

Statement for the Record
Senator Chuck Hagel
Congressional-Executive Commission on China Hearing
February 27, 2008

The Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) meets today to discuss the 2008 Summer Olympic Games and its impact on human rights and the rule of law in China. This is the first Commission hearing under its new leadership, and I thank my distinguished colleagues, Chairman Sander Levin and Co-Chairman Byron Dorgan, for bringing us together here today. I look forward to working with you, as well as my fellow Ranking Member, Congressman Chris Smith, and each of the Commission members to continue the good work and prominent reputation that the Commission has established over the past seven years.

I would like to thank each of the distinguished witnesses for coming today to discuss these important issues, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.

There is no strategic relationship more important to the U.S. than China. U.S.-China relations cover the full arc of our national interests — economic growth, national security, financial, social, and regional stability, as well as political reform, individual rights, the rule of law and religious freedom. From civil and intellectual property rights to the balance of trade, we continue to have clear differences with the Chinese government.

In the recently published 2007 CECC Annual Report, the Commission found that China's record of compliance with international human rights standards has been mixed. The Commission does recognize the progress that China has made in bringing its legal statutes and regulations nominally in line with international standards. These reforms may one day provide the legal backdrop for constraining the arbitrary exercise of government authority in China.

China should also be commended for its achievements in the economic realm. Its success in lifting more than 400 million Chinese citizens out of extreme poverty since the early 1980's should not be overlooked. However, China's progress on civil and political rights has unfortunately not kept pace with its economic progress. Significant human rights abuses and problems with the application of the rule of law in China need to be addressed.

In the 2007 CECC Report, the Commission found that despite legal and regulatory reform, the changes "have not necessarily translated into the everyday practice of local law enforcement." Major concerns remain over religious freedom, property rights, corruption, and the right of political dissent. China will not be a full and responsible member of the global community, nor will it reach its own potential, until political reforms move forward as economic development has done.

The 2008 Summer Olympics present China and the international community with a significant opportunity for progress and dialogue — especially with regard to human rights and the rule of law in China. Beijing has made a number of important commitments to domestic political and legal reforms in the lead-up to the Olympics — among them, promises to advance religious, economic, civil, and social freedoms inside China. As a responsible member of the international community, China should meet those important commitments.

The international community should also take advantage of this opportunity to enter into expanded dialogue with China on areas of both disagreement and of mutual concern. The Olympics present a

chance to take another step towards engagement and common purpose, but we need to remember that it is but one step on this path.

Lasting and stable progress on liberalization and domestic reform takes time. Change does not happen overnight, and our disagreements with China will not be resolved by the time the Olympics leave Beijing. At some point, late this summer, the Olympics will be over, but our differences over human rights, the rule of law, trade issues, and others will likely still remain.

The global community should use this opportunity to help frame a constructive, long-term, strategic relationship with China where our differences can be aired and areas of mutual concern can be found. In the coming months, we must be realistic, balanced, measured, focused and clear headed in our approach to China.

The Committee looks forward to hearing the testimony from this distinguished panel of witnesses. Thank you all for coming. We appreciate your time and presentations.