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**Congratulating Liu Xiaobo – and All of China’s Democratic Reformers–
and Urging the Chinese Government to Release Them**

Press Conference
2255 Rayburn, Washington, DC
December 7, 2010
By Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)

We’re here today to join the Norwegian Nobel Committee in honoring Liu Xiaobo, the great Chinese human rights activist – whom the Chinese government last year cruelly sentenced to 11 years imprisonment for his leading role in the Charter 08 democracy manifesto.

We’re also here to call on the Chinese government to release Liu and all of its political and religious prisoners, and to begin the process of democratic reform. And we’re also here to call on the world to bring new light and fresh scrutiny to the Chinese government’s horrific human rights record.

Liu, by his long leadership and the harsh persecution he has heroically borne, has become the symbol of two generations of Chinese reformers – he unites in himself the Tiananmen generation, and, through his role in Charter 08, the generation that has come on the scene today.

There is so much to admire in Liu Xiaobo – whatever aspect of his life we look at, we see extraordinary courage, magnanimity, integrity, and love – his love of China is obviously deep. His giving up of a brilliant academic career, even returning from a visiting professorship in New York City, to join the students on Tiananmen Square – his fasting on the square – his insistence on democratic process among the students – his efforts to avoid violence. And then the repeated imprisonments – years in detention and labor camp – publishing hundreds of brilliant essays dissecting the Chinese communist party’s propaganda, proposing alternatives – culminating in Charter 08 – and the magnificent way he conducted himself at the 2009 trial.

Liu’s “I Have No Enemies” statement at the close of his 2009 trial is the most concentrated expression I have ever read of a human rights defender’s integrity and love of country.

But I still want to say to this regime, which is depriving me of my freedom, that I stand by the convictions I expressed in my “June Second Hunger Strike Declaration” twenty years ago—I have no enemies and no hatred. None of the police who monitored, arrested,

and interrogated me, none of the prosecutors who indicted me, and none of the judges who judged me are my enemies. Although there is no way I can accept your monitoring, arrests, indictments, and verdicts, I respect your professions and your integrity, including those of the two prosecutors... who are now bringing charges against me... During interrogation... I could sense your respect and your good faith.

Hatred can rot away at a person's intelligence and conscience. Enemy mentality will poison the spirit of a nation, incite cruel mortal struggles, destroy a society's tolerance and humanity, and hinder a nation's progress toward freedom and democracy. That is why I hope to be able to transcend my personal experiences as I look upon our nation's development and social change, to counter the regime's hostility with utmost goodwill, and to dispel hatred with love.

At the conclusion of his statement, Liu addressed his wife, Liu Xia:

My dear, with your love I can calmly face my impending trial, having no regrets about the choices I've made and am optimistically awaiting tomorrow. I look forward to [the day] when my country is a land with freedom of expression, where the speech of every citizen will be treated equally well... where every citizen can state political views without fear, and where no one can under any circumstances suffer political persecution for voicing divergent political views. I hope that I will be the last victim of China's endless literary inquisitions and that from now on no one will be incriminated because of speech.

Freedom of expression is the foundation of human rights, the source of humanity, and the mother of truth. To strangle freedom of speech is to trample on human rights, stifle humanity, and suppress truth.

In order to exercise the right to freedom of speech conferred by the Constitution, one should fulfill the social responsibility of a Chinese citizen. There is nothing criminal in anything I have done. [But] if charges are brought against me because of this, I have no complaints.

In February of this year I led a group of six other Members in nominating Liu for the Nobel Peace Prize. Though we didn't know it at the time, many other people were doing the same thing – and we're especially thankful for the nominations by Nobel Peace laureates the 14th Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu, and for former Czech president Vaclav Havel's leadership in encouraging nominations by many Czech and Slovak parliamentarians.

In our letter, we nominated Liu as “a visionary leader,” remarkable for “his patriotism, his civic courage, and the generous tone of his work, which has never sought to divide his country or cause civil conflict, but always to raise the Chinese people's awareness of its dignity and rights, and to call on his government to govern within... the international human rights agreements it has signed.”

Yet as much as Liu Xiaobo was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for what he personally has done, he is also the representative of thousands of Chinese democracy advocates, human rights defenders, and

civil rights lawyers, of religious believers and labor activists. The Norwegian Nobel Committee said as much when it noted that, "the campaign to establish universal human rights also in China is being waged by many Chinese ... through the severe punishment meted out to him, Liu has become the foremost symbol of this wide-ranging struggle for human rights in China."

So many brave Chinese men and women come to mind here. I think first of the generation of Tiananmen – after Liu's wife told him of the award, he wept and dedicated the prize to "the Tiananmen martyrs" – and of those who have willingly taken up their legacy – heroes like Chen Guangcheng and Gao Zhisheng.

But of course there are so many others, including some who now live in the U.S. I have been blessed to know some of them: Bob Fu, Chai Ling, and Yang Jianli. And let's not forget the generation of giants who came before the Tiananmen generation. Here again I think of some of those I have been blessed to know: Harry Wu, who spent nineteen years in Chinese labor camps, Wei Jingsheng, founder of the Democracy Wall Movement who spent eighteen years in prison, Cardinal Kung – 30 years in prison for his faith, and Bishop Su, missing since 1997

In this award to Liu Xiaobo, all these people, and tens of thousands more, are being honored.

At the same time, in this award to Liu, there is a rebuke to the Chinese Communist Party, which has repeatedly held out the promise of political reform – for example in order to get admitted into the WTO, and to get the Beijing Olympics – and then utterly failed to deliver. The one essential reform is to begin phasing out one-party rule, to loosen and finally surrender give up the party's claim to total power over the Chinese people, to render itself accountable to the people. Sadly, this is as far away now as it was in 1990 or 2000, probably farther, as the party has regained its self-confidence, improved its techniques and technologies of control.

While Liu recognizes that, even with the best will in the world, the creation of a meaningful democracy in China will take time, and while he refuses to divide his country by condemning the government and its supporters – he is unyielding in his demand that, for the sake of the Chinese people, real democratic reform must begin immediately. This is at the heart of all his writings, and I believe it is real wisdom.

Finally, I'd like to remind everyone that this afternoon the House will be debating H. Res. 1717, a resolution I authored and that is co-sponsored by the other Members who nominated Liu for the prize, and many other members. The resolution congratulates Liu Xiaobo and calls on the Chinese government to release him. In its frank language on political prisoners, media and Internet censorship, the Chinese government's campaign of defamation against Liu Xiaobo, and its flat rejection of the Chinese government's insistence that Liu's imprisonment is a purely internal matter – this is one of the strongest resolutions the House has passed on human rights in China in many years.

This Nobel Award is an important chance to awaken the Chinese people to its rights and the government to its responsibilities. I will keep speaking out on this – including in Oslo, where I'll be attending the Nobel ceremonies this Friday.