



Statement of U.S. Representative Chris Smith, Chairman of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)

**CECC Hearing on “Urging China’s President to Stop State-Sponsored Human Rights Abuses”
Friday, September 18, 2015**

As prepared for delivery.

On July 10, police came for lawyer Wang Yu. Her arrest was the first in what became a massive crackdown on China’s human rights defenders. Wang Yu was one of China’s brightest and bravest lawyers. She chose to represent clients in “sensitive cases,” such as Uyghur professor Ilham Tohti and Falun Gong practitioners. Police later swept up her husband and others who worked at their Beijing law firm. What originally looked like a targeted attack on one law firm quickly became a coordinated hunt for human-rights lawyers and legal staff across 19 Chinese provinces. Over the next few weeks over 300 were detained. Of that number around 27 remain incarcerated and 10 face charges of committing national security crimes.

Li Heping and Zhang Kai, two lawyers well-known to the Congress and other Parliamentarians around the world—were “disappeared” in this crackdown. They remain missing and are reportedly denied access to family or legal counsel. Zhang Kai was arrested the night before a planned meeting with U.S. Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom David Saperstein.

These detentions were lawless, brutal, and shocking. Sadly, they are not without precedent in China. President Xi comes to the U.S. next week at a time when his government is staging an extraordinary assault on the rule of law, human rights, and civil society. Under Xi’s leadership, the Chinese government has pushed through new laws and draft legislation that would legitimize political, religious, and ethnic repression, further curtail civil liberties, and expand censorship of the Internet.

China also continues its coercive population control policies. The “One Child Policy” will mark its 35th anniversary next week. That’s 35 years of telling couples what their families must look like; thirty-five years of forced and coerced abortions and sterilizations; thirty-five years of children viewed by the state as “excess baggage” from the day they were conceived. This policy is unacceptable, it is hated, it is tragic, and it is wrong. We urge President Xi to do the right thing and end China’s horrific population control policies forever.

The NGO Chinese Human Rights Defenders says President Xi has “overseen one of the most repressive periods in the post-Mao era.” The CECC, whose Annual Report will be officially released in three weeks, will conclude that the Chinese government’s efforts “to silence dissent, suppress human rights advocacy, and control civil society are broader in scope than any other period documented since the Commission started issuing Annual Reports in 2002.”

China is in a race to the bottom with North Korea for the title of world’s worst violators of human rights. The hope that President Xi would be a different type of Chinese leader has been completely destroyed.

Nonetheless, despite the torture and arrests, despite the harassment and censorship, despite the “black jails” and failed promises—rights advocates, civil society activists, and religious believers continue to grow in prestige and social influence in China. Persecution has not silenced them—at least not at this moment. It has not dimmed their hope for a different kind of “China Dream” that embraces human rights, freedom, and democracy.

U.S. policy must be geared to protect China’s rights defenders and religious communities, nurture China’s civil society, and work with those committed to the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

The U.S. cannot be morally neutral in this regard. We cannot be silent in the face of the Chinese government’s repression. We must show leadership and resolve because only the U.S. has the power and prestige to stand up to China’s intransigence. U.S.-China relations would be stronger and more stable if people like Wang Yu, Li Heping and Zhang Kai were in positions of leadership in the Chinese government.

Washington is preparing to roll out the red carpet next week for President Xi and his delegation. Toasts will be made, statements will be exchanged, and the highly symbolic gesture of a state visit will give President Xi a much-needed boost of legitimacy at home.

If President Obama fails raise human rights prominently and publicly--it is a diplomatic win for Xi Jinping. If economic and security interests grab all the headlines, China’s freedom advocates will despair. If there is no price paid for China’s lawlessness and repression, it is a loss for everyone who is committed to freedom and rights.

We can no longer afford to separate human rights from our other interests in China. Human rights can’t be considered a separate track in negotiations, but integrated at all levels of engagement.

Surprisingly, former Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson agrees with this assessment. Mr. Paulson is not known as a passionate defender of human rights, but in his latest book “Dealing With China” he says that the U.S. must not shy away from “shining a light on human rights problems, because nothing good happens in the dark.” He says the U.S. must push for greater transparency, the free flow of information, and

better adherence to universal standards in China--not only because they represent universal values but because they are critical parts of U.S. economic interests in China.

It is increasingly clear that there is direct link between China's domestic human rights problems and the security and prosperity of the United States. The health of the U.S. economy and environment, the safety of our food and drug supplies, the security of our investments and personal information in cyberspace, and the stability of the Pacific region will depend on China complying with international law, allowing the free flow of news and information, complying with its WTO obligations, and protecting the basic rights of Chinese citizens, including the fundamental freedoms of religion, expression, assembly, and association.

President Obama must "shine a light" on China's human rights abuses. He must make clear to President Xi that the suppression of rights defenders, ethnic minorities, and civil society will adversely affect U.S-China relations. And, he must use all the diplomatic tools available, including sanctions if necessary, to demonstrate that human rights protections are a critical interest of the United States.