

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

Protection from Persecution:

Establishing Humanitarian Pathways for Hong Kongers and Uyghurs

Tuesday, October 19, 2021 – 10:00am

SD-106 & Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Chair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Good morning. Today’s hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on “Protection from Persecution: Establishing Humanitarian Pathways for Hong Kongers and Uyghurs” has come to order.
- For years, this Commission has documented the Chinese government’s repression of its people. Even as that repression continues, the Chinese government continues to seek the repatriation of those searching for protection abroad.
- China has sought the forcible return of Uyghurs and Kazakhs from Kazakhstan and Thailand. At one point earlier in the COVID-19 pandemic, it appeared to be withholding vaccines from the Turkish government in an attempt to pressure Turkey to ratify an extradition treaty that would put Uyghurs in Turkey at risk of deportation. In Hong Kong, those seeking refuge abroad face arrests and exit bans.
- This hearing will examine these threats to those seeking protection from persecution inside and outside China and shed light on humanitarian pathways available to those fleeing this persecution.
- As the Chinese government continues its genocide of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and continues to trample the political rights and autonomy promised the people of Hong Kong, the situation is bleak. In fact, our Commission’s Political Prisoner Database now includes prisoners detained in Hong Kong, which the Commission previously has not done. Hong Kong prisoners include those subject to prolonged pre-trial detention and those serving lengthy sentences for peacefully exercising their rights.
- This Commission will remain steadfast in our fight to shine a bright light on these abuses, as well as the broader human rights and rule of law situation in China and the Chinese Communist Party’s attempts to export repressive models of governance and stifle free expression globally. Members of Congress will continue to work with the Administration

and likeminded partners across the globe to push for change in the behavior of the Chinese government and Communist Party.

- But we can't stop there. In the face of egregious violations of internationally recognized human rights, we need to take concrete steps to protect those harmed by authoritarian governments. While we cannot control the Chinese government's behavior, we have the power to protect the persecuted who come to our shores.
- That's what this hearing is about: taking responsibility for actions within our control to advance humane policies to support Uyghurs, the people of Hong Kong and others seeking protections as refugees, as asylum seekers, or as beneficiaries of humanitarian parole.
- In this hearing, we will hear from four witnesses, who will help us better understand humanitarian pathways that could be promoted by legislative, executive, or diplomatic action. One of our fellow commissioners will share perspectives on important legislation he is advancing, one of several bills we will hear about today that take actionable, concrete steps to protect the persecuted. We will also hear from a leading refugee policy expert on potential promise offered by designating Uyghurs and Hong Kongers as Priority 2 refugees as groups of special humanitarian concern. And we will hear the personal testimonies of two brave exiles now seeking asylum in the United States.
- Their stories remind us, yet again, of not only the human costs of repression but that the victims of that repression look to the United States for help. When we can offer that help I feel we must. I look forward to today's testimony informing the work of Congress, the Administration, and the international community to do just that.