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House of Representatives

“Empty Chair in Oslo for Liu Xiaobo”

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey

Madam Speaker,

In the theatrical adaptation of Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables*, Marius sings a haunting song – “Empty Chairs and Empty Tables” – an expression of agony at the loss of his idealistic comrades, gunned down on a barricade.

“There’s a grief that can’t be spoken,” he sings, “there’s a pain that goes on and on. Empty Chairs and empty tables, now my friends are dead and gone...”

“Here it was they lit the flame... Here they sang about tomorrow and tomorrow never came...from the table in the corner they could see a world reborn... And they rose with voices ringing. I can hear them now... Empty chairs and empty tables, where my friends will meet no more...”

When prisoner of conscience Liu Xiaobo, Nobel Peace Prize winner for 2010, learned that he was selected, he wept and dedicated his prize to the

martyrs of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Throughout China today, families and friends know heartbreaking loss and the agony of empty chairs and empty tables – where young, brave, idealistic democracy activists were gunned down, bayoneted, or beaten to death by Chinese government troops and secret police. Both before and since Tiananmen, Chinese men and women have sacrificed their freedom – even their lives – in the struggle for faith and liberty. Yet the struggle for freedom, rule of law, and respect for human rights continues despite the enormous cost to individual Chinese men and women.

At Oslo a couple of weeks ago, I had the privilege of witnessing the conferring of the Nobel Peace Prize on Liu Xiaobo’s empty chair – empty because this courageous nonviolent man of principle languishes in a lonely prison cell, serving an eleven-year sentence for promoting democracy in China, most recently through Charter 08, a human rights manifesto. In a stunning revelation of Beijing’s weakness, fear, and moral deficiency, even Liu’s wife and friends

were barred from attending the Nobel ceremony.

Amazingly, at his government show trial in 2009, Liu expressed absolutely no malice toward the dictatorship that so cruelly mistreats him – and millions of others like him.

He said, “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... 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.”

The Nobel Peace Prize ceremony has come and gone. And, I would note parenthetically, it was an honor to join you in Oslo, Madam Speaker, as well as Rep. David Wu and numerous Tiananmen Square alumnae – Chinese men and women who peacefully demonstrated for freedom in 1989 – including Yang Jianli, Chai Ling, Bob Fu, Fang Zheng, and Kaixi Wuer. It is now more important than ever that all of us who treasure freedom, democracy and human rights empathize more, pray more and do more to expose and combat the cruelty and the crimes committed on a daily basis by Beijing.

The brutality and violence that were witnessed by all the world in 1989

at Tiananmen continues unabated today, especially in the gulags – laogai – and detention centers throughout China, where people are systematically tortured, sometimes to death, particularly Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs, Tibetans, Christians, and democracy activists.

The brutality and violence of unrestrained dictatorship has – and continues to be – unleashed against hundreds of millions of Chinese women and children – victims of the barbaric one child per couple policy, a cruel policy that has made brothers and sisters illegal and relies on forced abortion – a crime categorized as a ‘crime against humanity’ at the Nazi war crime trial at Nuremberg.

As a result of the one child per couple policy, an estimated 100 million girls are missing – dead through sex-selective abortion – which is a gender crime of unimaginable depravity and has made China a magnet for sex trafficking. Chai Ling – one of the heroes of Tiananmen – has launched All Girls Allowed – an NGO that appeals to Beijing, the world, and especially mothers in China to protect the girl child in the womb.

And finally, even the Internet has been turned into a tool of repression and surveillance by the secret police.

The selection of Liu Xiaobo as the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize laureate obliges us to undertake sustained scrutiny and meaningful action.

Indifference or silence or feigned ignorance concerning the Chinese government’s appalling and massive human rights violations simply isn’t an option.