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**Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations**

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**The Chinese Communist Party's Malign Influence at the United Nations — It's Getting Worse**

## OPENING STATEMENT

Thank you, Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Wild and Members of the Committee.

I'd like to ask that my written statement be submitted as part of the record.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the influence of the Chinese Communist Party in the United Nations and across multilateral organizations.

Over the last decade, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has grown increasingly assertive in its engagements at the United Nations (UN). What was once described as a defensive “snapping turtle” approach has been replaced with General Secretary Xi Jinping’s “wolf warrior” foreign policy. As the U.S. Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, I saw firsthand how China expands its influence, and actively bends international norms to fit Beijing’s malign interest, at times specifically challenging the Western international order established by the U.S. and our allies following World War II. I’d like to briefly mention three aspects of this approach before addressing more specific examples.

**Leadership Positions:** China has actively sought to place Chinese nationals in key positions within the UN system, including specialized agencies, to quietly change the status quo. When I arrived in 2019, four agencies were already led by a Chinese national, and a 5th was incoming. At the time, no other country held a leadership position in more than two other agencies. These leadership positions allowed China to influence the agenda and priorities of the UN, from development policies to telecommunications and international security standards.

**Norm Setting and Discourse Shaping:** Using these leadership positions, the CCP has been more proactive in pushing for the adoption of resolutions and norms that reflect its world view. Beijing focuses on non-interference in internal affairs, cyber sovereignty, and attempts to redefine human rights to emphasize the right to development and other social and economic rights over civil and political rights that we in the West take for granted.

**Use of Economic Influence:** China deploys its economic leverage through development assistance and investments linked to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to gain the support of other UN member states, especially developing countries. This can translate into backing for China's positions on contentious issues or in elections for UN bodies — and results in dangerous debt traps across the globe for Beijing to exploit.

Turning to some specific examples, one of China's most high-profile leadership roles in the UN was at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), where they held the Secretary General position for eight years, ending in 2022. During this time, significant concerns were raised about how China used this position to promote a more authoritarian model of internet governance, which emphasizes state sovereignty over the internet and tight control over cyberspace, reminiscent of Beijing’s Great Fire Wall. We saw China influence the development and adoption of global technical standards for telecommunications and information technologies, including the development of specific technical standards advancing surveillance and censorship. China also

leverages this influence to favor domestic companies and technologies, such as Huawei, in global markets. Fortunately, in 2018 the U.S. put forward a senior American candidate to run for Deputy Secretary General, and after winning that election, she took over as the new Secretary General just last year.

In the last election for the Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), a Chinese national who was then the deputy director general of WIPO was the assumed favorite. WIPO is an important specialized agency responsible for promoting the protection of intellectual property (IP) worldwide. I doubt I need to explain to anyone why there were serious concerns about China winning the leadership position of a critically important IP body. The primary concerns related to:

**Intellectual Property Theft and Forced Technology Transfers:** China has the worst record related to intellectual property rights, including IP theft, and forced technology transfers as conditions for market access. There was concern that Chinese leadership at WIPO could lead to a weakening of global IP protections and the promotion of policies that align with China's interests, potentially at the expense of innovators and creators worldwide.

**Transparency and Governance:** Concerns were also raised about transparency and governance within WIPO under Chinese leadership, given China's lack of transparency in other international forums. There was fear that the organization's operations could become less open, potentially undermining trust among member states and stakeholders.

In the end, the United States led a coalition of countries to push back against China's campaign, and a new Director General was elected that would protect IP in the most lopsided victory in WIPO's history. This was widely viewed as a significant moment in the politics of international organizations, demonstrating the ability of a coalition of countries to finally push back against China's increasing influence in global governance, and paved the way for the United States to secure the leadership position at the ITU.

While it is clear the U.S. has started to halt China's march in the UN, we are still failing to address the terrible human rights abuses currently taking place. China aggressively combats criticism of its human rights record, leveraging its diplomatic network and economic influence to discourage criticism or dilute condemnations at the Human Rights Council and other forums. It has more proactively organized support for statements and resolutions backing its policies in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, effectively using the UN system to legitimize its worst human rights violations.

In 2022 VOC published a massive trove of documents and images from Beijing's de facto concentration camps in Xinjiang. The Xinjiang Police Files, provided by an anonymous hacker who broke into the province's police database, painted a detailed and horrific picture of the genocide taking place.

The cache contains more than 2,800 images of detained Uyghurs, many crying, in handcuffs, or behind bars, ranging from 15 to 73 years old. It also includes internal police documents detailing the methods of detention, including unmistakable phrases like "shoot first, report later." Finally,

it contains private speech transcripts in which senior communist officials call for detaining Uyghurs en masse while highlighting the direct involvement of Chinese President Xi Jinping in the genocidal campaign. These images and documents blatantly expose Beijing's lie that what is happening in Xinjiang is really “vocational education” or “poverty alleviation.”

Thankfully, these files were repeatedly referenced and included by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in its August 31, 2022 report “OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China” which concluded that the CCP’s actions may constitute crimes against humanity. It is shameful that this report has never been discussed at a meeting of the UN HRC. While the United States attempted to add this to the HRC agenda at the 51st session in October 2022, this effort failed by two votes. What I find even more shameful is the fact that the U.S. has made no attempt since to get this report on any agenda.

I would also note that in 2022 China ratified two International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions related to forced labor: the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and the Abolition of Forced Labor Convention, 1957 (No. 105). The U.S. can use these ratifications as a leverage point to push for stringent enforcement and monitoring mechanisms within the ILO to ensure that China fully complies with these conventions. This includes advocating for transparent reporting and independent inspections to verify the abolition of forced labor practices. While this opens a new avenue for the U.S. and other countries to hold China accountable for forced labor abuses, unfortunately, to date I am unaware of any actions the U.S. has taken in this regard.

Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic showed the world firsthand the consequences of China's influence at the UN. China clearly failed to live up to its obligations under the International Health Regulations (IHRs). The U.S. and the international community's ability to respond effectively was hampered by a lack of transparent and timely information. China's reluctance to share critical data about the virus, including its transmissibility, and live virus samples, harmed the global response.

Shockingly, through all this the WHO failed to hold China accountable for its lack of transparency. At a time when we needed transparency the most, the WHO's communications and actions were influenced by political considerations rather than grounded in public health and the need for impartial dissemination of information. Almost 20 years earlier, the CCP had been publicly criticized by a WHO Director General for its failure to be transparent about a novel coronavirus outbreak, now known as SARS. This resulted in significant reforms to the IHRs to ensure that countries would always be transparent about novel infectious diseases. Surely this time, after the experience of SARS and the strengthening of the IHRs, WHO leadership would insist on transparency. After all my meetings and calls with Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO Director General, and his staff, we knew that the WHO was asking the right questions in private; about getting a team on the ground to investigate, about getting more information on transmissibility and epidemiologic data, about tailored travel restrictions, about access to live virus samples, etc. But not once did the WHO publicly share how their questions were either rejected, ignored, or given delayed or very partial answers by China. What changed in less than 20 years? While the world strengthened the rules, the CCP strengthened its relationships in the WHO to ensure they would not be criticized.

To conclude, it is important that as the United States develops its overall strategy for confronting the Chinese Communist Party, it must address its growing influence across the UN. While positive steps have been taken, including the creation of the Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel at the State Department, which began under the last administration and was formalized by Congress, not nearly enough has been done.

If the U.S. is going to participate in a UN body, we must take a proactive approach. We should work to shape the agendas and either seek leadership positions or actively promote candidates from likeminded countries. The U.S. can work closely with its allies to coordinate positions and voting strategies, and jointly push for reforms in UN institutions that ensure transparency and accountability. We must utilize economic tools and incentives, such as development aid and investment initiatives, to help build partnerships and influence UN member states' positions on policies and key votes. And finally, the United States must continue to champion human rights and hold China, as well as those countries that defend it, accountable for their human rights violations.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing, and I look forward to your questions.