

Opening Statement by U.S. Senator Chuck Hagel

Hearing to Consider

Fifteen Years After Tiananmen: Is Democracy in China's Future?

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

June 3, 2004

Washington, D.C. -- Fifteen years ago the People's Liberation Army cleared Tiananmen Square of the peaceful demonstrators who had held it for several weeks. The shocking sounds and images of unarmed students and workers gunned down by Chinese troops remain vivid in our minds. The demonstration was crushed that awful day, but the optimism and possibilities represented by those fighting for a future democratic China were not. We meet today to remember their voices, and assess China's progress in meeting their goals.

I am especially pleased that this Commission will hear today from two leaders of the 1989 democracy movement, Mr. Wang Youcai and Ms. Lu Jinghua. These individuals have never given up the struggle for their country's democratic future, and their insights and sacrifice will greatly inform today's proceedings.

Mr. Chairman, I congratulate you for holding today's hearing. China today faces important choices for its political future. These choices will affect the lives and welfare of all Chinese citizens, but China's size and growing importance guarantee that these same choices will reverberate around the globe in ways that we can only dimly predict and understand today. China's future is also important to America's future. It is in our interest to work broadly and deeply with the Chinese government using all the bridges and opportunities available to us to help shape and ensure a democratic future for China.

China is a much-changed and much-changing place. The results of two decades of market reforms are visible nearly everywhere. The cold, gray Beijing airport where I first saw China on New Year's Day in 1983 has long been replaced with a state-of-the-art facility. The skylines of China's major cities have changed dramatically. These are the most prominent symbols of China's new wealth, but the economic reforms that generated these changes have also fundamentally altered the dynamics that will define China's future.

The economic realities of building a modern nation while feeding, clothing and employing 1.3 billion people have begun to drive China in directions that, I believe, some within the Communist Party have not wanted to go. The twin demands of political stability and continued economic progress have spurred legal reforms that someday may be the leading edge of constraints on the arbitrary exercise of state power. Elections at the village level are now commonplace in China, and limited experiments like these continue at other levels of government. Shanghai is experimenting with public legislative hearings, and the term "human rights" was recently added to China's own constitution.

While these changes are important, the gap between forward-looking economic freedoms and a backward-looking political system remains significant. The Communist Party continues to crush any

person or movement it perceives as challenging its hold on power. But there are leaders now within China that comprehend the necessity for change, and understand that inflexibility, secretiveness and a lack of democratic oversight now pose the greatest challenges to continued development. President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have demonstrated, albeit unevenly, that they may be two such leaders, but they will need to gather considerable reformist courage to drive continued change. Not overnight, but in ways that Chinese society, culture, infrastructure and institutions may be prepared for, and willing to accept.

With no voice in their own political future, the frustration of China's citizens is growing. The political scientist Murray Scot Tanner cites police figures in the current issue of *National Interest* showing the number and size of protests in China growing rapidly in the 1990s. It is extraordinary that China's ruling party came to power in a peasant revolution, representing the working class, but now faces waves of both worker and rural protests. China's citizens are fed up with corruption, a social and economic ill that China's student demonstrators both recognized and offered a democratic solution for in 1989.

The United States wants to work with China to build a more open and participatory society. David M. Lampton wrote in the Fall 2003 issue of *National Interest* that "Americans must balance the impulse to treat China as it is with the foresight to recognize China for what it may become." China will not match the United States on every issue. Political change is complex and imperfect, and it will be up to the Chinese people to determine where their country goes and how it gets there. But China's leaders must take the first steps, and the United States must be ready to assist.

Thank you.