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“Chen Guangcheng: His Case, Cause, Family, and Those Who Are Helping Him”

*Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee**Excerpts of Remarks by Chairman Chris Smith**May 15, 2012*

Thank you for joining us for this hearing to examine the status of the Chinese human rights defender, Chen Guangcheng, and that of his family and others who have been targeted by Chinese officials in connection with his case.

This hearing will also focus on Chen’s cause. Chen Guangcheng is among the bravest defenders of women’s rights in the world. Chen defended thousands of women from the ongoing, most egregious systematic state-sponsored exploitation and abuse of women in human history—pervasive forced abortion and involuntary sterilization as part of China’s one child per couple policy—and has suffered torture, cruel and degrading treatment, unjust incarceration, and multiple beatings as a result.

The sheer magnitude of this exploitation of women has been largely overlooked and trivialized by many—and even enabled. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has for over thirty years supported, defended, and whitewashed the crimes against women and children Chen struggled to expose. That’s why President Reagan and more recently President Bush defunded the UNFPA. In an indefensible reversal, the Obama Administration has provided approximately \$165 million to the UNFPA.

Mr. Chen was blinded by a severe fever as an infant, and is a self-taught lawyer. He garnered international attention in 2005 when he organized a class action lawsuit against local officials who were forcing women to undergo abortions and sterilizations to comply with China’s one-child policy. There were as many as 130,000 involuntary abortions and sterilizations being performed in Linyi County in a single year. In response to his heroic efforts to defend women and men from these monstrous abuses, Mr. Chen was sentenced to over four years in prison on trumped up charges, and then subjected to extralegal house arrest.

In response to his incredible escape on April 22nd and the events that followed, I chaired an emergency hearing about Mr. Chen with the Congressional-Executive Commission on China in this same room on May 3rd. During that hearing, which took place just days after Mr. Chen left the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, Mr. Chen spoke to us from his hospital bed in Beijing over Mr. Bob Fu's cell phone.

Mr. Chen indicated that he wanted to come to the United States "for some time of rest," noting that he has not had rest for the past 10 years. He asked for a face to face meeting with Secretary of State Clinton, who was in Beijing. He also expressed fear for the life of his family members, and said that he was most concerned about their safety, especially that of his mother and brother. He was extremely concerned about their welfare and whereabouts.

In that context, Mr. Chen noted that security officers had installed seven video cameras and even an electric fence around his house in Shandong Province, saying that they "want to see what else Chen Guangcheng can do." As soon as the authorities learned of his escape, they refused to allow his daughter to attend school. For these reasons, he was justifiably worried that the villagers and others who were helping him were being subjected to severe, life-threatening retribution.

Reports that we have received since then are corroborating Mr. Chen's fears. Following his escape from house arrest, Chinese officials started breaking into the homes of his family in the same village and rounding up those who may have assisted him for interrogations. When local officials and thugs broke into the home of Mr. Chen's brother, Mr. Chen's nephew, Chen Kegui reportedly tried to defend himself with a kitchen knife. He is now in a police detention center. I am extremely concerned for his welfare, as well as that of Mr. Chen's other extended family members.

The day after that emergency hearing, on May 4th, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on their website the statement that "[a]s a Chinese citizen, [Mr. Chen] may apply like other Chinese citizens according to the laws and normal procedures of the relevant departments." The U.S. Department of State also issued a press release, announcing that:

"[t]he Chinese Government stated today that Mr. Chen Guangcheng has the same right to travel abroad as any other citizen of China. Mr. Chen has been offered a fellowship from an American university, where he can be accompanied by his wife and two children. "The Chinese Government has indicated that it will accept Mr. Chen's applications for appropriate travel documents. The United States Government expects that the Chinese Government will expeditiously process his applications for these documents...."

Now, eleven days later, Mr. Chen is still in the same hospital room, with his wife and two children under *de facto* house arrest. Although Mr. Chen is under the impression that his application for a passport was made last Sunday when he was visited by a Chinese official – and under Chinese law, blind persons are supposed to be able to apply orally for travel documents – he has not been notified of any further action on the application. With the exception of the half-

hour each morning and afternoon that the children are escorted outside by one of the nurses, he and his family are not allowed to leave the hospital and no one is allowed inside to see them.

Anyone who attempts to see Mr. Chen risks severe retaliation. For example, on May 2nd, human rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong attempted to visit Mr. Chen in the hospital. He was forcibly taken away by police officers. It was later reported that Mr. Jiang was beaten so severely that he lost his hearing in at least one ear, and he has been forced to move from Beijing to Hebei Province until after the 18th Party Congress.

Mr. Jiang was here in the United States in October 2009 and testified twice before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission. Mr. Wolf chaired one of those hearings – I chaired another. One of his recommendations was that President Obama speak with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao about freeing a number of political prisoners, including Chen Guangcheng who was imprisoned at that time. Now, Mr. Jiang himself must be included in the list of those on whose behalf the United States advocates.

Chinese nationals are not the only ones prohibited from trying to meet Mr. Chen. The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China reported in early May that officials threatened to revoke the visas of foreign journalists who entered the hospital without permission. I would note here that many journalists have demonstrated courage and laudable perseverance in publicizing Mr. Chen's plight. It is largely due to their promotion of Mr. Chen's case that it has reached this stage of his possible travel to the United States. I would earnestly ask them not to forget Mr. Chen and his family, or his extended family and others who are risking their security and lives on his behalf. The story, unfortunately, is far from over.

Before I turn to our panel of distinguished witnesses to discuss the current situation, I invite other members of the Subcommittee to make opening comments.