

China Trip Report

Rep. Frank Wolf & Rep. Chris Smith
June 28 - July 1, 2008

This report provides details of my trip to Beijing, China, June 28 - July 1, 2008. I was accompanied by Rep. Chris Smith of New Jersey, a senior Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and a member of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), which monitors human rights and the development of the rule of law in China.

Before going into detail about my trip, I want to express my deepest sympathy to victims of the recent earthquake in China. While the death and destruction has been well documented, I believe it is important for the Chinese people to know that the people of America grieve with them. I was pleased that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with quake victims and toured a relief camp in Dujiangyan, a city near the epicenter of the May 12 earthquake, during her recent trip to China.

This was my second visit to China. My first was in 1991, also with Rep. Smith. I also have been to Tibet.

Among the reasons for my recent trip was to visit a Protestant “house church,” sometimes also referred to as an underground church since the Chinese government refuses to recognize these as legitimate places of worship. They are called “house churches” because they often meet in private houses or apartments. Sadly, their members are regularly harassed, detained and often jailed by the government.

Rep. Smith and I also wanted to meet with Chinese political dissidents in their homeland, visit an Internet café to see if access to certain Web sites is blocked by the government and witness firsthand the human rights conditions which many groups such as Human Rights Watch and Reporters Without Borders claim to have deteriorated in the run-up to the 2008 Summer Olympics.

We were only able to visit one “house church” and only then for a brief period of time because we were followed to the site by the Chinese state security services. The members of the congregation wanted us to stay, but we did not want to put any of them at risk of being targeted for punishment by the government. We did attend mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Beijing, a historic Roman Catholic Church also known as the South Cathedral. While parishioners are able to meet openly in this state-registered church, it is not without restraints. Registered Catholic bishops are forced to “exercise their faith according to Party-dedicated terms,” according to the CECC.

Our attempt to meet with Chinese human rights lawyers and other political dissidents was

equally disappointing. We were scheduled to have dinner the first night we were in Beijing with several private Chinese citizens, including Li Baiguang, a distinguished human rights lawyer who just weeks earlier I presented with a National Endowment for Democracy award at a reception on Capitol Hill. However, within a few hours of our arrival in Beijing, we began receiving word that Mr. Li and many of the other individuals invited to dinner had been visited by the Chinese security police and warned not to meet with us. Mr. Li was actually taken to a town several hours away from Beijing and at least two other individuals were placed under house arrest. The one individual who was able to meet us, Pastor Zhang Ming-xuan, was later placed under house arrest. Thankfully, all the individuals detained in conjunction with our visit have now been released. (Copies of news accounts of the arrests are attached, including articles in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*.)

It should be noted that the Chinese security police followed us to every meeting we had and we suspect listened in on all our conversations judging from questions we received from Chinese officials which could only have been known from monitoring our private conversations.

During a two-hour meeting with Ambassador Li Zhaoxing, the former Chinese Foreign Minister who now chairs the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress, Congressman Smith and I both pressed for the release of the detained individuals. In addition, we presented Ambassador Li with a list 734 other political prisoners compiled by the CECC and asked that they, too, be released. A copy of the list is available online at www.cecc.gov. Click on the headline: **Partial List of Political Prisoners Known or Believed to be Detained or Imprisoned in China as of June 26 (734 Cases)**. The list provides the name and age of the prisoners and, if available, the name of the prison or place at which they are being detained, the length of their sentence and a brief summary of the reason for their detention.

One such example is Zhang Rongliang. Below is the summary of his case provided in the CECC document:

“According to China Aid Association and Compass Direct, on December 1, 2004, security officials detained unregistered Protestant pastor Zhang Rongliang in Xuzhai village, located in Zhengzhou city in Henan province. Zhang, a leader of the China for Christ Church, a network of house churches that Zhang estimated to have up to 10 million members, had been hiding for several years. According to Dui Hua information, authorities formally arrested Zhang on December 31. The Zhongmou County People's Court sentenced Zhang on June 29, 2006, to seven years and six months in prison on charges of fraudulently obtaining border-exit documents and illegally crossing the border. The Zhengzhou Intermediate People's Court rejected his appeal on September 11, 2006. Zhang is held in Henan No. 1 Prison. He has reportedly been subjected to electric shock while imprisoned and suffers from hypertension and diabetes. He is known for his co-authorship of a house church confession of faith and other articles.”

It is my understanding that he is allowed one 30-minute visit a month from a member of his family and a prison guard sits next to him during the visit. Since his arrest, his family relies on donations from members of his church to survive.

Protestant “house church” leaders aren't the only individuals arrested for practicing their

faith. Catholic bishops, Muslim Uyghurs, Falun Gong followers and Buddhist monks have all been harassed, beaten and jailed.

According to the Cardinal Kung Foundation, currently every one of the approximately 35 underground bishops of the Catholic Church is either in jail, under house arrest, under strict surveillance or in hiding.

Renowned human rights advocate Rebiya Kadeer, who now lives in Fairfax County, has watched in exile as the Chinese government arrested and beat her sons. The Chinese government has a long record of criminalizing any form of political dissent expressed by Uyghurs.

All that we experienced and saw during our visit was consistent with the heartbreaking accounts that we have heard from political dissidents and persecuted people of faith in China for years. These personal testimonies are, of course, echoed in the media on a host of different fronts.

For example, I was deeply disturbed by the reports and images coming out of Tibet of monks and Tibetan youth who have been beaten down in the street and rounded up in house-to-house searches for protesting China's rule of the Tibet region. Scores of Tibetans are believed to have been killed in the violence, and hundreds of Tibetans have been arrested by Chinese police for participating in protests. China has a long history of attempts to liquidate Tibet's culture and presence in China. Given this legacy of violence and discrimination by the Chinese government, sadly, I'm not surprised it would crack down with such brutal force against these Tibetan protestors.

A group of Falun Gong practitioners who were peacefully demonstrating recently against the Chinese government in Flushing, New York, were cursed and violently attacked by a group of counter-demonstrators. Six of the counter-demonstrators were subsequently arrested by the New York Police Department.

There are some indications that the Chinese Consulate in New York was responsible for encouraging and bribing counter-demonstrators to violently attack the Falun Gong. I recently read a transcript of an alleged conversation between an unnamed investigator and the Chinese Consul General in which he admits to encouraging attacks in the United States against those who speak out against the Chinese government. This is inexcusable in the United States, and I have personally appealed to FBI Director Robert Mueller to conduct a full investigation of this incident.

We also visited an Internet café to see if access to the Internet was restricted by the Chinese government. It was. We tried to access a number of different Web sites, including the National Endowment for Democracy, information about the Dali Lama and media sites including Voice of America and Reporters Without Borders. None of the sites would allow us access. All came up with an error message. It was interesting to note that in order for us to gain access to a computer, we had to provide a copy of our passports.

During the debate over granting China permanent normal trade relations status, proponents argued that economic liberalization would lead to political liberalization in China, that exposing China to the West's ideas and values would lead them to play a more constructive role in the international community, and that the U.S. and other industrialized nations could influence China through economic activity to better respect the rights of its citizens to fundamental human rights and the unfettered practice of their faith.

Instead, we have seen that the Chinese government is unmoved and, in fact, emboldened in its ongoing repression while at the same time experiencing explosive economic growth. We have seen the tragic flaw in de-linking the "export" of democracy and freedom from unbridled capitalism. We have seen our own short-sightedness in making the protection of basic liberties secondary to the unfettered access to markets. Ultimately the China of today is worse than the China of yesterday, or of last year, or of the last decade.

China is not progressing. It is regressing. It is more violent, more repressive, and more resistant to democratic values than it was before we opened our ports to freely accept Chinese products.

Given these realities, I do not believe the Olympic Games, an event designed to lift up "the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles," according to its own charter, should have ever been awarded to China.

I had called on President Bush and other senior members of the administration to boycott the opening ceremonies this August. I have even tried to pass legislation barring American tax dollars from being used to pay for planned trips by senior U.S. government officials. My attempt to offer the measure to a supplemental appropriations bill moving through Congress this spring was rebuffed because no amendments were permitted.

I am deeply disappointed by President Bush's apparent decision to attend the opening ceremonies next month. The political prisoners in China and Chinese dissidents around the world will be demoralized by what the Chinese government will surely portray as symbolic support for its regime if senior American officials attend the games.

America must be a country that stands up for basic decency and human rights. America must speak out on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves – men and women who are being persecuted for their religious or political beliefs. Our foreign policy must be a policy that helps promote human rights and freedom, not a policy that sides with a government that oppresses its own citizens.

There have been reports by groups such as Amnesty International that the Chinese government has rounded up people in the streets of Beijing who might "threaten stability" during the Olympic Games, and has detained them without trial. Human Rights Watch has reported that the Chinese government has tightened restrictions on domestic and foreign media, in an effort to control what information leaks out during coverage of the Olympics about China's repressive and violent nature.

China's desperation to conceal its true character leading up to the Games smacks of the Nazi bid for the Olympic Games. Analysts have likened the 2008 Beijing Olympics to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, in which Nazi Germany soft-pedaled its anti-Semitic agenda and plans for territorial expansion, fooling the international community with an image of a peaceful, tolerant Germany under the cover of the Olympic Games.

On the plane to Beijing Rep. Smith and I made a pact with one another. We agreed that if we saw improvements in civil liberties and human rights in China that we would publicly acknowledge the government's progress. Unfortunately, we did not see progress.

I fear that after the Olympic torch is extinguished, and the world's attention wanes, the Chinese government will be left to its own devices to further tighten its grip on power at the expense of brave men and women who daily yearn for true freedom. That, indeed, will be tragic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

* Since President Bush has made the decision to attend the Beijing Games, he should plan to deliver a major speech on human rights while in China, similar to what President Ronald Reagan during his historic visit to Moscow in 1988. During the trip, Reagan visited the restored Danilov Monastery, where he delivered a brief, but powerful speech calling on the Soviets to reopen thousands of boarded-up churches, to end the oppression of banned religious groups and to revoke Soviet law banning religious instruction. The speech dramatically raised the issue of human rights in the Soviet Union because it was done in such a high profile and public way. The president should do the same thing in China. The people of China, and the dissidents who sit in their jail cells day-after-day, week-after-week, year-after-year, should know that the president of the United States of America and leader of the free world stands with them in their quest for freedom, and not with the repressive communist regime of China.

* President Bush, Secretary Rice and U.S. Ambassador to China Clark Randt should publicly raise cases involving human rights and religious persecution with the leaders of the Chinese government. It is not enough to just raise these cases in private. Ambassador Randt and his staff should push to visit as many of the prisoners as possible and forcefully advocate for their release. Taking another page from President Reagan's 1988 trip to Moscow, where he met with 96 dissidents and dissident family members, the president should meet with Chinese dissidents and their families when he is in Beijing.

* The U.S. Embassy in Beijing should be an "Island of Freedom," a place where dissidents and others should be able to come when threatened with arrest or detention.

* The number of individuals assigned to work on human rights and religious persecution issues at the U.S. Embassy in China needs to be increased. There presently is only one person dealing with human rights issues. If the State Department can send staff to Beijing on a temporary basis to help with the Olympics, it can assign at least two permanent staff to the Embassy to help address human rights issues.

* President Bush, Secretary Rice and Ambassador Randt must continue to push China to help end the genocide in Darfur. The Chinese government can and should do more, including ending its practice of selling weapons to the Sudanese government, which, in turn, are being used to kill and maim innocent civilians in Darfur.

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