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*Excerpts from the Statement by Rep. Chris Smith
Human Rights for Uyghurs
May 21, 2009*

Thank you, Mrs. Kadeer. I am very honored to be with you this morning, and to welcome you to the U.S. Capitol.

Today I want to make two appeals, which I know are at the heart of the World Uyghur Congress's mission, of Mrs. Kadeer's own heroic work, and the work of many of us in Congress who will be joining you today. To the Chinese Government: respect the human rights of the Uyghur people! And to the governments of the world, including the Obama administration: in your relations with the Chinese government, make human rights a priority.

At the moment, sadly, I don't see many signs that either the Chinese government, or the new administration, is listening.

According to the U.S. State Department's *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, the Chinese government's human rights record got worse last year. Likewise the 2008 report of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, on which I serve as Ranking Member, reporting specifically on Uyghurs, gives us a long list of Chinese government abuses. It includes, "wide-scale detentions, inspections of households, restrictions on Uyghurs' domestic and international travel, controls over Uyghur Web sites, and increased surveillance over" Uyghur Muslim clerics, mosques, and believers. The Chinese government has ratcheted up its controls on Muslim religious practice, infiltrated groups of believers, forced women to remove headcoverings, restricted observance of Ramadan, and prevented Uyghur Muslims from making the hajj. In some cities, Uyghurs have been detained en masse, including children.

There are ominous reports of genocidal policies toward the Uyghurs. I have met with women who have seen with their own eyes how the one-child policy and forced abortion campaigns—horrific barbarisms in any case, in view of their scope perhaps the worst human rights abuse in the world today—are more vigorously enforced on the Uyghurs than other ethnic groups.

And in what amounts a program of cultural genocide, the Chinese government is

marginalizing the Uyghurs in their own homeland. It has promoted a massive Han Chinese migration to historically Uyghur lands. At the same time, the government tries to disperse the Uyghurs throughout China. In the State Department's 2008 Trafficking in Persons Report we read reports that the government coerces young women to leave their native land to work in factories in eastern China, where they are often unpaid. In schools, the Uyghur language is being marginalized, and in some places even eliminated.

The list of abuses would have to include the government's cruel campaign against the family of my good friend Mrs. Kadeer. Since Mrs. Kadeer now lives in the United States, the Chinese government harasses, beats, imprisons, and even tortures several of her sons, daughters, and other relatives, and thereby reveals its Mafia-like side.¹ Evidently the government is angry: in the 1990s it brought her, a successful businesswoman, into the National People's Congress, and she had the guts to stand up to them in Beijing and tell them what they were doing to her people. So in 1999 they imprisoned her for "revealing state secrets"—that is what they called the newspaper clippings that she sent to her husband in the United States. In 2005 the Chinese government released her, and she came to our country. Evidently they thought they would force her to be silent by using her relatives as hostages. Needless to say, they didn't. I remember the boldness with which she spoke at a hearing I chaired in 2006 on human rights. It is tragic beyond words that Beijing simply cannot understand the heart of great patriot—in this case, a whole family of great patriots!

I can't resist adding a word on Mrs. Kadeer. How blessed you—you and we—are to have such an extraordinary witness.

Just as bad or worse are the abuses the Chinese government visits on all the peoples of China, whether Han Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur, or other: the cruelty of the cruel one-child policy and forced abortion, the widespread use of torture in the police and penal system, religious persecution, and the censorship and surveillance of the Internet. And every citizen of the PRC suffers the massive injustice of one-party rule by communists that have given up their utopian dreams but remain determined to maintain totalitarian control.

Yet the governments of the world seem determined to ignore all this. Looking at my own government, a few months ago Secretary Clinton effectively took human rights off the U.S. agenda with the Chinese Government. She told the global media that concern for the protection of human rights of the Chinese people can't be allowed to "interfere" with the economic crisis, climate change, and security – as if human rights were disconnected and irrelevant to those issues.

Nor has President Obama shown much interest in human rights. In our policy toward Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, and Russia, to name a few countries, human rights has been dramatically downgraded.

That is the situation: the Chinese government's human rights record is worsening, while the concern of other governments is diminishing.

Despite this, I want to assure you that you have many friends in Congress and insist to you that you have plenty of reason to believe that you will prevail, and to leave this room more determined than ever to carry on your work.

China will one day become a democracy, and perhaps sooner than we think. Remember Nicolae Ceaucescu, Slobodan Milosevic, General Jaruzelski, Erich Honecker—only a year before the fall of these communist dictators, they seemed permanent fixtures. And the first generation of democratic leaders of eastern Europe were in exactly the position you are in right now—preparing themselves in civil society organizations, while the illegitimate governments spied on and pretended to ignore them.

So I urge you to keep working, keep hoping, keep praying. Now and then I think you will find a Communist official who will do something good for your people. Not many of them will have the virtue or courage of Harry Wu, Bob Fu, Wei Jingsheng, or Yang Jianli, but there are good, if confused, people among them.

Just six months ago, a Uighur Muslim woman named Arzigul Tursun was being held under guard in a hospital, waiting to be forcibly aborted—twice she had escaped from the population police, and the doctors were doing tests to prepare for the forced abortion. But Radio Free Asia learned of her plight, and my good friends Rebiya Kadeer, Rep. Joe Pitts, and Mustafa Cerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and I began to make public appeals to the Chinese Government. I spoke to the Chinese Ambassador, Mr. Zhou, who raised the issue at the highest level in Beijing. After almost a week in custody, the Chinese officials cancelled the abortion and allowed Arzigul to return home--great news for Arzigul, her baby, and her family. We called the Chinese ambassador to thank him.

Someday you will work with democratic Chinese leaders to peacefully secure justice for the Uyghur people. Together you will write a new page in the history of human rights in China and the Uyghurs.

In the meantime, I am reminded of the simple message Pope John Paul II carried to Poland in 1979: Be not afraid!

I know you are not afraid, and that you will persist. God bless you, and God bless your struggle for justice and human rights.

¹ CECC 2008 AR, p. 173f.