

# **Testimony for Hearing, “15 Years After Tiananmen: Is Democracy in China’s Future?”**

## **Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

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Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission, on behalf of Human Rights in China (HRIC), thank you for this opportunity to make this statement. It is also an honor to testify today alongside of activists and leaders from the 1989 Democracy Movement.

HRIC is an international, non-governmental organization founded by Chinese scientists and scholars in March 1989. Our mission is to promote universally recognized human rights and advance the institutional protection of these rights as one of the fundamental parameters of China’s social and political transformation. Through our advocacy on behalf of over 2,000 political prisoners over the past fifteen years, our research and education, HRIC aims to measure, monitor, and promote the implementation of human rights in China. Our work is informed and inspired by our fundamental belief that democracy is both possible –and inevitable- in China.

### **Tiananmen 1989**

Fifteen years ago, the Chinese government ordered the violent use of military force to suppress a peaceful protest movement.<sup>[1]</sup> Over a period of two months in the spring of 1989, in China’s major cities, students, workers, and activists called for democratic reforms and the end to escalating official corruption and abuses. The center of the protest movement was Tiananmen Square in Beijing, where tens of thousands of students camped out to press their demands, and where more than one million people marched carrying banners and shouting slogans. On the night of June 3, 1989, the government ordered the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to clear the Square and restore order. PLA troops moved into Beijing and clashed with civilians trying to block their way to Tiananmen Square. In the early hours of June 4th, the troops moved into the Square and opened fire on unarmed students and civilians in the surrounding area.

It is believed that more than 2,000 people died in various Chinese cities on June 3rd and 4th and the days immediately following. The Tiananmen Mothers have documented the names of at least 182 victims, including three who died at Tiananmen Square. Following June 4th, more than 500 people were imprisoned in Beijing’s No. 2 prison alone, and an unknown number were imprisoned in other Chinese cities. An additional unknown number were executed. Some 130 people are believed to remain in prison serving long terms for crimes connected with the 1989 protests. However, the total accurate number of dead, wounded, imprisoned and executed remains unknown.

### **Fifteen years later, why is this is still the case?**

First, the Chinese government, despite whatever internal debates are going on, refuses to engage in a public reassessment of the crackdown. However, Chinese history demonstrates that an assessment is also possible, e.g. the Anti-Rightist Campaign and after the Cultural Revolution. Second, China’s pervasive legal, regulatory, security and police control over “sensitive” political issues and events ensures that the costs of writing, publishing, or investigating June 4<sup>th</sup> events will be high – and include facing endangering state security or leaking state secrets criminal charges, and imprisonment.<sup>[2]</sup> Third, China’s growing economic power and role has contributed to the sidelining of human rights by the international community when they conflict with trade, military, or other geo-political interests and priorities. Fourth,

the opportunistic invocation of the post-September 11 war against terrorism by the Chinese government has allowed it to crackdown on peaceful assertions of religious and cultural identity in the name of fighting terrorism.

Today --the “No Deaths in the Square” proclamation in the *People’s Daily* on September 19, 1989 and the label of counterrevolutionary rebellion on the 1989 Democracy Movement remains – a bloody stain on the legitimacy of any official claims to progress.

### **Fifteen years later**

Over the past 15 years, the **Tiananmen Mothers**, along with HRIC and many other groups and individuals, have repeatedly called for an independent investigation into the June 4th crack-down, a thorough official accounting of the dead, injured and disappeared, appropriate redress and compensation for surviving victims and families of the dead, and accountability on the part of the officials who ordered the crackdown.

**Dr. Jiang Yanyong** who had spoken out during the SARS crisis last year, once again came forward and called for an official reassessment of the 1989 Democracy Movement and the June 4<sup>th</sup> crack-down. In reply to a question posed by a foreign journalist during the NPC and CPPCC sessions in this past March, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stated: “We must concentrate all our time, energy and efforts on the development of our country... If China could have another 20 to 50 years of stability, our country would surely emerge stronger than ever before.”

This assertion of the primacy of stability –that is, stability as synonymous with the survival of the supremacy of the Party at all costs -- is a sobering echo of the statement attributed to Deng Xiaoping 15 years ago about the necessity to: “Kill 200,000 for 20 years of stability.”

In their open letter to Chinese compatriots inside and outside China, the Tiananmen Mothers ask:

“Is this to say that if no one had been killed, we would not have today’s political stability? If no one had been killed, we would not have today’s economic miracle? If no one had been killed, we would not enjoy the status today and in the future of a world power? Over the past 15 years, nearly every leader in the Party and the government, almost without exception, has defended the suppression in 1989 with the “enormous accomplishments” of the subsequent years. In that case, we must now in equally clear and unequivocal terms tell these leaders: The massacre that took place in the Chinese capital in 1989 was a crime against the people, and a crime against humanity. This massacre not only seriously violated the Constitution of this country and the international obligations of a sovereign state, but also transformed a habitual disdain for human and civil rights into an unprecedented act of violence against humanity. “ [\[3\]](#)

### **Is democracy in China’s future?**

The future of democracy in China is interrelated to the promotion of human rights and a rule of law that is transparent, fair, and a judiciary and process independent of the Party. Although there have been areas of improvement --increased average living standards, access to information, greater government participation in the international human rights regime -- the human rights situation is generally worsening in other respects for the vast majority of China’s people.

As well documented by the World Bank, UNDP, Chinese researchers, [\[4\]](#) human rights NGOs, including HRIC, and reported by this Commission and the U.S. State Department country reports on China, the human rights situation has overall deteriorated seriously and is marked by growing social inequalities and poverty;[\[5\]](#) massive unemployment; and environmental degradation reaching crisis dimensions; severe

restrictions on freedom of expression, including crack-downs on ethnic minorities, religious groups (Falun Gong, underground churches), independent political parties or unions, independent media; use of torture and mistreatment of prisoners, arbitrary detentions and arrests. Lawyers taking on cases that are politically sensitive may find themselves intimidated or themselves the target of prosecution.[\[6\]](#)

Today, fifteen years after Tiananmen, facing increasing labor and social unrest, China is not more stable nor can it claim sustainable progress in equitable economic development. True social stability requires as fundamental conditions – protection of human rights, democracy, and a rule of law. The order that is maintained in the absence of these conditions is in fact just social repression and control.

### **Democracy is inevitable in China**

Chinese democracy can only develop and be realized within a vibrant civil society, not a limited “non-critical realm” where any views contrary to the Party are silenced. Whatever direction the current ideological debates within China’s leadership takes about political reforms (or not), the Chinese government can not legitimately claim that it alone can define democracy, even ‘socialist democracy,’ as only what it will allow; or that progress is measured predominantly by the interests of economic and political elites; or that elections, such as for Hong Kong’s LegCo, will be permitted but only if the results are what it approves.[\[7\]](#)

Yet democracy is inevitable because the aspirations, hopes, and the willingness to struggle for a more open and democratic China are still powerfully present and alive—against all odds. Despite the brutal invocation of military violence in 1989 to crush the democracy movement; a pervasive and powerful Chinese propaganda, police, and security apparatus; China’s growing global economic power (that China manipulates to undermine scrutiny and accountability for its human rights record); and a privileged and powerful Chinese elite bought off by economic and political benefits of supporting the present policies; despite all this – courageous Chinese—the Tiananmen Mothers, journalists, intellectuals, peasants, workers, students, internet activists, religious practitioners, lawyers, artists, and poets, continue to write, to speak out, to organize mass demonstrations, form independent political parties, independent unions, to petition the government, and to appeal to international fora for redress and support.

We can support these human rights and democracy activists, these ordinary citizens claiming justice and freedom, by remembering the past, by not allowing the Chinese authorities’ control over information and censorship to result in historical amnesia. Like the call from the Tiananmen Mothers, the names of those who were killed, the sacrifices made must not be forgotten. [\[8\]](#) The Chinese government certainly has not forgotten and its actions in suppressing independent voices reflect a government still fearful and distrustful of its own people. In an effort to head off anniversary memorials and possible demonstrations, the Chinese authorities have cut off phone lines, put under house arrest and close surveillance leading activists and intellectuals, including Liu Xiaobo, Ren Wanding, AIDS activist Hu Jia, and Tiananmen Mothers leaders Ding Zilin, Zhang Xianling, and Yin Min.

### **Recommendations**

As part of its bilateral process with China and as part of multilateral processes such as the UN and the WTO, the U.S. government should:

- continue to exert its influence with China by raising human rights issues and cases,
- support more coherent and rational implementation of international obligations, including trade obligations as they impact on human rights,
- in any technical assistance or exchange initiatives, build in a human rights assessment, and
- continue its critical support for civil society and democracy groups inside and outside China.

In the negotiations on behalf of individual political prisoner case, we also respectfully suggest that exiling dissident voices is not a sign of progress and does not contribute to the systemic reforms necessary for the advancement of democracy and human rights. Individual political prisoners should be released without conditions on their peaceful exercise of their rights, and be allowed to remain within their own country. That would be the true litmus test for democracy in China.

Thank you.

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[1] See Tiananmen: The Once and Future China, *China Rights Forum*, No.2, 2004.

[2] For identification of some individuals sentenced to prison terms of 15 years to life for activities related to 1989 Democracy Movement, See In Custody: People imprisoned for Counterrevolutionary and state security crimes, *China Rights Forum*, No. 2, 2003, pp.88-91.

[3] Open letter from the Tiananmen Mothers letter, available on the HRIC website <  
<http://iso.hrichina.org/iso/>>

[4] Chinese Academy of Social Sciences report released February 26, 2004.

[5] Official numbers place those living at absolute poverty at 30 million, while the World Bank estimates the number to be between 100-150 million persons.

[6] According to the officials at the All China lawyers Association, more than 100 defense attorneys have been arrested for the on the alleged charge of making false statements in court. For example, **Xu Jian** was arrested in 1999 and sentenced to four years imprisonment in 2000 for 'incitement to overthrow state power' because he had provided legal counselling to the workers at his office and via its hotline. **Zheng Enchong** provided legal advice and assistance to several hundred Shanghai families affected by redevelopment projects. He was sentenced to three years in prison on October 28, 2003 for 'illegally providing state secrets to entities outside China.' On December 18, 2003, the appeals court denied Zheng Enchong's appeal and affirmed the sentence, sending a chilling message to Chinese lawyers.

[7] LegCo: Hong Kong's 60-seat Legislative Council. Elections will take place in September, with the number of directly elected seats increased to 30.

[8] The June 4<sup>th</sup> Memorial Global Coalition, of which HRIC is a member, is organizing a candlelight vigil on June 4<sup>th</sup> in front of the Chinese Consulate in New York City from 7:00-10:00 p.m. For full details of June 4<sup>th</sup> memorial activities taking place around the world, please visit the Web site of the June 4<sup>th</sup> Memorial Global Coalition: <http://www.global64.com/>. To support the Tiananmen Mothers, see the Fill the Square Petition at HRIC's website <<http://iso.hrichina.org>>