



Testimony of Prof. Kwame Anthony Appiah, President, PEN American Center:

**Congressional-Executive Commission on China
Hearing on “Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Liu Xiaobo and the Future of Political
Reform in China”
November 9, 2010**

Chairman Dorgan, Co-Chairman Levin, Members of the Commission:

My name is Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah, and I have the honor of being President of PEN American Center. I am very grateful for the invitation to speak to you today. Our center is one of the 145 centers—in more than 100 countries—of International PEN, the world’s oldest literary and human rights organization. For nearly ninety years we have sustained fellowship between the writers of all nations and defended free expression at home and abroad. More recently, we have worked with particular assistance from our colleagues in the Independent Chinese PEN Center (ICPC), to advance the cause of free expression in China. Part of this effort has involved supporting our colleague Liu Xiaobo, who served as President of ICPC from 2003 to 2007, held a seat on its Board until late 2009, and remains an Honorary President. In late January 2010, in connection with our support for him and the cause of democracy in China, I wrote to the Norwegian Nobel Committee, to urge them to give serious consideration to him as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. I was not, of course, alone in doing this. Vaclav Havel, President of the former Czechoslovakia, and Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu of South Africa, among many others, made similar appeals. If I may, I would like to summarize briefly the arguments I made in that letter on behalf of my organization.

On December 25, 2009, a Beijing court sentenced Liu to 11 years in prison and an additional two years’ deprivation of political rights for “inciting subversion of state power.” This so-called incitement, the verdict made clear, consisted of seven phrases—a total of 224 Chinese characters—that he had written over the last three years. Many of these words came from Charter 08, a declaration modeled on Vaclav Havel’s Charter 77 that calls for political reform and greater human rights in China and has been signed, at considerable risk, by more than 10,000 Chinese citizens.

Liu Xiaobo has a long history as one of the leading proponents of peaceful democratic reform in the People’s Republic of China. A poet and a literary critic, Liu served as a professor at Beijing Normal University and was a leading voice and an influential presence during the student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989; indeed, his insistence on non-violence and democratic process are widely credited with preventing far more catastrophic bloodshed during the subsequent crackdown.

Liu’s writings express the aspirations of a growing number of China’s citizens; the ideas he has articulated are ideas that are commonplace in free societies around the world, and while the Chinese government claims they are subversive they are shared by a significant cross

section of Chinese society. Charter 08 itself is a testament to an expanding movement for peaceful political reform in China. This document, which Liu co-authored, is a remarkable attempt both to engage China's leadership and to speak to the Chinese public about where China is and needs to go. It is novel in its breadth and in its list of signers—not only dissidents and human rights lawyers, but also prominent political scientists, economists, writers, artists, grassroots activists, farmers, and even government officials. More than 10,000 Chinese citizens have endorsed the document despite the fact that almost all of the original 300 signers have since been detained or harassed. In doing so they, too, exhibited exceptional courage and conviction.

We all recall the period of the Cultural Revolution, in which millions were uprooted, millions died. We should acknowledge that there has been substantial progress from that horrendous nadir. We know, too, that there are voices within the regime, urging greater respect for free expression. China wants—and needs—to be heard in the community of nations. I—and all of my PEN colleagues—believe in a cosmopolitan conversation in which we hear from every nation. But we also believe we must let China's rulers know that we can only listen respectfully if they offer to their own citizens the fundamental freedoms we all claim from our governments. This is the right moment for the world to show those in China who do not understand that history is on freedom's side that all the world's friends of peace and democracy are watching. And that is why this was the right moment to give this peaceful campaigner for democratic freedoms the Nobel Peace Prize.

Since the announcement of the Peace Prize, the government of China has behaved with exactly the sort of contempt for the rights of her people that Liu has long protested. The Chinese Communist Party has demonstrated that it remains unfortunately willing to revert to its most unattractive traditions.

The Chinese government blacked out television broadcasts on CNN and the BBC and the French station TV5 that reported Liu's Nobel Prize. They censored sites on the web that mentioned him or published Charter 08. Indeed, comically, they have censored references to free expression in the recent speeches of Wen Jiabao. Much less comically, they have harassed Liu Xia, Liu Xiaobo's wife, destroying her cell phone, surrounding her house and placing her effectively under house arrest. Her friends and family have not been able to be in touch with her since October 20th.

The Chinese authorities have also stepped up pressure on members of the ICPC as part of their campaign to limit information about the awarding of the prize. Since the prize was announced on October 8, dozens of ICPC's China-based members have been visited by police and harassed and several of its leading members are living under virtual house arrest. On November 2, Wu Wei (whose pen name is Ye Du), ICPC's Network Committee coordinator and the organization's webmaster, was summoned for questioning by the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau after Internet writer Guo Xianliang was arrested for "inciting subversion of state power" on October 28 for handing out leaflets about Liu's Nobel. Police reportedly believe that Wu Wei is behind the leaflets, and he stands accused of "disturbing public order." He was questioned for four hours and his home was raided. Police confiscated two computers and information from PEN's annual international congress, which took place last month in Tokyo, Japan, including a video clip that was shown at the conference of Liu Xia reading a letter from Liu Xiaobo, as well as a video about ICPC that included clips of Liu Xiaobo speaking about freedom of expression in China in 2006.

On November 4, exiled poet Bei Ling, who is a co-founder of ICPC and recently wrote movingly about his friend Liu Xiaobo in a Wall Street Journal editorial, arrived at Beijing International Airport on a flight from Frankfurt for a brief stopover on his way to Taipei, where he was invited to participate in a discussion at Dongwu University and stay as a writer in residence. He was met by 20 police officers as soon as he disembarked and was taken to an empty room at the airport, where he says he was questioned for two hours and told that someone high in the government ordered that he not be permitted to travel on to Taiwan. He was instead manhandled and put on a plane back to Frankfurt. His baggage, which included two manuscripts about underground and exile literature, was confiscated and not returned.

These are only a few of the outrages of recent weeks—many of which appear calculated to keep the Chinese people in the dark about Liu Xiaobo's award.

We believe that it is right that President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have raised Liu's case with their Chinese counterparts, both before and after his most recent sentence, as we at PEN American Center have asked them to do. We are grateful that Ambassador Jon Huntsman in Beijing sent representation to Liu's trial last year, as we urged *him* to do. We believe that China should live up the promises made in its own Constitution; promises it made when it signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. And we believe that it is America's obligation, as a party to the Covenant, to hold China to that standard. But the most fundamental reason why we should do this is that these demands are right.

We specifically recommend to the Commission and to the Obama administration and Members of Congress, that in all communications with the Chinese government, you:

1. Continue to press for the release of Liu Xiaobo at all available opportunities;
2. Call for the release of all other writers imprisoned in violation of their right to freedom of expression;
3. Urge the government of the People's Republic of China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Chinese government argues that their treatment of Liu Xiaobo is an internal matter, and that international awards and advocacy on his behalf amount to meddling in China's internal affairs. But the treatment he has endured is by definition an international matter, just as all violations of human rights are matters of legitimate concern to the whole world. By detaining Liu Xiaobo for more than a year, and then by convicting and sentencing him to 11 years in prison in clear violation of his most fundamental, internationally recognized rights, the People's Republic of China itself has guaranteed that his case is not and cannot be a purely internal affair.

We have no hostility towards China or the Chinese. Indeed, it is our respect and concern for China and her people that leads us to urge their government to allow them—all of them—the freedom to write and to read and to organize that will allow them to be responsible citizens of a democratic society, and will then allow China to be a responsible and respected colleague in the community of democratic nations.