

## ***Written Testimony of Anastasia Lin, Miss World Canada 2015***

July 23, 2015 Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China for convening this event.

My name is Anastasia Lin. I'm an actress and a Canadian citizen. I will be representing Canada at the 2015 Miss World competition in Sanya, China, at least that is my hope. Recent events leave me uncertain, I'm a little worried about what will happen next if I continue to speak out.

I campaigned for the title of Miss World Canada on a human rights platform. I wanted to speak for those in China that are beaten, burned and electrocuted for holding to their beliefs; people in prison who eat rotten food with blistered fingers because they dare have convictions. These are some of China's most noble people, people of moral fortitude—a characteristic once treasured in my homeland, a characteristic now so desperately needed.

When I was crowned Miss World Canada, my father was so proud of me.

He received hundreds of congratulatory messages. But within a couple days, my father's tone changed. He told me nervously that I must stop my advocacy for human rights in China, or else he would have no choice but to sever contact with me. I understand my father was visited by Chinese security agents, who forced him to apply pressure on me in this way.

Over the past several years, I have taken on roles in several independent film and television programs that depict human rights abuses in China. My job requires me to be intimately familiar with the stories of those who have suffered unspeakable horrors, including a number of Falun Gong practitioners who were imprisoned and tortured for their beliefs.

Prison guards put bamboo sticks under their fingernails. Women are tortured with electric batons on their private parts and raped. Hundreds of thousands have been jailed for a belief. These are not criminals. They are simply people who wanted to meditate and improve themselves by following the values of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance.

I have studied these stories and performed them. In *Bleeding Edge*, a film to be released this Winter, I play a woman imprisoned for practicing Falun Gong. Like so many millions, she is tortured. But it is the scene where her family members are brought before her, made to kneel and beg her to give up her belief, that is the hardest to bear.

Because it is not just her body and her mind that are battered; the Communist Party makes her family suffer. This is the regime's policy of guilt by association. It is why my father was threatened by security forces. Nevermind that I am a Canadian citizen, upholding Canadian values, on the other side of the world.

I can't understand what it is like to be tortured or face the inhuman violations of prison guards. But I now understand what it means to feel deep fear that my convictions could be paid for by the people I love the most in the world.

I wish I could tell you that I didn't waver, that I didn't question if I wasn't being too selfish and putting my family at risk, but I did. Then I remembered, this isn't about me.

Through my encounters with persecution victims and their family members, I have found that these practitioners of Falun Gong—who have been marginalized, defamed and vilified in China for the past sixteen years—are noble people. Despite the constant threat of arbitrary detention, torture, psychiatric abuse, or death, they have been steadfast in their commitment to their principles, and have always sought peaceful means to resist and generate public awareness of the persecution.

In China today, our traditional values have buried under the moral scars of endless political campaigns. Material wealth and the pursuit of self-interest are foremost in many people's minds. The courage of Falun Gong practitioners, and of other dissidents and human rights lawyers, stand in stark contrast to these trends and this is what gives me hope for China's future. There are still people of integrity there.

And yet, it is these people that suffer the most. Good people like my father, a law abiding and contributing citizen, an honest businessman now too afraid to talk to his daughter, who once supported her in everything she did, who now must leave her to face the world alone.

Mr. Chairman, I hope you understand this is a common experience for so many American and Canadian citizens. Those Chinese who dare to speak their minds do so knowing that those still within the regime's reach in China could pay the price for it.

We have a saying these days, being "invited to tea" It is when the Chinese security agents ask you to come with them to remind you who has the baton and that they don't mind using it.

For myself, I know silence is more dangerous. If you don't speak up, those security personnel will know that their tactic work, and they will never stop. That's why I told the world what happened to my dad. I hope he understands. I hope he knows how much I love him.

I also hope that people will pay attention to stories so much more tragic than my own. Like that of Paul Li who, like me, is also a Canadian citizen in Toronto.

Three months ago, Paul's father Li Xiaobo was sentenced to his second 8-year prison term. Mr. Li is 60-years-old and in Chengdu, China. He was once a highly respected county magistrate, and because he followed Falun Gong's teachings of truth, compassion and tolerance, he and sought to be fair in all his dealings. He didn't use his position to gain wealth and personal advantage. That is very rare among chinese officials.

After the persecution of Falun Gong began in 1999, Mr. Li wrote essays criticizing the Communist Party's actions. He spent 8 years in prison for these words. In order to try to force him to renounce his beliefs and embrace the Party's doctrine of atheism, authorities tortured him brutally, making him blind in one eye.

After being released from prison, he continued to publicize cases of torture and abuse, and again wrote and distributed literature to inform his compatriots about the persecution of Falun Gong.

I could never claim to have that kind of courage and unbending integrity. This is the kind of person that China needs, the kind of person the world needs.

Last year, while Mr. Li and his son were out distributing information, he was again arrested. Paul, who is a Canadian citizen, was eventually deported back to Canada. But in April of this year, Mr. Li was again sentenced to eight years in prison.

His deeds are heroic, and yet unlike myself, when Paul Li tried to get the media to pay attention to his case, he met with silence.

Maybe nobody paid attention because Mr. Li's story is just too common.

The persecution on Falun Gong is among the worst most widespread and the brutal human rights violations in history. After the end of 1998, the Chinese Communist government estimated that the number of people who practiced Falun Gong was about 70 million.

Since the persecution began in 1999, millions have been arbitrarily detained, arrested, imprisoned, tortured, sexually assaulted or murdered.

Thousands of Falun Gong practitioners continue to be sentenced to prison every year, often after show trials where they have no chance of justice, and where decisions are made by Communist Party authorities rather than independent judges.

Lawyers who try to represent Falun Gong practitioners—including many of the lawyers targeted in the most recent crackdown—have faced harassment, disbarment, beatings, and imprisonment.

Historically, most Falun Gong practitioners have been detained in reeducation-through-labor camps (RTL). In a 2013 study, Amnesty International reported that Falun Gong detainees comprise between one third to 100 percent of the prisoners in the labor camps it studied.

Freedom House recently reported that “hundreds of thousands” of practitioners had been sent to these camps, where they face an elevated risk of torture and death in custody. Common torture methods include beatings; shocks with electric batons; violent forced-feedings that often puncture the esophagus or lungs; suspension in stress position; and sexual humiliation and abuse.

Facing growing international and domestic pressure, the Chinese government closed the reeducation-through-labor system in 2013. But this was mainly a cosmetic change, as many camps were simply renamed as prisons, rehabilitation centers, or reeducation centers. For Falun Gong practitioners, it did nothing to improve their circumstances. In fact, between 2013 and 2014, the reported number of abductions and arrests of Falun Gong practitioners rose by nearly a third (29.8%), from 4,942 to 6,415 per year.

While Falun Gong practitioners have the names and stories of some 3800 practitioners who have been killed in the persecution, multiple independent investigators estimate that tens of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners have been killed so their vital organs could be extracted and sold for organ transplantation—a lucrative business in China.

I'd like to remind you all that there are so many people in China facing unspeakable suffering, not because they did anything wrong, but because they are people of faith and morality. They are people any country would be fortunate to have. I hope China realizes that before too many more of them have been jailed or killed for possessing the kind of conviction and virtue China so desperately needs.

I want to finish by telling you about my father. He is a successful and decent businessman. He's also uniquely generous. For many years, he has been contributing to villages to build roads and donating money to people that can't get work. He brings his children out to the street to give out red envelopes of money every New Year to people less fortunate than himself. He has really inspired me throughout my life to think of others.

I don't get to talk to him anymore. Here I am doing something I think he should be so proud of, something I think is so important for the country I was born in, and he and I can't even speak. I also have to question if my testimony here today may make him angry with me, or worried for his business and family in China.

These threats are how American and Canadian citizens with family in China feel the weight of the regime's repression even here, on the other side of the world. Human rights and religious freedom in China don't just affect the people they live there, they affect every person of Chinese ethnicity around the world that still have loved ones there.

I hope that you can help Chinese people gain a voice, to support them in their wish to believe what they want to believe and talk to whoever they want to talk to about any topic they wish. I hope this can happen soon. I miss my dad.

Thank you