

Remarks on the 10th Anniversary of China's "709" Crackdown

Rep. Chris Smith

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Excerpt of Remarks

Good morning.

Today is a solemn and somber day, as we—members of Congress, and China human rights advocates, including Bob Fu and Anna Wang—mark the tenth anniversary of China's "709" crackdown.

On July 9, 2015, the Chinese Communist Party launched an unprecedented nationwide campaign targeting human rights lawyers and rights defenders. Across 23 provinces, more than 300 lawyers, legal assistants, and activists were detained on fabricated charges. Many were forcibly disappeared for months, subjected to torture, and coerced into televised "confessions." At least ten were later sentenced to lengthy prison terms. This sweeping repression aimed to silence a generation of legal professionals who dared to seek justice for ordinary Chinese citizens.

The crackdown was also Xi Jinping laying down a marker. Just as Jiang Zemin revived the Maoist practice of a "struggle" against a targeted class by targeting the Falun Gong, Xi would target human rights lawyers, many of whom incidentally were Christians.

Ten years on, the Chinese government's assault on the legal profession continues—and shows no signs of abatement.

Lawyers who challenge official abuse or defend the poor and persecuted are punished, disbarred, or jailed. The regime has transformed the legal system into an extension of the Party apparatus,

compelling lawyers to demonstrate fealty to the Communist Party and abandon cases deemed politically sensitive. This is the weaponization of law: turning instruments of justice into tools of repression.

Forced disappearances, torture in custody, denial of due process, and the absence of defense counsel—these practices violate China’s international obligations and contradict its own domestic legal standards.

And so we gather today to honor the courage, tenacity and innate goodness of those who stood firm in the face of this repression.

Among them is Gao Zhisheng, a brilliant and courageous Christian human rights lawyer who has spent most of the past two decades either imprisoned, tortured, or forcibly disappeared for defending the marginalized and exposing systemic abuse. As I said during a hearing last year last Congress, Gao is one of China’s finest legal minds. His wife, Geng He, who is here with us today, has tirelessly traveled the world to tell his story. She has testified before Congress multiple times, describing Gao’s persecution as a “never-ending nightmare of torture and abuse.”

We also remember other lawyers who suffered unspeakable abuse in Chinese detention following the 709 crackdown: *“In a just world, they would be celebrated and consulted, not disappeared and tortured.”*

But the 709 crackdown was not just an assault on lawyers—it was an attack on every Chinese citizen seeking justice. These legal professionals were representing clients in cases of police abuse, illegal land seizures, labor exploitation, and religious persecution. By targeting the lawyers, the Party sought to dismantle the legal lifelines of countless individuals and organizations. The crackdown fits within a broader, systematic campaign targeting fundamental freedoms in China—

suppressing everything from labor organizing to religious liberty. And, we cannot forget the atrocities occurring right now targeting Uyghurs and Tibetans, and the disappearance of civil liberties in Hong Kong. Indeed, we have one young victim of the erasure of rule of law in Hong Kong who will be speaking on a panel, Frances Hui, who had a bounty placed on her head for daring to voice support for democracy.

The Chinese Communist Party is in a race to the bottom on human rights abuse of every kind.

Every year under General Secretary Xi Jinping, tens of thousands of young women and men—average age 28—are murdered in cold blood to steal their internal organs for profit or to be transplanted into communist party members and leaders.

These crimes against humanity are unimaginably cruel and painful. Between 2 to 6 internal organs per victim are extracted. It is murder masquerading as medicine.

Ethnic groups targeted include Uyghurs who suffer from Xi Jinping's ongoing genocide and the Falun Gong, whose peaceful meditation and exercise practices and exceptional good health make their organs highly desirable.

Over the years I have chaired several hearings on this barbaric abuse and two years ago—on March 27th—the House passed my [Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act of 2023, 413 to 2](#); and two months ago on May 7th, (H.R 1503) again [passed the Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act , 406 to 1.](#)

I respectfully ask everyone here to ask the Senate to pass it now.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party has also turned to collective punishment as a tactic of repression. Wives and children of detained lawyers have faced travel bans, eviction, blacklisting, and round-the-clock surveillance. Some children have been barred from attending school or taking national exams—cut off from education,

employment, and public life. These are not isolated abuses; they represent a deliberate policy of intimidation and reprisal aimed at silencing dissent by targeting entire families.

From the very beginning of this campaign, the U.S. Congress has spoken out forcefully. In 2017, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China—on which I am proud to serve currently as Cochair—warned that the crackdown on human rights lawyers violated international human rights norms. We made clear that Chinese officials responsible for enforced disappearances and torture would be held accountable.

We have held numerous congressional hearings on these issues—including a 2017 CECC hearing entitled “[Gagging the Lawyers](#)”—where we have brought attention to the disappearance of Gao Zhisheng and other prisoners of conscience. It was in these forums that Geng He delivered some of the most powerful testimony we’ve ever heard.

Our staff documented the five-year mark with a report, [Five Years after 709 Crackdown, Lawyers Continue to Face Repression and Punishment](#), and will also be coming out with a report shortly that will mark this somber tenth anniversary.

Congress has also responded with legislation. I’ve been proud to sponsor and support a range of bipartisan measures that confront the Chinese government’s human rights abuses.

We enacted the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act, the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, and the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act. I led the passage of legislation banning products made with forced labor, including the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. These laws give the U.S. government powerful tools—visa bans and financial sanctions—to hold perpetrators of abuse accountable.

I've also introduced legislation to suspend China's Most-Favored-Nation trade status unless it meets specific benchmarks: releasing political prisoners, ending torture, and guaranteeing basic rights. The idea is simple: the U.S.-China relationship cannot be driven by commerce alone—it must also reflect core American values. This would undo a mistake Bill Clinton made in 1994, when he delinked trade from human rights, something I and a handful of others objected to [at the time](#).

Today, I'm also announcing a new bill: the FREEDOM for Gao Zhisheng Act. This legislation would require the State Department to issue a detailed public report on U.S. efforts to advocate for Gao, including diplomatic actions taken, responses received, and sanctions imposed. It would mandate the development of a comprehensive diplomatic strategy for securing the release of political prisoners and ensure that Global Magnitsky sanctions are considered for Chinese officials responsible for Gao's continued detention and the broader repression of human rights lawyers.

Most importantly, this legislation reaffirms our commitment to Gao Zhisheng—and to all those who have sacrificed everything in the pursuit of justice and truth. Their voices may be silenced in China, but they are heard here.

Let us recall that tyranny thrives in darkness. We answer with light.

By remembering Tiananmen, by marking the 709 crackdown, and by continuing to speak the names of the disappeared, we send a clear message to the Chinese Communist Party: The world is watching. Your crimes will not be forgotten.

We will continue to stand with and pray for Gao Zhisheng and those lawyers he represents. We will honor the families who endure

this suffering. We will share their stories. And we will ensure that U.S. policy toward China is shaped not only by economic interests—but by moral leadership and an unwavering commitment to human dignity and freedom.