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Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Testimony: The Beijing Olympics and the Faces of Repression

Chairman Merkley, Congressman McGovern, and members of the Commission:

On August 17, 2017, I was sitting in the dock of the Court of Appeal in Hong Kong with Joshua Wong and Alex Chow. We were all sentenced to months of imprisonment for “inciting and participating” in an unlawful, yet peaceful, assembly during the Umbrella Movement.

Today, while I am exiled in the UK, Joshua has been sitting in jail for a year without knowing when his trial under the National Security Law can even begin. The number of high-profile political prisoners has continued to rise, as the government cracks down on professors, reporters, and many other members of civil society.

Americans used to talk about Hong Kong as the “Pearl of the Orient” and one of Asia’s freest enclaves. Now, however, all there is to associate with the city is rising authoritarianism and the decline of freedoms. Since the massive 2019 protests, tens of thousands of protesters have been arrested, with more than 2,000 formally charged. And all of this has occurred in parallel to government-appointed judges presiding over National Security Law cases.

Joshua was very young when I met him, and we have been fighting alongside each other for eight years. He was my closest ally, and we shared joys and pains. So it is particularly hard that amid the Lunar New Year — traditionally when families and friends gather and celebrate — that he and a lot of my friends are still behind bars, while I am unable to connect with my family because it will endanger them.

The political turmoil in Hong Kong and the growing number of political prisoners show that Chinese leaders have grown very confident about their more technologically advanced and sophisticated Orwellian model of social control. They disregard any commitment to human rights and international obligations.

Last December, to counter President Joe Biden’s Summit for Democracy — at which I was privileged to speak as the sole Hong Kong representative — they published a white paper promoting what they call “China’s democracy.” They claimed that China’s democracy was the one that worked. They tried to redefine “democracy” in a way that universal suffrage, checks and balances, and the division of power would not be part of it. Instead, they called the totalitarian system in China, in which the people have absolutely no rights to elect their countries leaders, a “democracy.”

This is the level of disinformation and hostility they are imposing on the free world. They are trying to undermine the history of Hong Kong, the culture of Hong Kong, what it means to be a Hongkonger, and, most importantly, the democratic values that we all treasure.

The Chinese government has broken every promise it made to the world ahead of the last Olympic Games it held, in the summer of 2008. Fourteen years later, under General Secretary Xi Jinping, it is more aggressive and arrogant than ever. To see corporations and other

countries rolling the red carpet for it is plainly disgusting. There is nothing to celebrate about the current Winter Olympic Games in Beijing while a genocide is literally happening. That is why an even larger coalition of activists — not just Hongkongers but also our Uyghur, Tibetan, Taiwanese allies — are standing up now.

The Biden Administration is right to diplomatically boycott the event. But there are far more policymakers in Washington can do. To support Hong Kong, Congress should consider the various bills on everything from sanctions to internet freedom that have been introduced in recent years. Of even more importance are humanitarian pathways for Hongkongers in need, including the Hong Kong Safe Harbor Act, the Hong Kong People's Freedom and Choice Act, and the relevant portions of the America COMPETES Act, which I know the leadership and many members of this Commission support.

The Olympic Games may be a one-off event, but our struggle against China is global, existential, and potentially lifelong. We will all do well to reduce our reliance on China in every way possible and forge better multilateral partnerships with like-minded stakeholders to coordinate an international push back. We must grasp every opportunity to send a signal and stop the complacency.

Fight for freedom. Stand with Hong Kong. Thank you so much, and I look forward to your questions.