

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

“From All Angles”: Protecting Human Rights, Defending Strategic Access, and Challenging
China’s Export of Censorship Globally

February 14, 2018 – 10:00 a.m.
301 Russell Senate Office Building

Statement for the Record

of

The Honorable James P. McGovern
Representative in Congress from the State of Massachusetts

I thank the Congressional-Executive Committee on China for convening this critically important hearing on the eve of the anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising, in which 87,000 Tibetans were killed, arrested or deported to labor camps, and which led His Holiness the Dalai Lama to flee to India, along with tens of thousands of other Tibetans. I appreciate the opportunity to provide a statement for the record.

I admire the courage and perseverance of the Tibetan people. I have stood in solidarity with them for years in their struggle to exercise their basic human rights -- to speak and teach their language, protect their culture, control their land and water, travel within and outside their country, and worship as they choose.

Dhondup Wangchen embodies that struggle. I join my colleagues in welcoming him to Washington and to the halls of Congress.

But as the Dalai Lama ages, and as China doubles down on its deeply authoritarian practices, I worry that time is running out to make sure that Tibetans will be able to live their lives as they wish.

China has a terrible human rights record. Whatever hope once existed that China would become more open, more ruled by law and more democratic as it became wealthier has faded over the years – especially under the rule of President Xi Jinping.

As Xi Jinping consolidated his power during last October’s Communist Party Congress, he laid out a vision of China in which every aspect of life – economic, political, cultural and religious – will be under the control of the Communist Party. An authoritarian vision that does not bode well for minority populations like the Tibetans who see the world through a different lens.

One of my great frustrations as a Member of Congress has been the unwillingness of the United States government, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, to impose any real consequences for China's bad human rights behavior.

I understand there are trade-offs in foreign policy. But I see nothing to suggest that going easy on China's human rights record has worked.

Instead, the overall human rights situation is getting worse: human rights lawyers detained, held in secret and incommunicado; the enforced disappearance of critics from Hong Kong; a cyber security law that strangles online freedom; the highest number of executions in the world. The barbaric denial of adequate health care and the death in custody of Liu Xiaobo.

At the same time, the repression of the Tibetan people has deepened. Tibetans are confronted with an intrusive official presence in monasteries, pervasive surveillance, limits on travel and communications and ideological re-education campaigns.

Last year demolitions were carried out at Larung Gar, the famous Tibetan Buddhist center of learning, and thousands of monks and nuns were expelled. We now know that draconian new controls have been imposed there – party cadres are taking over management, finances, security, admissions, and even the choice of textbooks.

As of last August, 69 monks, nuns or Tibetan reincarnate teachers were known to be serving sentences in Chinese prisons. I fear the real number is much higher.

And the Chinese government continues to claim the prerogative to decide who will succeed the Dalai Lama – a mind-boggling conceit for a government that is officially atheist.

This is not the first time the Chinese government has interfered in the identification and installation of reincarnated leaders of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1995, the government arbitrarily detained the 11th Panchen Lama, then a six-year old boy, and installed its own candidate for the job.

I see no evidence that things are getting better for the Tibetan people, and so it is critically important that Congress speak out in support of Tibetan rights. Hearings like this one, and those held last year by the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, which I co-chair, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee, say to China that we are paying attention.

But it is not enough. The many meetings we have all had with courageous Tibetans, our solidarity with their plight, our appreciation for His Holiness, are not enough.

China needs to face real consequences for its actions in Tibet. And that means we in Congress need to step up the pressure.

To start, Congress must pass the *Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act*, the bill I introduced in the House last session, along with a bipartisan group of Members, and that Senators Rubio and Baldwin are leading in the Senate.

This bill imposes consequences for restrictions on travel to areas in China where ethnic Tibetans live.

The rationale is simple. The basis of diplomatic law is mutual access and reciprocity. But while the Chinese enjoy broad access to the United States, the same is not true for U.S. diplomats, journalists or tourists going to Tibet -- including Tibetan-Americans trying to visit their country of origin.

This is simply unacceptable. If China wants its citizens and officials to travel freely in the U.S., Americans must be able to travel freely in China, including Tibet.

Under the Reciprocal Access Act, no senior leader responsible for designing or implementing travel restrictions to Tibetan areas would be eligible to enter the United States.

Allowing travel to Tibet is only one step China needs to take; there are others.

China should permit His Holiness the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet for a visit if he so desires. He has that right, and he must have that opportunity before it is too late.

As Members of Congress we must insist that the administration name a Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues, a statutory position.

We must support the robust use of the Global Magnitsky Act to hold accountable Chinese officials responsible for human rights abuses. The December decision to sanction Gao Yan for his involvement in the arbitrary detention, torture, and death of human rights activist Cao Shunli was a good first step. It should be the first of many.

We must redouble our efforts to secure the release to Tibetan prisoners of conscience.

And it is time to insist that American businesses do their part to protect the human rights of Tibetans and all the people of China. To not speak out in the face of abuses is to be complicit.

Changing Chinese behavior will not be easy. But it is time to walk the walk. The alternative risks the lives and well-being of millions of Tibetans.

Thank you.