



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Defending Prisoners of Conscience

February 15, 2018

2:00 – 3:30 PM

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on Defending Prisoners of Conscience.

Prisoners of conscience (POCs) are persons imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their political, religious, or other conscientiously held beliefs, even though they have neither used nor advocated for violence.

As the number of POCs continues to increase globally, and as the space for civil society continues to shrink under authoritarian governments, it is vital that the international community, and Congress in particular, bring attention to those imprisoned for peacefully exercising their most basic human rights, and work to secure their freedom.

In 2012, the TLHRC launched the Defending Freedoms Project (DFP) to help Members of Congress advocate for the release of POCs around the world. Through the DFP, Members "adopt" incarcerated prisoners of conscience, highlight the circumstances of their imprisonment and stand in solidarity with the prisoner through letters, floor speeches, Op-Eds, and other actions to keep them and their situation in the public eye so they are not forgotten. The advocacy efforts of Members and their staff have often contributed to better prison conditions, the reduction of prison sentences, and even their release.

Today's witness organizations are all partners working on the DFP to identify and advocate for POCs. They will focus on a variety of POCs, including those who are imprisoned as journalists,

religious leaders, scientists, human rights and democracy activists, and scholars. We thank you for your commitment to this vital work, and for coming to share your expertise with us today.

I want to thank my fellow Members on the Commission who are fighting on behalf of the prisoners listed under the DFP. I look forward to hearing about their experience doing this kind advocacy. We will also hear the powerful statements from several prisoners who have been released, and from the family members of several who are still incarcerated.

In light of this important work, Co-Chair McGovern and I will be introducing a resolution expressing support for the designation of a prisoners of conscience day. This resolution will bring attention to the thousands of prisoners of conscience around the world, and will underscore the importance of prioritizing the protection and freedom of these prisoners as a United States foreign policy goal.

I actually first became involved with the TLHRC when I was invited to advocate for a prisoner of conscience through the Defending Freedoms Project. For several years now I have sought to bring attention to the unjust imprisonment of democracy activist, Zhu Yufu in China.

Zhu is a poet who was imprisoned for his view that the people of China should be able to believe and express themselves according to their own conscience. For this, he received a seven-year prison sentence under very harsh conditions.

The Defending Freedoms Project consists of other similar heroes of human rights. Currently we have over 20 prisoners of conscience who do not have a Member of Congress advocating on their behalf. My desire is to see my congressional colleagues “adopt” each of these prisoners – beginning today even. Over on the side table we have the profiles of each prisoner of conscience in need of an advocate. We encourage you to select one of these prisoners who has not yet been adopted, to take this opportunity back to your Member, and to email or otherwise let the Commission know of your selection. We will then send you a custom starter kit to help your office in their advocacy efforts. This is an easy way for your office to make a difference on international human rights for one person.

I would like to close my remarks by reading a statement from Zhu Yufu’s son that he wrote for this hearing:

I, Zhu Ang, the son of Zhu Yufu, represent my father to give his current situation. This is on the basis of personal visits with my father that my mother and I have made monthly over these past years.

Zhu Yufu was sentenced to seven years for “inciting subversion” in 2011, while he wrote a well-known poem, It’s time. That is his third imprisonment since he participated in the establishment of the China Democratic Party in 1998. He is still in prison now.

His first prison term started in 1999, and he served 7 years for “subversion of state power.” The first imprisonment was so cruel at that time: sleep deprivation used during interrogation, threatening his family, inciting criminals to beat him together. After his sentencing, he experienced 24-hour surveillance, confinement, and continuous standing as frequently used punishments. After a beating, he was sent to the hospital for a perforated eardrum.

Then, the international community noticed such human rights disasters happening in China, both to my father and other political prisoners. The news reported on this, and political leaders from several countries met with the Chinese government.

Then, the Chinese government dealt very deceptively with the international community when it came to my father. They asked my father to confess in exchange for better treatment, and told the outside world my father was living well. While my father refused to plead guilty, all his reading privileges, relief, and medical treatment were suspended, even for years.

During the second imprisonment, my father was accused of “obstructing official business” and sentenced to two years in 2007. When the police pursued his friend for no reason, my father and I were taken away.

We were sent into the same detention center but had different rooms. My father still did not plead guilty, but this time he was most worried about me. I told him I was okay, but my rib was fractured after a prisoner hit me. The world knows few details about this period, since it was not named a political crime, but in fact, we were politically sentenced and persecuted.

The most recent imprisonment has lasted until now. The world put much effort into reporting my father’s plight. He is already an old man now, with severe diseases all over his body. He never got the chance to receive medical treatment for his gallstone, spine ache, cardiac tumor, and prostatitis.

Prison officers exempt him from daily labor, and sometimes he is given the right to write and draw. However, chances for exercise, chats, and mail are still rare. Family visits have been restricted, and no conversation about anything other than family-related subjects are allowed. He is not allowed to read the Bible.

Other prisoners and officers scolded and humiliated him from time to time; they always seek to destroy his confidence, but he still keeps up hope. He knows I am safe and have gotten back my job, my friends, and my normal life in another country, for which many people exerted effort.

In February 2017, my father was cast down by a prison officer and fainted. The U.S. Congress learned of this very soon and was concerned about it. Even though the prison officers lied and declared to the public that my father fell down by himself, they dare not arbitrarily hurt him like this again. In the last conversation state security officers had with my father, they threatened to

keep him under house arrest after his release. I know that there is no ultimate solution for saving my father unless he is set free.

I appreciate all the kindness from people who keep up their concern for my father and others. I am so worried about his coming release. They may do nothing but move him from one jail to another. All I can do is just tell the truth, and let history make the judgment.

Zhu Ang, 1/27/2018

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