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China's Latest Crackdown on Dissent

Opening Statement by Chairman Christopher Smith
Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee
Excerpts of Remarks at Congressional Hearing
May 13, 2011

Good morning, and welcome to our witnesses and to everyone who is joining us to examine the Chinese government's intensifying assault on human rights.

In recent months, the human rights situation in China has gone from abysmally bad to worse. In fact, we've not seen this level of blatant violations of human rights since the crackdown on Tiananmen Square protestors in June 1989. Since February of this year, the Chinese government has significantly increased its oppression of human rights advocates, including activist lawyers, bloggers, clergy and members of independent religious groups. It has resorted not only to social pressure, intimidation, and physical harassment, but also to threats against family members, beatings, and even forced disappearances.

Lawyers, in particular, have been targeted. In William Shakespeare's play Henry VI, "Dick the Butcher" and anarchist "Jack Cade" plan the success of their diabolical plot by stating that "first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." It is no different in China today. Government harassment of lawyers and law firms that work on human rights cases or other politically sensitive matters is on the rise. In recent years, lawyers who took cases in opposition to the government's interests have faced disbarment, house arrest, kidnapping, beatings, and prison.

A very recent example is Li Fangping, the lawyer for Chen Guangcheng who has been engaged in a public crusade to expose the horrors of forced abortion in China. Mr. Li was abducted by unidentified individuals on April 29th, 2011, outside the offices of a health rights non-governmental organization for which Mr. Li was serving as a legal advisor. His whereabouts today are unknown. Ironically, his arrest occurred the day after the United States

and Chinese governments concluded a human rights dialogue.

Religious freedom is also under increased attack. Although China has been designated a “Country of Particular Concern” since 2000 (meaning it’s one of the worst violators of religious freedom in the world), statistics from 2009 and 2010 indicate that the number of arrests of Christians increased almost 43 percent (389 to 556). Because the Chinese government demands that religious organizations serve the aims of the state, religious organizations must receive government approval to operate. Failure to do so means the groups lack legal protection and the membership is vulnerable to human rights abuses at the hands of government officials. However, many religious observers adhere to the tenet that they must “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s, but unto God what is God’s,” and as a result, they are persecuted. Recent cases include the denial of the Shouwang Church in Beijing from occupying either the space they rented or the space they purchased; the disappearance of three Catholic priests who refused to register with authorities for official recognition; and the lockdown of the Kirti Monastery in Sichuan Province and the disappearance of 300 monks from there.

We will also be examining recent developments with respect to the Chinese regime’s imposition of the barbaric one-child policy. Few outside of China understand what a massive and cruel system of social control the one-child policy entails. According to the U.S.-China Commission, the system is marked by pervasive propaganda, mandatory monitoring of women’s reproductive cycles, mandatory contraception, mandatory birth permits, and coercive fines for failure to comply, in addition to forced sterilization and abortion.

The price for failing to conform to this system is staggering. A Chinese woman who becomes pregnant without a permit will be put under mind-bending pressure to abort. She knows that “out of plan” illegal children are denied education, healthcare and marriage, and that fines for bearing a child without a birth permit can be up to 10 times the average annual income of both parents, and those families that can’t or won’t pay are jailed or their homes are smashed in or their young child is killed.

If the brave woman still refuses to submit, she may be held in a punishment cell, or if she flees, her relatives may be held and, very often, beaten. Group punishments will be used to socially ostracize her. Her colleagues and neighbors will be denied birth permits. If the woman is, by some miracle, still able to resist this pressure, she may be physically dragged to the operating table and forced to undergo an abortion. Her trauma is incomprehensible. It is a trauma she shares, in some degree, with virtually every woman in China, whose experience of intimacy and motherhood is colored by the atmosphere of fear created by the government, by government threats and determination to intrude itself in a deadly fashion in the most private aspects of her life.

The World Health Organization reports over 500 female suicides per day in China. China is the only country in the world where female suicide rates are higher than the male, and according to the Beijing Psychological Crisis Study and Prevention Center, in China the suicide rate for females is three times higher than that of males. The result of this policy is a nightmarish brave new world with no precedent in human history, where women are psychologically wounded and girls fall victim to sex selection abortion.

In some provinces, there are some 140 boys that are born for every 100 girls, and most children grow up without brothers or sisters, aunts or uncles or cousins. Gendercide is a serious crime and it is absolutely prevalent in China today.

The one-child policy is spawning other grave human rights violations as well. Just this week there were media reports that government officials in one province were kidnapping children who were allegedly born in violation of the one child policy and effectively selling them for a profit to be adopted overseas.

I thank our distinguished panel of witnesses for joining us to discuss these and other critical human rights issues.