

# **THE BEIJING OLYMPICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

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### **STATEMENT BY LAURYN BEER**

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#### **Introduction**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the Fund for Peace. My name is Lauryn Beer and I am the Director of the Fund's Human Rights and Business Roundtable.

The mission of The Fund for Peace is to prevent war and alleviate the conditions that cause war. Our programmatic focus is to strengthen the capacity of the US and the international community to respond to global internal conflicts in 5 key areas: Early Warning, Military Intervention Criteria, Arms Control, Policy Integration and Constituency Building.

It is this last area - constituency and consensus building -- that the Human Rights and Business Roundtable has excelled. It is also the focus of what I wish to speak to you about today. The Beijing Olympics affords a timely opportunity for creative partnering between the business and human rights communities both in the US and in China to both improve human rights and the climate for international businesses investing in China.

The Human Rights and Business Roundtable was launched in 1997 with the goal of bringing together two communities that have been traditional adversaries: multinational business and human rights advocates. Yet they represent two of the most important post-Cold War constituencies in the US. In its five years of operation, the Roundtable has developed procedures, principles, formats and policies to ensure the smooth working of the Roundtable, including a set of operational ground rules. They stipulate that members of the Roundtable participate in their individual capacity and not as representatives of the organizations with which they are affiliated, so that they do not need to obtain clearance from their organizations to express views and reach consensus. All discussions are off-the-record and by invitation only, and records of the meetings are on a non-attribution basis, except when speakers indicate otherwise. The Roundtable offers a way to discuss hard issues in a spirit of cooperation rather than confrontation. It has thus far convened over 50 meetings that have engaged more than 150 individuals from the human rights and business communities. Over 20 multinational corporations and 30 human rights groups have collaborated under the Roundtable's leadership to work in partnership on the problems and opportunities of economic globalization.

#### **The Potential Impacts of the Beijing Olympics on Human Rights and Business**

It is no secret that the success of China's bid for the 2008 Olympic Games has garnered much criticism from human rights advocates. The scrutiny of the human rights community will make it likely that businesses supporting the Olympics will be expected to do more than simply pay for advertising space in Beijing. Already, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and others have stated publicly they expect sponsoring businesses to take a proactive role in advancing democracy in China in the lead up to, and during, the Games. US corporations sponsoring the Olympics or tendering bids for preparatory infrastructure development could face considerable challenges. Sponsors could find themselves tainted by association, should the Chinese authorities commit human rights abuses during the Games. For example, the Olympic Committee's mandate states that there must be unfettered access to the Press during the Games. But what will the Chinese authorities do in the face of potential protests around the Games? What might be the repercussions for business if human rights abuses are being seen committed under corporate banners?

Further, corporations doing business in China - not just those sponsoring the Games - have an interest in promoting the rule of law, since predictability is crucial to sustainable business. Businesses ignore the human rights aspects of the rule of law at their own peril, as has been borne out by the experiences of some companies in countries such as Nigeria, Colombia, Indonesia, India and, yes, China.

The new leadership in China will no doubt wish to capitalize on the publicity and income the Games generate. There are 6 years between now and the Summer Games in 2008, during which business, government and NGO's can engage in a meaningful and action-oriented dialogue on human rights and business issues surrounding the Games.

## **Recommendations**

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China is charged with monitoring human rights and the development of the rule of law in China, and with submission of an annual report to the President and the Congress. In its 2002 Annual Report, the Committee made one of its priority recommendations that the Administration "...facilitate meetings of U.S., Chinese, and third-country companies doing business in a specific locality and industry in China to identify systemic worker rights abuses, develop recommendations for appropriate Chinese government entities, and discuss these recommendations with Chinese officials, with the goal of developing a long-term collaborative relationship between government and business to assist in improving China's implementation of internationally recognized labor standards."

1. The Fund for Peace believes that human rights organizations and multinational business form two of the key constituencies affecting US foreign policy today. The Fund proposes that the Committee's recommendation on business-government collaboration be broadened to include US and international NGOs;
2. We further recommend that the focus of collaboration between business, NGO's and government be widened to cover not only labor issues in China but a broad range of human rights and rule of law issues that relate to the success of the Beijing Olympics. These would include freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, security concerns, due process and transparency;
3. The Human Rights and Business Roundtable offers a useful and practical model for engagement between businesses and human rights organizations and their partners in China;
4. We propose that the goals of a dialogue on the Beijing Olympics be as follows:
  - To develop a preventative strategy that would assist businesses in avoiding being implicated in potential human rights abuses surrounding the Games;
  - To engage a broad cross section of civil society and businesses in frank discussions of Chinese and Western perspectives on human rights and the rule of law;
  - To involve the private sector in ongoing conversation and education on security and human rights issues in a cooperative spirit of corporate social responsibility;
  - To educate both constituencies and increase their knowledge of human rights and security issues;
  - To support civil society capacity building by promoting groups to act in a collective setting and encourage collaboration, where possible;
  - To find areas of common ground, explore channels of potential cooperation between communities, and create practical actions to attain mutual goals;
  - To use the Beijing Olympics as a means to establish a "best practices" model for future international events.

5. We invite the Committee to report on the dialogue's progress in its future Annual Reports.