese activists like Liu Xiaobo are excluded from participating in this vision of what the Internet can and should be.

Cisco claims to be a company dedicated to encouraging free speech and upholding a commitment to human rights. Yet in reality, Cisco is a company that will do business with any partner, so long as it turns a profit- even at the expense of other people's rights and freedoms. One day when Liu Xiaobo is released, I am confident that he too will demand to know just how the Public Security officials were able to track him down and how the government is able to exert such control over both internet content and internet users.

Unfortunately, Liu Xiaobo's situation has not changed much since last year. Several months after the awards, his wife Liu Xia - who had previously been under house arrest- became unreachable. Prior to this, the Laogai Research Foundation had been able to maintain some contact with her in order to provide the couple with regular financial support from the Yahoo! Human Rights Fund. We have also sold nearly 2,000 copies of Liu Xiaobo's Chinese publications: *Civil Awakening- The Dawn of a Free China* and *Strive for Freedom- Selected Writings of Liu Xiaobo*. Since February 2011, we have not been able to get either of these payments to them. Soon we will publish the English translation of *Civil Awakening*, so that Liu Xiaobo's message of optimism, democracy, and peaceful dissent can reach the international community, even while he serves out his 11-year prison sentence.

When I was in the Laogai, political dissidents were treated just like all the other criminals, if not worse. We worked long hours and were often beaten or mistreated by prison guards. At night we had to attend political reeducation sessions and criticize each other for holding counterrevolutionary ideas. Over the last few decades, conditions inside the Laogai are no longer as severe, but the fundamental principals that drive the prison system remain the same: prisoners are forced to labor and are forced undergo to political thought reform.

By the 1990's China realized that if it wanted to export its prison labor products internationally, it would have to conceal the origins of the products. Since 1994, China has stopped using the word "Laogai", and now refers to the camps as mere "prisons". Yet today, Liu Xiaobo remains locked up in Jinzhou Prison in Liaoning province, also known as Jinzhou Jinkai Electrical Group or Jinzhou Xinsheng Switch Co. According to reports, it is the largest prison in Liaoning province, with the majority of prisoners having sentences of 10 years or more. The inmates produce a wide variety of electrical equipment including household products, circuits, machine components, transformers, and so on. As of 2008, two of its prison enterprises were listed in Dun & Bradstreet, and today, Jinzhou Xinsheng Switch Co. continues to be listed on a number of English business directory websites.

Despite the continued use of forced labor, China has grown increasingly concerned about its soft power and international image. Thus, the CCP has afforded more prominent political prisoners like Liu Xiaobo better treatment. This fall, he was even allowed to return home to mourn the death of his father, and was permitted a rare visit by close family. The CCP has learned to treat high-profile dissidents differently, fearing that any word of abuse would enrage the international community. Liu may not be forced to do hard labor, but what about those who are not in the media spotlight, those who are not lucky enough to escape forced labor? Must a man win the Nobel Prize to be treated with dignity and have his most basic rights respected?

Today we still do not know what kind of persecution Liu and his wife are enduring, but one thing is for certain- it is undeserved. Liu said himself that, "it is time we move beyond a society where words are viewed as crimes." But the Chinese Communist Party has a long

history of abusing prisoners of conscience in order to minimize dissent and maximize what it views as “stability”. In 2009, around the time of his most recent arrest, authorities had tried to convince Liu to leave China instead of stirring up trouble at home, but he refused. It is clear that Liu Xiaobo will not abandon his democratic ideals, nor will he give up voicing his opinions. Therefore, there is no telling if the Chinese government will reduce his sentence. So until that day comes, it is critical that the U.S. government and international human rights advocates speak out on his behalf, telling the Chinese Communist Party that he is not forgotten and that his vision of a better future will not quietly fade away. We should not talk about “political reform” in China, because to the CCP, “political reform” means finding a way to keep itself in power even as its people demand more freedoms. True change in can only happen in China if and when the CCP falls. The Chinese people will not tolerate the Communist Party’s repression forever.