



**Statement of U.S. Representative
Christopher Smith, Cochairman of the
Congressional-Executive Commission on
China (CECC)**

**CECC Hearing on “Understanding China’s
Crackdown on Rights Advocates:
Personal Accounts and Perspectives”**

April 8, 2014

On the morning of March 14th, Cao Shunli died alone at Beijing Military Hospital #309. Chinese police detained her on September 14, 2013, after she attempted to attend the UN Human Rights Council’s review of China’s human rights record.

She was officially detained on the bogus charge of “suspicion of illegal assembly” and “creating a disturbance.” During her six month detention she was repeatedly denied medical care for serious conditions, many which developed in prison.

China’s campaign to discredit Cao Shunli even continued past her death. Authorities continue to deny her family the dignity of releasing her body for burial. Chinese diplomats in Geneva objected to a planned moment of silence at the UN Human Rights Council.

It is a sad irony that Cao Shunli’s pleas for human rights in China were finally heard at the UN after her death.

Cao Shunli is exactly the type of person the Chinese government should embrace—not jail, discredit, and leave to die. She was a brave advocate for human rights, who had sacrificed much to make her country a better place. She wanted a China that fulfilled its highest ideals and its promises to advance human rights and protect the poor and vulnerable.

Unfortunately, her case is not an isolated one.

President Xi Jinping has presided over one of the most extensive crackdowns on rights advocates in recent memory. 200 hundred people have been arrested in the past year and many more are intimidated into silence.

Chinese authorities are not only arresting rights advocates, they are also intimidating and detaining their family members as well—a chilling escalation of abuse that is both outrageous and illegal.

The Congress has repeatedly expressed its concern about health and welfare of Chen Kegui , the nephew of Chen Guangcheng and Liu Xia the wife of Nobel Prize Laureate, Liu Xiaobo —but many more families suffer in silence. We urge the Chinese government to stop its harassment and detention of the family members of dissidents.

We are also concerned about recent efforts to silence the work of human rights lawyers. Four lawyers were detained recently in northern China for seeking to defend Falun Gong practitioners arbitrarily detained in a “black jail.” Over the past several years, human rights lawyers are often stripped of their legal licenses, beaten by police or hired “thugs,” and detained—for seeking to provide legal services consistent with China’s own laws and its international obligations.

China’s human rights lawyers courageously remain committed to the rule-of-law, even though, it seems, the Chinese government is not.

China’s active repression of ethnic minority communities has failed to bring stability and only created more discontent. It even jails those, like the Uyghur Ilham Tohti who seek to bridge the divide between their ethnic group and China’s majority Han population, promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding.

Expanding police power is not the answer to creating stability in restive ethnic minority areas of China. Tibetans, Uyghurs , and Mongolians should be given a way to shape policies that affect them and preserve and practice, without interference, their unique religions, cultures, and languages. Unfortunately, China has worked to silence Tohti’s voice, and the voice of others, who have actively worked to ease inter-ethnic strains. The silencing of these voices is likely to further marginalize ethnic communities and worsen the prospects for peace and prosperity for Han and Uyghur alike.

President Xi came to office one year ago promising reforms of longstanding policies, including abolishing the re-education through labor (RTL) system of arbitrary detention, changing the household registration system and “One-Child” policy, and expanding efforts to stamp out corruption.

Yet, except for aggressive campaigns to discredit former political opponents and silence rights advocates, none of these reforms have produced results.

President Xi promised to create a “China Dream” of unlimited prosperity and progress, but coupled that with vision with a more conservative tone, opposing greater press freedom and “western-style” rule of law and extending existing curbs on the freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and religion. The Chinese government continues to prohibit independent labor unions and human rights organizations; heavily censors the media, the Internet, and academic research on topics deemed too “political.”

It uses “social stability” to justify suppression of human rights advocates and repressive policies in ethnic minority areas of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia.

The China Dream is becoming a nightmare for those peacefully advocating for human rights and the rule of law.

A strong and secure China would welcome independent civil society and free press, committed to holding the Chinese government accountable to its highest ideals and promises. Instead it criminalizes dissenting opinions and uses repression to silence those viewed as challenging its authority.

China must begin to embrace the idea that continued prosperity and security can only be ensured when freedom is embraced and human rights protected.

The China Commission has repeatedly urged the Administration to raise, in a serious and visible way, the issue of human rights abuses in China. That need continues now, more than ever, in the midst of the current crackdown on rights defenders.

But more needs to be done to improve human rights diplomacy with China. The Administration has promised an “Asia Pivot,” but the human rights and democracy pillar of that policy is, by far, the least developed part.

There are pressing economic and security concerns in the Pacific that require U.S. leadership, but the hard won truth of history is that a future of stability and prosperity is built on the foundation of liberty and human rights.

The United States must find credible ways to advance this principle in its relations with China. And, we must find ways to effectively link U.S. interests in human rights with its interests in global security and freer and fairer trade.

That is the challenge. We in the Congress, and at the CECC, promise to continue work to advance universally-recognized rights and freedoms in China.