

Statement of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC) to the US Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC)

Enghebatu Togocho

December 7, 2016

Dear Chairperson Christopher Smith, Co-Chair Marco Rubio and distinguished members of the Commission,

It is my great honor to have this opportunity to bring to your attention the deteriorating human rights conditions and worsening humanitarian crisis in the Mongolian areas in China.

14 years ago, on August 5, 2002, on behalf of the Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center (SMHRIC), I testified before the Commission and brought to the attention of the Commission the specific human rights violation cases including the cases of political prisoners Mr. Hada, Mr. Tegexi and the Chinese authorities' state-sponsored forced displacement of Mongolian herders from their ancestral lands.

We are truly grateful to the Commission for its great effort in the past 14 years to raise public awareness of human rights issues of the Mongolian people by including a great deal of information we provided into the Commission's annual reports as well as updating its political prisoner database with the cases of Mongolian dissidents and activists who have been arrested, detained and imprisoned by the Chinese authorities for promoting and defending their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Yet, 14 years later today, human rights situations of the Mongolian people in China have gone from bad to worse. Mr. Hada, President of the Southern Mongolian Democratic Alliance, is still under house arrest in an apartment owned and guarded by the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Public Security authorities, after serving the full term of 15 years imprisonment and an additional 4-year extrajudicial detention.

Despite the Chinese authorities' cruel torture and inhumane treatment in the past 21 years, Hada has consistently refused to admit that he committed any crime. Recently Hada completed his written appeal to the Chinese Supreme People's Court, demanding the Chinese authorities retry his case for the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Public Security authorities illegally sentencing him to 15 years in prison, holding him for another 4 years of extrajudicial detention, and maltreating and persecuting him and his family members.

Hada's family members including Ms. Xinna and son Mr. Uiles are still under tight surveillance and subjected to constant harassment by the Chinese Public Security and State Security authorities after spending multiple and extended period of extrajudicial detentions for defending their rights and refusing to cooperate with the authorities.

Xinna, was arrested on December 4, 2010, on a trumped-up charge of “involvement in illegal business,” referring to her Mongolian Studies Bookstore. In April 2012, she was sentenced to three years in prison with five years reprieve on the same charge.

In 2002, the then 17-year-old Uiles, was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison for another trumped-up case of “involvement in robbery.” On December 5, 2010, Uiles was arrested for “illegal drug possession.” After nearly a year of detention, he was discharged but was placed under “residential surveillance,” a form of house arrest.

Another case we would like to highlight is the case of Ms. Huuchinhuu Govruud, a human rights defender, dissident writer and activist. A month ago, Huuchinhuu died of cancer at the age of 61 in her home place of Tongliao Municipality. Until her last breath, at her deathbed she had been monitored and guarded by Chinese State Security personnel around the clock for her “possible threat to the national interest and state security of China.”

Huuchinhuu’s son, and only family member, Mr. Cheel Borjigin, himself has also been diagnosed with brain cancer and is receiving chemotherapy in Minneapolis, the United States. As an outspoken critic of the Chinese Government, returning to visit his mother had been totally impossible for Cheel. His multiple requests to the Chinese Government to allow his mother to come to the United States for medical treatment have been turned down.

In early November 2010, Huuchinhuu was arrested by the Chinese authorities for rallying the Mongolians via the Internet to cheer for the scheduled release of Hada. After nearly two years of enforced disappearance and extrajudicial detention, Huuchinhuu was placed under house arrest in one of her relatives’ residences in Tongliao Municipality. She was denied the right to communication, including by Internet, phone access and postal service.

On November 28, 2012, Huuchinhuu was tried behind closed doors and pronounced guilty by the Tongliao Municipality People’s Court for “providing state secrets to a foreign organization”. Since then, she has virtually been placed under indefinite house arrest.

In 2007, she was denied a passport for her “possible threat to the national interest and state security of China.” Since then, her requests to visit her son in the United States and receive medical treatment abroad have consistently been rejected by the Chinese authorities.

Mr. Chairman, over the past 14 years, hundreds other Mongolian dissidents, activists and writers have been arrested, detained, sent to jail and placed under house arrest for expressing their political views, promoting and protecting freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of assembly.

In addition to these cases of Mongolian political prisoners, dissidents and activists, here I would like to turn to the worsening humanitarian crisis unfolded in rural Mongolian communities as a direct result of the Chinese authorities' intensifying economic exploitation, resource extraction, cultural eradication and environmental destruction in Mongolian areas. The very survival of the Mongolians as a distinct people is threatened. Their right to maintain their traditional way of life, and their right to access their land, water and other resources are completely denied. The Mongolians who maintained their pastoralist way of life for thousands of years are now forced by the Chinese authorities to give up their traditional life-style to give way to expanding Chinese encroachment.

Since 2001, the Chinese government has implemented the so-called "Ecological Migration" policy in rural Mongolian pastoralist communities. This policy was officially instituted to forcibly relocate the entire Mongolian pastoralist population from their ancestral grazing lands to the predominantly Chinese populated agricultural and urban areas in the name of "protecting the grassland eco-system" and "improving the living standard of rural communities".

Another policy adopted for the purpose of putting an end to the Mongolian traditional way life was the "Livestock Grazing Ban" (or "jin mu"). Under this policy, Mongolian herders grazing livestock on their own pastures were considered criminals and subjected to large fines or confiscation of their livestock.

Mr. Chair, when I testified before the Commission in 2002, these policies were just adopted. 14 years later today, these policies achieved their determined goal with the desired outcome: putting to an end to the millennia-old nomadic civilization within the borders of China.

According to a statement posted on May 30, 2012 on the official website of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China, the State Council Steering Committee meeting hosted by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao passed the "Twelfth Five-Year Plan for the Project on Resettling Nomadic People within China". The announcement marks a major and seemingly final step toward eliminating the remaining population of nomad herders and eradicating the thousands of years old nomadic way of life in China.

According to the statement, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan aimed to resettle the remaining nomad population of 246,000 households or 1.157 million nomads by the end of 2015. The socio-economic and political purposes of the plan were stated "to accelerate the development mode shift of animal husbandry and grassland eco-system protection in pastoralist areas, to maintain ethnic harmony and frontier stability, and to lay a firm foundation for building an all around prosperous society".

Another earlier statement posted on August 3, 2011 on the Chinese State Council website states that the Chinese Ministry of Finance allocated a special fund of 1.7 billion Yuan to the project of resettling nomadic herders particularly in "Xinjiang (including Xinjiang Development Corps), Inner Mongolia and Tibet".

With the Mongolian out, now it is time for the Chinese to be in. In 2009, the Chinese Central Government announced in that the Mongolian regions became the largest “energy base of China”. Chinese extractive industries immediately started to rush to the Mongolian grasslands to open up coal, gas, oil, and other minerals, not only destroying the natural environment, but also escalating the tension between the Chinese and the Mongolians.

Tensions have escalated between the Mongolian herders and the Chinese authorities as clashes took place almost on a daily basis. In 2011, the brutal killing of a Mongolian herder named Mergen by a Chinese mining truck sparked a large-scale, region-wide protest by Mongolian herders and students. Chinese authorities mobilized the People’s Liberation Army and large numbers of police forces to crackdown on the protest.

Since then violent clashes have been widespread between Mongolian herders, who are attempting to defend their land, and Chinese miners, who open up mines recklessly to destroy the grassland for profit. Defending the interest of the Chinese miners and settlers, Chinese authorities are using excessive force, including police and prison system to crack down on the Mongolians. Many herders who defended their land and demand justice have been assaulted, injured, hospitalized, arrested, detained, and sent to jail.

As a result of large-scale unregulated mining, unscrupulous resource extraction and uncontrolled agricultural practices by the Chinese, Mongolian grassland ecosystem has seriously been destroyed; lakes and rivers are dried up; underground water is depleted; air and water is heavily polluted; the Mongolians herders who have been kicked out of their land have become landless and homeless on their ancestral land.

In response to these humanitarian crisis and environmental destruction, Mongolian herders are standing up to defend their right to survival. In the past year alone nearly 80 major protest and clashes are reported, and no less than 1000 herders have been arrested, detained, and sent to jail for defending their land.

We ask the Commission to continue to pay closer attention to the development of deteriorating human rights situations and deepening humanitarian crisis in the Mongolian areas of China, and pressure the Chinese Government to take a prompt action to prevent the situations from becoming worse.

Thank you.

Enghebatu Togochoog