

Senator Marco Rubio
Statement for the Record
October 19, 2021

Thank you to Chairman Merkley and Co-Chairman McGovern for convening this important hearing. I’d also like to thank my colleagues who have worked with me on two bills that are directly relevant to this hearing: Senator Menendez, for his partnership on the *Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act*, and Senator Coons, for the same with the *Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act*. These bills are driven by bipartisan concerns that cut to the core of what it means to be American. If we are to remain true to who we are as a nation, we have to be a place of refuge for persecuted peoples like Hong Kongers and Uyghurs. Welcoming these persecuted groups would also be a net positive for our country. They represent an invaluable source of knowledge and intelligence in the context of strategic competition with the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—a competition I believe will define the 21st century.

Since Xi Jinping took control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as General Secretary in late 2012, the CCP has encroached on Hong Kong’s autonomy more and more with each passing year, to the point that there is now no autonomy left of which to speak. In the last three years, gradual encroachment accelerated into a full-fledged campaign to nullify Hong Kong’s long-cherished freedoms and dismantle the semi-democratic institutions that it had. The world watched as Hong Kongers, from all walks of life, bravely took to the streets to protest the CCP’s intrusion in their city.

In June of last year, Beijing imposed a draconian National Security Law on Hong Kong. Since then, authorities have arrested a number of activists, and sentenced some to prison, including Joshua Wong, on ridiculous charges related to participation in “unlawful” protests in 2019. Media mogul and veteran democracy activist Jimmy Lai was also charged under the National Security Law. For years, the CCP has tried to silence Lai’s *Apple Daily*, one of Hong Kong’s last media outlets that still published pro-democracy pieces rather than pro-Beijing propaganda. In June of this year, the *Apple Daily* was forced to close, delivering a deadly blow to press freedom in Hong Kong.

The experience of Hong Kong reveals to us the only constant with the CCP: broken promises and unrelenting efforts to crush anything it perceives as

threatening. Hong Kongers asked for nothing more than a home where their freedom and fundamental rights were protected. A home where the Chief Executive, and all members of the legislative body, would be directly elected through universal suffrage. These reasonable demands were supposed to be respected under the framework of “one country, two systems,” which was created by the CCP itself in the 1980s.

In light of all that has happened, Hong Kongers who participated in pro-democracy protests have a well-founded fear for their safety in the CCP-dominated Hong Kong. For this reason, the United States must create a humanitarian pathway for vulnerable Hong Kongers to come here if they need to flee. Hong Kong is a test of our national character and an opportunity to once again demonstrate our commitment to be a friend to those who stand up for democratic values around the world.

Assisting Hong Kongers in need of refuge is the morally right thing to do, but it is also in our own national security interests because Hong Kong is the frontline of a much larger struggle. Congress has taken a clear stance in defense of Hong Kong by passing the *Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act* and other related legislation. Now we need to complete the mission by passing the *Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act* to help those courageous Hong Kongers who took to the streets to fight for freedom escape the retaliation of a vengeful regime.

Likewise, we must understand that the survival of the Uyghurs is a much larger struggle between democratic forces who believe in pluralism and religious freedom, and the totalitarian CCP that seeks to homogenize people and impose political and ideological uniformity. Today, General Secretary Xi Jinping is committing systematic atrocities against Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang in an attempt to suppress their belief in Islam. The CCP cannot tolerate a competing source of authority. Beijing persecutes religious people who refuse to betray their faith by pretending that the CCP is the only authority. This is what lies behind the CCP’s efforts to completely eliminate Turkic Muslims, especially Uyghurs, and other ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

More than one million Uyghurs and other predominately Turkic Muslims are detained in “transformation through reeducation” camps and forced to labor. The network of detention facilities and factories have turned Xinjiang into a huge concentration camp. Guards at these camps force Uyghur men to renounce their faith, shave their beards, and violate Muslim dietary restrictions. Uyghur women

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have been raped, experienced other forms of heinous sexual violence, and have undergone forced sterilization and abortions. Families are ripped apart, with adults working in factories and the children sent to state-operated orphanages. The goal is to brainwash them, strip them of their language, culture, and traditions while isolating them from their families and communities.

The CCP is also working to suppress Uyghur birth rates, with official data showing a decline of 48.7 percent between 2017 and 2019. The crimes against humanity and genocide that the CCP are committing demand an urgent response from us that is in keeping with our founding spirit. Simply put, it is time to once again show that we are a “shining city upon the hill,” as President Reagan liked to call us.

In July of this year, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed my *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act*. It is time that the U.S. House of Representatives does the same. It is also incumbent on both chambers of Congress to promptly take up the *Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act* and send it to the president’s desk for his signature.

Thank you.