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**Statement of Rep. James P. McGovern
Co-chair, Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**Hearing on “Growing Constraints on Language and
Ethnic Identity in Today’s China”**

Thursday, April 5, 2022, 10:00 a.m.

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on language and identity in the People’s Republic of China.

First, I join the Chair in welcoming the release of the Commission’s Annual Report for 2021 last week. It comprehensively documents the Chinese government’s appalling human rights record. The report takes countless hours to research, write, fact-check and publish.

I particularly want to praise the Commission’s professional staff of researchers for their expertise and skill in producing each annual report. They do amazing work, and are a valued resource for this Commission and the entire Congress.

These researchers do their work objectively. They check out every single fact. The reporting is impeccably accurate, which makes this report especially powerful. I can’t thank them enough. Those of both parties who care about human rights out to recognize their incredible work.

Let me quote from author James Baldwin in a 1979 essay. He writes, “Language is a political instrument, means, and proof of power. People evolve a language in order to describe and thus control their circumstances, or in order not to be submerged by a reality that they cannot articulate. And, if they cannot articulate it, they are submerged.”

Baldwin was writing in a different context, but his message is one that anthropologists and political scientists confirm: that language is the core of a people’s identity.

The People’s Republic of China is a multi-lingual society. There are 56 official languages, and hundreds more that are not formally recognized by the state.

On paper, language is protected under Chinese law. The PRC Constitution gives ethnic minorities “the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs.”

In practice, however, we are witnessing the exact opposite. Government policies appear to promote standard Mandarin at the expense of other languages. This is happening as the Party under Xi Jinping imposes a coercive conformity across all facets of society.

This trend provides the context and the central question for this hearing. Is the Chinese government and party deliberately eroding the language rights of ethnic minorities in a quest for majoritarian political control?

And in doing so, isn’t the government violating rights guaranteed under the Chinese constitution and law?

This Commission has documented protests by Tibetans, Mongolians and others against restrictions on their own languages.

These protests are often suppressed. People are jailed for simply asking that their guaranteed rights be respected.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the threats to the Mongolian, Tibetan and Uyghur languages under PRC policies, and what this means for the concept of ethnic autonomy. I also look forward to hearing about the vulnerability of the hundreds of unofficial languages which also deserve protection and preservation.

So again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing.