

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

The Future of Women in China: #MeToo, Censorship, and Gender Inequality

Tuesday, March 1, 2022 – 10:00am

SD-562 & 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 “The Future of Women in China: #MeToo, Censorship and Gender Inequality” will come to order.
- One week from today, the world will mark International Women’s Day. This is an occasion not only to celebrate the critical role women and girls play in families, communities, and societies across the globe but to also reflect on how those societies can better protect the fundamental human rights of women and girls. Governments that fail to treat women equally prevent their countries from reaching their full potential. Those that empower women in political, social, and economic life are more prosperous and peaceful. Over 70 years ago, Mao Zedong acknowledged the importance of women in Chinese society with his famous statement that “women hold up half the sky.”
- Yet, as this Commission fulfills its mandate to monitor human rights in China, we continue to find a mixed picture when it comes to the status of women. While the Chinese government implements laws and regulations intended to address persistent issues related to gender-based violence, discrimination, and harassment, women face significant challenges in all of these areas.
- In recent months, several high-profile cases shined a bright spotlight on the vulnerability of women to violence. In November, tennis star Peng Shuai accused a senior Chinese Communist Party official of sexual assault. In January, a video appeared showing a rural woman – reportedly the mother of eight – chained by her neck in an outdoor shed, sparking serious concerns about human trafficking, the impact of policies of population control, and the treatment of persons with mental disorders. These stories come on the heels of other cases of domestic violence and workplace harassment that reinvigorated the #MeToo movement, as well as horrifying reports of rape committed against Uyghur women in intrusive homestay programs and mass internment camps. A brave survivor of these camps will tell her story to us today.
- While many of these reports generated intense interest within China, the Chinese Communist Party worked to suppress them and stifle expression related to women’s rights, just as it

constricts freedom of expression and civil society more broadly. It's been seven years since China jailed five female activists for publicizing sexual harassment on public transportation, and feminists – that is, advocates for improving the condition of women in China – continue to be denied the space to speak up or to organize, as demonstrated by the coordination of online attacks and the shutdown of feminist social media accounts last spring.

- In political life, women are excluded from positions of power, with not a single woman serving on the Politburo Standing Committee and only one woman serving on the 25-member Politburo and few women serving at senior levels of county, municipal, or provincial governments.
- Many of the most egregious abuses deny the fundamental freedom for families to decide if, when, and how to have children. Forced sterilizations and forced abortions, such as those prompted for years by the one child policy and those reported in recent years by the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, are atrocities. The move to a three child policy raises the specter of new coercive tools and tactics denying freedom.
- This all adds up to a complex landscape for women's rights in China, deserving of close scrutiny through today's hearing. This is the first time the Congressional-Executive Commission on China has held a hearing dedicated to this set of issues and it shouldn't be the last. I look forward to our witnesses helping us understand ways we can better stand up for women in China.