



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

Hearing on “The Beijing Olympics and the Faces of Repression”

Thursday, February 3, 2022, 10:00 a.m.

As delivered

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing on prisoners of conscience on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Thank you for your leadership on so many human rights issues. I am also honored to be here with my colleague from Virginia, Jennifer Wexton, who has been a leader on so many issues of human rights. And obviously I am thrilled and honored to be here with the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

Before I begin, I want to say a few words about the Asian-American community. They have experienced a spike in hate crimes, discrimination and invectives directed toward them. This has happened in a climate where public figures have declared or implied that China is to blame for all our ills. Think “China virus.”

This Commission monitors the human rights record of the Chinese government. Our criticism is not directed at the people of China or of Chinese heritage. I take great care to make this distinction clear. I hope that all my fellow Commissioners do as well.

This Commission's important work is based on international human rights standards. Our message is strongest when grounded in the law and morals. We must strive to keep it that way.

Hundreds of athletes are preparing to compete in this Olympics. They have trained for years. This may be their last, or only, shot at a Medal.

Ideally, the athletes' experience should be uncomplicated by the venue or the host. But sadly that is not the case in 2022.

When the International Olympics Committee awarded these Games to Beijing in 2015, China already had the worst human rights record of any country on the planet.

It has gotten worse since. The Chinese government has engaged in genocide against the Turkic Muslims, cracked down on civil society, and snuffed out democracy and freedom in Hong Kong.

Many, including members of this bipartisan Commission, asked the IOC to relocate the Games, so the athletes wouldn't have to compete under a cloud of repression. They refused.

We asked the IOC's U.S.-based corporate sponsors to use their leverage to insist on human rights improvements, so athletes on the medal stand wouldn't have human rights violations as the backdrop. They refused. They, save one, wouldn't even admit to the fact that genocide is happening in Xinjiang.

If given a choice, I believe no athlete would want to compete in a country committing genocide and crimes against humanity. But that is what they are forced to do because of the feckless IOC and its corporate partners.

The risks are real. Last month, a Chinese Olympic official said that "any behavior or speech that is against the Olympic spirit, especially against the Chinese laws and regulations, are also subject to certain punishment."

Reportedly, the app that athletes are required to use in Beijing could result in theft of their personal information. Participants could be exposed to food or clothing made by IOC exclusive suppliers who use forced labor.

Make no mistake, I am rooting for the athletes. I hope nothing goes wrong.

The athletes shouldn't be forced to bear this burden created by companies and entities who want to protect their ability to make money no matter the human cost.

I don't drink Coca-Cola any more. They operate a bottling plant in Xinjiang. They source sugar from a company implicated in forced labor. Coke will be served at Olympic venues. Every athlete should be aware of the risk.

Sponsor companies told us if they spoke up, they would lose market share in China. And then they don't speak up. This is wrong. This paradigm must change. These companies are going to need to figure out a way to make money other than reliance on forced labor and abetting crimes against humanity.

The IOC will eagerly inform us how many viewers around the world watch the Games. But they won't tell us who can't watch the games, those unjustly imprisoned and deprived of their most basic freedoms by the host Chinese government: Ilham Tohti, Ding Jiaxi, Joshua Wong, Zhang Zhan, Bonkho Kyi.

These are the faces of repression, and resilience, who are represented by our witnesses today.

We must always remember the human dimension behind our policy work. It is for prisoners of conscience that we speak out. We must never, ever forget them.

One person who has never forgotten this is our first witness, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. She has been a principled voice for human rights in China and Tibet for decades, and I want to thank her in particular for working with all of us in a bipartisan way to get the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act through the Congress and to the President's desk, where he signed it. She has been a champion for so much legislation.

We welcome her and all the witnesses. I look forward to your testimonies.