

"Voices of the Small Handful: 1989 Student Movement Leaders Assess Human Rights in Today's China"

**Testimony before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China
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First, I want to thank the Commission for allowing me the opportunity to share some of my opinions and ideas. It is my great honor to be able to speak before you today.

It has been fourteen years since the June 4 Tiananmen massacre of 1989. If we want to attempt to summarize the changes in China over these past fourteen years, I think there are three things that need to be noted. First, I think we can all agree that there has been much progress in China in terms of economic freedoms. Second, even at the social level, people have more space for freedom. But in terms of democratic politics and political reform, I can say that there really has been no change or progress whatsoever. The lack of transparency and openness was most notably revealed in the recent case of the cover-up of the SARS epidemic.

With respect to this latter situation I have five points to share with you today. I think we can admit that there has been some progress on human rights. But I think that this progress, at least partly, if not completely, is due to the pressure from the international community. As an example we can look at the period between 1992 and 1997. During that time there was consistent considerable pressure from the West and as a result human rights violations in China decreased notably. After 1997, however, when the pressure was relaxed, there was substantial erosion of China's human rights record. Therefore, I strongly believe that the United States and other Western countries should keep up their ongoing pressure on China to improve its human rights situation. I disagree with those who fear that if the U.S. keeps up its human rights pressures on China that this will have a negative effect on Sino-U.S. relations.

Second, it is obvious that China still lacks a mature civil society. However, over the last fourteen years we have witnessed the gradual emergence of a developing civil society. I think that it is very important that the United States pay attention to these sprouts of civil society in China and do all that it can to cultivate them. I believe that it is short-sighted for the U.S. government only to focus on the actors in the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party. Therefore, I think that the United States China policy should move from attention only on human rights issues to other issues of political reform and democratic politics. One way that the U.S. can do this is to provide support for NGOs and universities in China as a way to promote social contacts.

Third, as the U.S. is facing the challenge of terrorism in the new century, I can completely understand the necessity to strengthen its strategy against terrorism. However, I am worried that an unfortunate side-effect of this strategy may be a tightening of the U.S. policy that allows Chinese students and scholars to come to the States for exchanges, study, and visits. As one of the beneficiaries of this program myself, as well as a beneficiary of the human rights pressure from the international community, I sincerely hope that this will not occur. The current generation of overseas Chinese students, sooner or later, will return to China, and I believe they will be a motivating force for the further development of reform in China, including political reform. Therefore, I think it is important that the U.S. government allow this door to

remain open, and even to open it wider by expanding its contacts with the Chinese students already in America.

Fourth, it is not enough for the U.S. government merely to take a general stand to promote democracy in China. I think a more detailed and in-depth strategy is required, for instance based on specific cases, such as projects promoting the rule of law, freedom of the press, or workers rights. There are many worthwhile projects that are being undertaken in China today, and I and my colleagues would be happy to introduce them to you. However, I think a note of caution is necessary with respect to support from the U.S. to projects being carried out within China. This is a very sensitive issue and there is a thin line between seeing support for such projects because they are meant to help China and seeing support for such projects because they are meant to prevent China from becoming strong. It is very easy for many Chinese people to misinterpret the intentions from abroad. Therefore, it is advisable to first make contacts with the liberal intellectuals in China who are more open-minded about aid and support from abroad.

Fifth, when I noted above that the U.S. should transfer its focus from human rights issues to democracy, I do not mean to imply that human rights issues are not important. I would like to use this chance to raise the cases of Wang Bingzhang, which I am sure you are all aware of; Yang Jianli who attempted to return to China last year and since then has been held incommunicado by the Chinese government; Li Hai who reported information to the outside world about prisoners in China and as a result was sentenced in 1995 for nine years; Yang Zili who organized political discussions and now faces a long-term sentence; and Huang Qi who used the Internet to spread ideas of political reform and last month was sentenced to five years in prison.

China is now entering a crucial period. It is impossible to predict whether future developments will be positive or negative. But there is one thing that we certainly can all be sure of. That is, there are a number of things that we on the outside can do to help China. Even though I am studying in America now, my long-term plan remains to return to my country. Working together with a group of young educated Chinese in the States and elsewhere who are concerned about China's future, we hope to increase cooperative efforts with all parts of American society, including Congress, to bring about eventual political change in China.