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U.N. Investigation, Human Rights Leaders Urge China to Immediately and Unconditionally Release Chen Kegui

*Excerpts of Remarks
Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04)
Press Conference on Chen Kegui
June 25th, 2014*

The jailing of Chen Kegui is indeed arbitrary, as found by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. But it is also brutal and scary and unconscionable. It is unlikely that a country like China, which aspires to be a great power, can ever become one if treats its citizens thusly. Along with the UN, we urge China to immediately and unconditionally release Chen Kegui.

It would be tempting to dismiss Chen Kegui's case, if it was an isolated one. But his detention repeats and all too familiar pattern that includes Nobel Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, human rights lawyers Gao Zhisheng and Yang Maodong, and hundreds of others this year alone.

The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention renders the following opinion:

“The deprivation of liberty of Chen Kegui is arbitrary, being in contravention of articles 9, 10, and 11 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and falls within category III of the categories referred to by the Working Group when considering the cases submitted to it.”

“Consequent upon the opinion rendered, the Working Group requests the Government to take the necessary steps to remedy the situation, which include the immediate release of

Chen Kegui and to grant him compensation for the harm he has suffered during the period of his arbitrary detention.”

President Xi Jinping has presided over a sweeping crackdown on rights advocates and lawyers that rivals any in the past 15 years. And, this is on top of the ongoing pressures faced by Tibetan Buddhist, Uyghur Muslims, Falun Gong practitioners, labor and religious freedom advocates.

President Xi has also promised to stamp out Western influence and values, including human rights, free speech, civil society, internet freedom, and constitutional democracy. These are not the actions of a willing ally.

The United States must remain committed to those in China who continue to struggle for universal freedoms and human rights. The U.S. must also lead in promoting human rights, recognizing that almost all of our strategic interests depend on securing the free flow of information, the rule of law, and the ability of Chinese citizens to organize and speak their minds freely.

A creative human rights diplomacy with China has eluded the Obama Administration thus far. The human rights and democracy pillars are the least developed, least articulated, and least pursued parts of the Administration’s “Asia Pivot.”

It is time for a new approach, one that integrates human rights into all parts of the bilateral relationship. A policy where the President publicly meets with dissidents and their families. And, one where a human rights agenda is integrated across the entire structure of U.S.-China relations. Human rights are too critical to U.S. interests to be left to once-a-year Human Rights Dialogue.

If we don’t articulate clearly that human rights is a U.S. interest, critical to better relations, the Chinese government will never be interested in improving conditions for the Chinese people.

A good place to start such an approach is at the annual Strategic & Economic Dialogue, scheduled to meet again in early July.

We ask that Secretary Kerry seek the release of Chen Kegui and others rights defenders when he goes to Beijing in July. We also ask that he demonstrate U.S. leadership on human rights by creating a coordinated and creative approach to human rights diplomacy with China.