



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

A Stateless Breakfast for Human Rights Defenders in China

Friday, September 25th, 2015

8:30 – 10:00 AM

House Visitor Center 201

Opening Remarks

Good morning. I am Jim McGovern, Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. I would like to welcome you to our stateless breakfast in honor of human rights defenders in China.

Yesterday, Xi Jinping, the President of the People's Republic of China, arrived in Washington for his first official state visit. Last night he had dinner with President Obama. Today there will be a welcoming ceremony with a 21-gun salute, followed by meetings and a press conference with Mr. Obama, and a visit to Capitol Hill for meetings with Members of Congress. Tonight he and his wife will be honored with a state dinner.

I am among the members of Congress who want to see a *constructive* relationship with China. China is a major world power, and I would like to have China as a *partner* in strengthening and sustaining the international rules and norms that countries around the world, including ours, have helped to construct over many years, to the benefit of the entire world. Those norms include the fundamental human rights, which reflect our values and are essential to protecting human dignity for all people.

Unfortunately, China's record on human rights has been extremely concerning for a long time, and since Xi Jinping took office, things have only gotten worse. Just since the beginning of this year, organizations in China working on disability and health rights, on women's rights, and on anti-discrimination issues, among others, have been harassed and forced to close. Staff members of these organizations have been detained and face trial, or have been released on bail but still face charges -- this is the situation of the Five Feminists, targeted for promoting equal rights for women.

In July the world witnessed a huge crackdown on human rights lawyers and their supporters in China; more than 300 were detained, interrogated and intimidated. At least 23 remain in detention or have disappeared into police custody.

Also last July, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, a well-known and highly respected Tibetan religious leader, died in Chinese custody. He was serving a life sentence for supposedly ‘causing explosions’ and ‘inciting separatism,’ charges which he steadfastly denied. Many of us around the world asked the Chinese authorities to release Tenzin Delek on medical parole, because he was critically ill. But they ignored us, and as I have said many times, they bear the responsibility for his death.

So while I recognize and support the importance of engaging China and want to see a constructive relationship, I also know that human rights must be part of that engagement. I worry that because our president seeks to be a gracious host, Xi Jinping could come away with the wrong impression – he could conclude that for all the talk, human rights doesn’t really matter to us. This event this morning is our way of sending a powerful message that human rights matter a great deal; they are just as important as the economic and security issues on the table. In fact, we are reminded everyday as we read the news of just how important they are. Conflict is exploding around the world in places that systematically deny fundamental human rights and basic human dignity.

Building a strong, long-term relationship with China, like any other U.S. ally, means we must be able to honest. And the truth is that these human rights abuses cannot be ignored. To be a full partner on the global stage, China must take concrete steps

to strengthen human rights and support the reforms needed for a truly open society. As Ti-Anna Wang [wrote](#) in 2009, “Any government that jails its own people for political dissent still has a long way to go to become a respected member of the international community.”

The people and groups who the Chinese authorities are oppressing will not have a seat at the White House state dinner tonight. So we decided to host them here this morning, because their voices must be heard. This is a moment for real leadership and the world is watching.

I now turn to my esteemed colleague and Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, Congressman Joe Pitts, for his opening remarks.