

**Testimony of Bonnie Glick
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2002 U.S. Assessment Team to China**

Commission Members, Esteemed Colleagues:

At the beginning of May, I traveled to China as a member of a three-person team selected by the White House to conduct an assessment of whether the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has supported or participated in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization in the People's Republic of China. These concerns were codified in 1985 in U.S. legislation known as the Kemp Kasten Amendment. Since 1998, the Chinese State Birth Planning Commission has conducted a special program with UNFPA participation in 32 of the PRC's approximately 2800 counties under an agreement signed by the State Birth Planning Commission and the UNFPA on September 11, 1998.

Given the controversy which has existed in the Congress on the issues of coercive abortion and involuntary sterilization, great emphasis was placed on making this a mission of objective fact-finding and assessment.

Prior to our departure for China, we met in the State Department with a variety of U.S. Government officials. We also met with the Executive Director of the UNFPA, UN Undersecretary General Madame Thoraya Ahmed Obaid and with Mr. Scruggs as well as with Steven Mosher, President of the Population Research Institute and with Mr. Aird. Finally, we met with several members of Congress and/or their staff members.

On May 12, we departed for Beijing for a two-week assessment visit. In Beijing, we paid a courtesy call on U.S. Ambassador Randt then had extensive discussions with Minister Zhang Weiqing, Chairman of the State Birth Planning Commission as well as with Ms. Siri Tellier, the Director of the UNFPA Country Office in Beijing. We met with Chinese academics specializing in population and demographics as well as with students and NGO representatives involved in Chinese population matters.

Following this overview of the population situation in China, we began our travels through 5 of the 32 UNFPA counties. The five counties were selected by the U.S. Embassy, and they represented a cross-section of urban and rural, poor and middle income. During the next 10 days, we traveled approximately 6000 miles, by air and road, through urban and rural China. The five counties visited were Rongchang County (100 km outside Chongqing Municipality), Pingba County (2.5 hours from Guiyang in Guizhou Province), Xuanzhou County (in Anhui Province), Guichi County (in Anhui Province), and Sihui City (in central Guangdong Province). We were accompanied on our travels by a fluent Chinese-speaking member of the U.S. Embassy, by an interpreter, Ms. Ying Yu, a naturalized American citizen of Chinese origin, and by Mr. Hongtao Hu, a member of the State Birth Planning Commission. Mr. Hu received no more than 24 hours advance notice of our daily travel plans. Our visits were often unannounced and with no notice. We stopped in at three factories, two schools, 11 village Birth Planning substations, five municipal Birth Planning centers and three hospitals. I held discussions with women in the streets and agricultural fields who were going about their daily lives.

I went to China with open eyes, with an objective point of view, and with a narrow mandate. We went to as many counties and as many villages as possible. We also made a variety of unscheduled stops. Although our sample size was small (5 out of 32 possibilities), I believe the results are representative in that we varied our methodology through random visits, and with little to no notice given to Chinese government authorities, thereby decreasing biases in the observed data.

I would like to address the conversations I had with women throughout our travels. In my years as a Foreign Service Officer, I often found that women around the world, particularly women in societies that tend to be dominated by men, are willing to open up to foreign women to discuss personal issues. There is a

commonality of interests and experiences. This was as true for me in rural Ethiopia and Nicaragua as it was in rural and urban China.

Thus, in speaking with Chinese women, I was able to elicit direct and thoughtful responses to probing questions. Culture played an enormous role in these conversations. Often I found myself asking indirect questions in order to obtain genuine responses such as, “How many children do you plan or hope to have?” “How do you feel about the policy of the Chinese government that ostensibly limits your ability to have more than one child?” “Do you know any women who have been coerced to have abortions or forced, involuntarily, to become sterilized?” “Do you know anyone who has to pay Social Compensation Fees because she had more than one child?”

If I sensed that a woman, particularly a professional woman in one of the health clinics, was suspicious of my line of questioning, I would change the way in which I asked my questions. I might ask her, “Perhaps not in this county, but have you heard of women in other counties who might have been coerced to have abortions or sterilizations?”

In one pharmaceutical manufacturing and packaging factory, I had the opportunity to talk to a group of 15 or so women all working on an assembly line. We talked as they packaged pharmaceuticals. The conditions in which they were working were good, clean, and comfortable. They considered themselves lucky to have these stable jobs. When I asked them questions about their family planning practices, nearly all said that they had just one child. One woman had two children, several had none. All commented that it is expensive to raise children.

I met with two women in a health clinic in Rongchang County who had just had abortions due to pregnancies arising, they said, from failed contraception. I asked each of them why they chose to abort. The first woman said that she already had twins and neither wanted nor could afford a third child. She and her husband, she said, were happy with their two children and they had not planned on a third. The other woman, a 22 year old, said that she and her husband were not yet ready to have children. They themselves were children, she said, and she wanted to wait until she was ready for a “perfect” birth.

The Chinese government, it seems to me, through public service announcements in all forms of media, has convinced women of the merits of marrying late, delaying births, and focusing on a “perfect” birth. What is a “perfect” birth? This is a potentially dangerous question to ask. Since abortions are legal in China, women take great care to ensure that the fetuses they carry are perfect. If they fear that a fetus is in any way less than perfect, the inclination among Chinese women is to abort. While the practitioners with whom we met said that they do not promote abortion as a form of birth control, they were well aware that many women abort rather than “waste” their one opportunity to give birth on a less than perfect child.

As many of us are aware, this has, no doubt, led to the skewed gender ratios in Chinese births. With 116 male children born for every 100 female children, the numbers speak for themselves. This skewed birth ratio, when considered among a population of 1.3 billion people, demonstrates that the demographic challenges facing China today and into the future are staggering.

I was initially surprised by the near uniformity of responses I received to the questions I asked Chinese women. However, after several days, I realized that the similarity of responses was due to the tremendous public service campaign the Chinese government has undertaken to promote its one-child policy. Generally speaking, women in China genuinely and faithfully adhere to the one-child policy (now codified with the new population law as of September 1, 2002). While it is hard for Americans to accept that women elsewhere in the world *might not* want a house full of children, we must all think for a moment about the particulars of the situation in China. In a country with a population of at least 1.3 billion people, and where the current generation of women of childbearing age was raised with the philosophy of one-child only, it

easy to see women in China accepting the limitation on births as part of their civic and patriotic duty. The public service campaign, if you will, to discourage multiple births, has been so prevalent and so “effective” that few women I met seemed willing to rock the boat. Indeed, all the women I met talked about how expensive it is to raise children, the underlying implication could be that it is even more expensive to raise multiple children given the coercive Social Compensation Fees levied on families daring enough to have multiple children.

Clearly, China is sitting on a demographic time bomb. If the population continues to grow at its current rate, it will run into problems of resource allocation. I went to China to look into the resources of the UN Population Fund – all \$3.5 million of its annual budget. When comparing the budget of the UNFPA with the overall budget of the Chinese State Birth Planning Commission -- \$3.6 *billion* – it quickly becomes apparent that China is not interested in UNFPA for its money. Rather, the PRC is interested in the fig leaf UNFPA provides in its attempt to show the world that it conforms to international norms and conventions for family planning. By having a UNFPA presence in China, the PRC can hold this up to the world as “evidence” that it follows generally accepted norms vis-à-vis family planning. In fact, it does not, and the limited presence of UNFPA in China may actually hurt efforts to bring the country’s policies more in line with international norms. This leaves UNFPA with only two options, as I see it: expand into more counties in China – unlikely given its tremendous resource constraints; or scale back and demand real reforms of the Chinese government before agreeing to share international expertise and before granting international acceptance of Chinese practices. Given the codification on September 1 of China’s one-child policy, UNFPA should act forcefully to demand changes to this law, to the coercive fines and so-called Social Compensation Fees.

Before our departure for China, we were cautioned by certain members of Congress that it would be impossible to get Chinese citizens to speak openly to our group. China is, after all, a police state. With all due respect, I believe that many of the women I met were able to speak openly and honestly. While the answers they gave were not the ones that some in the U.S. would choose to believe, I would like to think I was able to sift through the half-truths and obfuscation to come out with a relatively clear picture of the birth planning decisions made by dozens of women in rural and urban China.

The opportunity I had to travel relatively freely throughout China is one that is afforded to very few people. The Chinese government was accommodating in that we were allowed to travel anywhere we chose in the country. Were we fully free? That is doubtful. Everywhere we went, we were accompanied by an official of the State Birth Planning Commission. At the initiation of our trip, I did not think it would be possible to operate as freely as I would have liked. In truth, the representative of the State Birth Planning Commission was more of a token than anything else. He facilitated our encounters in health centers and in factories, nothing more.

In closing, I would like to express my thanks to those who facilitated the visit while assiduously avoiding any effort to color our team’s impressions or influence our opinions. These include individuals in the State Department, the American Embassy in Beijing and the American Consulates General in Shanghai and Guangzhou. I urge the Administration to continue to monitor closely this aspect of Chinese life. As I mentioned, China’s continued population explosion is the elephant in the room that no one wants to discuss and all would rather ignore. It will place ever-increasing strains on natural resources, public services, and employment. These strains will be felt up and down the political spectrum, and they must be factored into our decision-making as we deal with China in this new century.

Thank You.