

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing
on
China, Genocide and the Olympics

Tuesday, May 18, 2021 – 1:00 p.m.
Virtual vis Cisco WebEx

Statement of Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for bringing us together on this very important issue. It's about our values. It's about who we are as a country. It's about more than words. It's about actions. Thank you, and I thank you for the years of service that you have given to this. You never have faltered in all of it.

I myself have lost my innocence on expecting people to behave in a way that is consistent with their words, when it comes to respecting human rights. But matters have only gotten worse in China, as you have pointed out, and the genocide recognized as a genocide should be reason for us to change our actions.

But it's been an honor to serve with you and with Frank Wolf over the years, and I thank you for calling forth the bipartisanship of this to Senator Merkley. Jim McGovern has, as has Chris Smith, been a relentless, persistent advocate for human rights in China – well, throughout the world – but I've seen him in action speaking to the leadership of China, going to Tibet, talking – giving – undermining the misrepresentation that the Chinese are making about what is going on in Tibet. You talked about Hong Kong. We talked about human rights throughout China.

But now this rises to the level of recognized genocide. So, when I hear Senator Merkley – I'm so excited that we are reinvigorated with a new, strong voice on all of this, and acknowledge the work of Senator Rubio in all of this. As Mr. – as you both have said, this has always been bipartisan, and that is its strength. And – and not only is it bipartisan, but we have built our trust. That serves us well in other aspects of our lives in the Congress.

Okay, so here we are, with the Olympics coming up. The Olympics were held in – in Germany when Hitler was in charge, and what did he say at the time? 'Who's ever heard – does anybody remember the Armenians?' Remember, he said that when they were executing the Holocaust. So, it just seems so strange that we would have history repeat itself.

But let me just say this: as I said, I've kind of lost my innocence on hoping that corporate America or the powers that be would ever be consistent in what they had said and actions they have taken. I want to join our two Co-Chairs and Senator Merkley, for – the three of you – for welcoming this distinguished panel. We want to get to them as soon as we can.

But we cannot proceed as if nothing is wrong about the Olympics going to China. That may be a fait accompli. It may not be possible to stop.

The last three decades have made it clear that we cannot continue to give Beijing a blank check on the hope that their behavior will simply change. As you said, Mr. Chairman, that doesn't happen. When the international community said, 'Let's wait and see.' Yeah, we waited and saw, and the Chinese proceeded as normal.

This is what I do know, because sadly, this is not the first time that Congress and the international community have held this debate. As Mr. Smith mentioned back in 1993, we all joined Tom Lantos in passing legislation urging the IOC to reject China's 2000 bid for the summer Olympics because of massive violation of human rights. They did not get it that year. I don't know if because of us, but – because Sydney prevailed. Then in 2001, again, we joined Tom Lantos and Chris Cox on the Republican side of the aisle to oppose China's 2008 bid, stating, 'The Olympic spirit is built upon peace and respect' – as Senator Merkley has said, 'Peace and respect to universal, fundamental, ethical principles.'

Sadly, we are here because the Chinese government continues to crush all political dissent and trample the basic human rights of its people.

Then in 2008, after returning from Dharamsala where our Congressional delegation was received by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, again – we spoke out, calling on President Bush to boycott the opening ceremonies, and opposing the torch – and I oppose the torch relay at San Francisco. Unfortunately, President Bush did go to them, but I do want to point out that he did attend our ceremony in the Capitol. We gave a gold – the Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama, which made the Chinese unhappy.

And as we know, a similarly disappointing debate that took place in the 1990's was China's WTO accession, simply giving China a blank check. They fail to comply with market commitments.

In this very room, the Speaker's Conference Room, I welcomed the President, the Chairman of the Chinese People's Congress, in this very room, and when I said to him, 'You're in violation of the WTO provisions' – this in relationship to rubber at the time – he said, 'When we joined' – he had his heads of the committees from, from the China People's Congress – they said, 'When we joined the WTO, they said we did not have to obey those rules.' So, we've given them, again, a free ride.

Today, we once again have an opportunity, obligation to speak out. While China has charged over – changed over 30 years, in some respects, it is appalling that its human rights record has worsened. The U.S. Congress has and will continue our long bipartisan and bicameral commitment to holding China accountable in this arena as in all others.

Over the past two years working together – Senator Rubio very much a part of this – passed and signed into law the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020. And I want to acknowledge our Congresswoman Wexton for her involvement in all of this. I know she represents a strong Uyghur population in our country. We passed the Tibetan Policy and Support Act. We passed the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2019. And already in this Congress, we passed a resolution condemning the ongoing violation of Hong Kong’s right – rights in Hong Kong by Beijing and the government of Hong Kong. We reintroduce the Uyghur Forced Labor Disclosure Act and Uyghur Forced Labor prevention, and we’ll soon take up another legislation urging human – Uyghur Human Rights Protection Act. This is all in a bipartisan, bicameral way.

As Mr. Smith mentioned the names of some of the prisoners – for the Chinese government, the most excruciating form of torture is to say [to] the prisoners, ‘Nobody cares. Nobody even remembers you’re here. And they don’t know why. Why don’t you just give up?’ But thank you for your mention, and of course, Wei Jingsheng was a hero who we nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. He’s so fabulous, and now in the U.S., but a victim of China’s human rights violations. A real hero to all of us. And he tells us, ‘When we speak out, people do hear it in the prisons and in the rest.’

Again, as I’ve said, if we don’t speak out against human rights violations in China for commercial reasons, we lose all moral authority to speak out for human rights anywhere.

So, how sad it is to see that the corporate sponsors look the other way on China’s abuses of out of concern for their bottom line with some even lobbying against the bipartisan Uyghur Forced Labor bill. Imagine, they’re lobbying against a bill on forced labor when the country, our country has declared this a genocide.

Here’s what I propose, and join those who – is a diplomatic boycott. I don’t know if it’s possible, because we have not succeeded in the past. And I’m a big sports fan. I watch the Olympics in the middle of the night. You ever see me during the Olympics season, and I’m never sleeping. I’m always watching because usually it’s in a different time zone. And to see the discipline, the focus, the dedication of our young, of our athletes out there is just the sources of such pride. Let’s honor them at home.

Let’s not honor the Chinese government by having heads of state go to China to show their support for their athletes.

When they come home, I show them even more. Not, 'You're home now, it's over, goodbye.' But even more – more respect, adulation, really, for their, for what they've done and to honor all of them, not just the medal winners.

But for heads of state to go to China in wake of a genocide that is ongoing while you're sitting there in your seats really begs the question: What moral authority do you have to speak again about human rights any place in the world if you're willing to pay your respects to the Chinese government as they commit genocide? So honor your athletes at home. Let's have a diplomatic boycott, if in fact, this Olympics takes place. Silence on this issue is unacceptable. It enables China's abuses.

Let me end by quoting from testimony submitted today from the International Campaign for Tibet, since this is – Mr. Chairman quoted some of the others: 'The history of human rights violations has taught us a clear lesson. Silence equates with license and that those who turn away from crimes against humanity, bear responsibility for them. If the IOC does not – nothing to address irrefutable, decades-long, persistent, severe human rights violations in Olympics host countries like China, it becomes complicit.' Now, the Chinese Olympic Committee has established new standards and the rest. I understand that. But they maintain that they pass those new rules after the – they awarded China, so let's hope that for the future of those new rules.

I just want to go back to our friend Tom Lantos. Years ago, I mean, after like ten years of doing this, and still not really having as much success as we would like to have in terms of human rights in China – and by the way, it's about proliferation of weapons and delivery systems that work to rogue nations. It's about – it's about violations of our trade relations. It's about a lot of things, including the human rights violations. And what I said to him – I said, 'Tom, this is so – we're not making any success.' He said – 'Nancy,' he said, 'The road on human rights is a long one. You must be patient. You must be patient, but you must be persistent.'

And in the spirit of Tom Lantos, with Chairman, Mr. McGovern, and Mr. Smith, both of our leaders in the leadership of the Tom Lantos Commission – thank you for your chairmanship, Mr. McGovern, of it. It is a long road and we must be patient. But we want some successes as well, and I think one would be if elite countries of the world withhold their attendance at the Olympics and instead save their energy and their enthusiasm for their athletes to welcome them when they come home and give them a beautiful send off when they go. That would that would be a giant step forward.

I've been told by President Trump that President Xi told him that the people in these education camps – the Uighur education – 'really like being there.' 'Really like being there.' No, they don't, President Xi. They don't like being there. They like being home with their families.

So, again, I thank all of you for your courage, for your leadership, for the clarity of the message. And I'm very, very proud of the bipartisanship that has been central to this bipartisan, House and Senate, bipartisan, bicameral, all-American support for human rights throughout the world. Thank you all for your leadership.