



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

# **Tenth Anniversary Celebration**

**Tuesday, December 11, 2018**

**3:30 – 5:30 p.m.**

**2168 Rayburn House Office Building – The Gold Room**

### **Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Good afternoon. I would like to join my esteemed Co-Chair in welcoming you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's Tenth Anniversary Celebration.

For all those gathered here today, we are very grateful for your commitment, support and partnership with the Commission over the past decade. We are so glad to have such a diverse, bipartisan coalition of people and groups committed to working together on international human rights issues. Some of you have testified at the Commission's hearings and briefings, others have updated us on rapidly evolving human rights situations, and others have worked to find congressional advocates for prisoners of conscience through the Defending Freedoms Project. I see past staff and fellows who have worked on the Commission here today, and we even have all the past co-chairs of the Commission with us, along with members of the Lantos family. I am thankful for you all, and I encourage you to continue pressing forward in this often-difficult work.

Contrary to how it might sometimes feel, we are making a difference for those around the world suffering under repression, who have had their most fundamental and universal human freedoms stripped from them. We must continue to find ways to strategize and work together, despite our differences, to strengthen the global commitment to human rights. It is also important that we celebrate our achievements in this work together.

Since the Commission began in 2008, it has held 201 official hearings and briefings. It has sent an estimated 50 letters to US government officials and foreign governments on a variety of human rights concerns. It has seen the release of 76 prisoners of conscience from 22 different countries through the Defending Freedoms Project. As I look back over my time of involvement with the Commission, there are a couple key highlights that stick out.

First, it has been a huge privilege to serve as an advocate for Chinese prisoner of conscience, Zhu Yufu over the past six years. I have come to greatly admire Zhu as a human rights activist, as a person of faith, a lover of democracy and as an artist. His endurance in the face of an oppressive government seeking to strip him of his freedom and separate him from his family has inspired me in my work. I was overjoyed earlier this year when Zhu was released to house arrest. Soon afterwards I received a gift, a beautiful piece of artwork by Zhu featuring hand-drawn calligraphy. I will cherish this gift and will continue to call for Zhu's release from house arrest.

In addition to all the hearings and briefings, I have enjoyed how the Commission has found creative ways to use art, media and film to propose solutions to human rights challenges. We partnered with Chinese artist Ai Weiwei to learn about human rights defenders at the Hirshhorn Museum. We also screened his film, Human Flow, at the E Street Cinema and held a fruitful discussion on the global refugee crisis.

Lastly, it has been a great honor to serve as the Co-Chair of the Commission over the past two years. I would especially like to thank my good friend, and mentor in this work, Jim McGovern. When I became the new Co-Chair, Jim lost no time bringing me up to speed on his many human rights priorities and sought to welcome me into his work. In a similar way, his staff have worked closely with my office in an equal and transparent partnership. I greatly appreciate that, and I believe it is one of the reasons we have been able to accomplish so much over the past two years. Please join me in giving Co-Chair McGovern a warm round of applause for his chairmanship of the Commission for the last ten years.

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