



**Statement of U.S. Senator Marco Rubio,
Cochairman of the Congressional-
Executive Commission on China (CECC)**

**CECC Hearing on “Religion With ‘Chinese
Characteristics’: Persecution and Control
in Xi Jinping’s China”**

Thursday, July 23, 2015

As prepared for delivery.

Nearly two weeks ago Chinese Communist Party authorities launched an unprecedented crackdown on human rights lawyers and activists that has been characterized as the most severe since the legal system was reestablished in 1980 after the Cultural Revolution. To date, more than 200 have been detained, questioned, or reported missing.

These “Black Friday” events have rightly garnered widespread international condemnation but Chinese President and Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping is unbowed and in fact seemingly emboldened. State media reported earlier this week that the Party managed to extract so-called “confessions” from some of the accused regarding their alleged involvement in a criminal gang suspected of interfering with the judicial process and inciting disorder.

As we examine the situation facing China’s courageous lawyers, men and women who have been described as the closest thing China has to a political opposition, an interesting thread emerges—namely the role of faith.

Many of those detained are practicing Christians. Several of the detained have taken on high-profile cases of individuals who have earned the ire of the Chinese Government for daring to live out their religious and spiritual convictions, including Uyghur Muslims, Christian house church leaders, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners.

It is precisely this issue of religious freedom which is the focus of today’s Congressional-Executive Commission on China hearing.

Without question, religious freedom is under assault in China. Irrespective of belief, the government’s oppression knows no bounds.

In its most recent annual report, the independent, bipartisan U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) described the situation facing religious adherents in China this way: “In 2014, the Chinese government took steps to consolidate

further its authoritarian monopoly of power over all aspects of its citizens' lives. For religious freedom, this has meant unprecedented violations against Uighur Muslims, Tibetan Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, and Falun Gong practitioners. People of faith continue to face arrests, fines, denials of justice, lengthy prison sentences, and in some cases, the closing or bulldozing of places of worship.”

USCIRF and the U.S. Department of State are of one mind that China is deservedly considered a Country of Particular Concern, a designation reserved for only the most severe violators of religious freedom.

News headlines in just the last year have been dominated by harrowing accounts of persecution and repression. Chinese authorities have implemented an extensive cross removal campaign resulting in the destruction of hundreds of Christian crosses. Thai authorities forcibly repatriated Uyghur Muslims to China where they face an uncertain future. Tibetan Buddhists have continued to set themselves on fire in desperation at the abuses their people have endured at the hands of the Chinese government.

The Chinese government has sought, through brutal methods, to restrict the ability of the Chinese people to worship and peacefully live out their faith according to the dictates of their conscience. Their misguided efforts have arguably had the unintended consequence of infusing many of these religious adherents with greater vibrancy as evidenced most dramatically by the explosive growth of Christianity in China.

The developments in China, including the crackdown on human rights lawyers and the deteriorating situation for religious freedom, are worthy of attention at the highest levels of the U.S. Government. With the upcoming human rights and counterterrorism dialogues and the pending September visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Obama administration must seriously weigh what points of leverage exist in our bilateral relationship and seize on them.