

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

1540 Kuser Road, Suite A9
Hamilton, NJ 08619-3828
(609) 585-7878
TTY (609) 585-3650

108 Lacey Road, Suite 38A
Whiting, NJ 08759-1331
(732) 350-2300

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765

<http://chrissmith.house.gov>



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'Human Rights in Hu Jintao's China'

Statement at House Press Conference on Hu Visit to U.S.

Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04)

January 18, 2011

Today we're here with some of the bravest human rights defenders and former political prisoners of the Chinese government, to talk about Hu Jintao's China – and to call on President Obama to raise human rights issues publicly and vigorously during Hu Jintao's visit to Washington.

Last month President Hu gave the world unmistakable proof of his government's moral puniness and fear – when he left the Norwegian Nobel Committee no choice but to place the Nobel Peace Prize on an empty chair – empty because Hu wouldn't let Liu Xiaobo, a proponent of gradual democratic reform, out of his prison cell to receive the prize. As most of you know, Hu even had Liu's wife and friends placed under house arrest for fear they would come to Oslo to receive the prize for him – in a country like China, it is inconceivable that the security and media campaign unleashed against Liu and his supporters wasn't approved at the very top.

President Obama, as the 2009 Nobel Peace laureate, has an obligation to call for Liu's release publicly and vigorously. Having led a group of members in nominating Liu for the prize, I was present in the Oslo City Hall for the empty chair ceremony, along with former Speaker Pelosi and Rep. David Wu. Over the years I have had the further privilege to meet a number of former Nobel Peace laureates. There is a strong bond between peace laureates – they share an understanding that the world's most prestigious award confers an obligation on them. I think that, for the peace laureates, the idea that they could meet personally with and throw a White House state dinner for a political leader responsible for jailing another laureate and not demand publicly for their fellow laureate's release would be something absolutely unthinkable. I truly hope that in the next few days President Obama lives up to the award he received in 2009.

Beyond this I urge President Obama to join us in speaking out for all those in China whose basic human rights are violated – for political prisoners, such as Gao Zhisheng, who we recently learned has been savagely tortured in the past year – his wife, Geng He, is with us today, as well as Chen Guangcheng, still under house arrest after serving years in prison for drawing the attention of the international media to a massive forced abortion campaign in Shandong province, for Falun Gong practitioners – also victims of the most brutal torture practices – for underground Christians, Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur Muslims, whose native lands Hu’s government treats like militarily occupied territory, for democracy advocates, labor organizers, North Korean refugees, for Internet users, subject to censorship and surveillance.

I particularly want to mention Chinese women. The Chinese government’s one-child-per-couple policy, with its attendant horrors of forced abortion campaigns and rampant sex-selective abortion, is, in scope and seriousness, the worst human rights abuse – the worst gender crime – in the world today.

Few people outside China understand what a massive and cruel system of social control the one-child policy entails. As the U.S. China Commission summarized, the system is “marked by pervasive propaganda, mandatory monitoring of women’s reproductive cycles, mandatory contraception, mandatory birth permits, coercive fines for failure to comply, and... 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, health-care, and marriage, and that fines for bearing a child without a birth permit can be 10 times the average annual income of two parents, and those families that can’t or won’t pay are jailed, or their homes 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 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 deadly fashion, into the most private aspects of her life.

Last year, I chaired a Lantos Human Rights Commission hearing and heard the testimony of Wujian, a victim of forced abortion. I’ll quote the pertinent part of her testimony, picking up from her abduction from a cabin where she had been hiding out to escape the population police:

“About one hour later, the van stopped in the hospital. As soon as I was out of the van, I saw hundreds of pregnant moms there, all of them just like pigs in the slaughterhouse.

“Immediately I was put into a special room without any preliminary medical examination. One nurse did oxytocin injection intravenously. Then I was put into a room with several other moms. The room was full of moms,” she went on, “who had just gone through a forced abortion. Some moms were crying. Some moms were mourning. Some moms were

screaming, and one mom was rolling on the floor in unbearable pain. Then I kept saying to her," the abortionist, "how could you become a killer by killing people every day?

"She told me that there was nothing serious about this whole thing for her. She did this all year. She also told me that there were over 10,000 forced abortions in our county," that is not country, county, "just for that year, and I was having just one of them. I was astonished by her words," she went on, "and I realized that my baby and I were just like a lamb on the cutting board. Finally she put the big, long needle into the head of my baby in my womb.

"At the moment, it was the end of the world for me," she went on, "and I felt even time had stopped. Since it did not come out as expected, they decided to cut my baby into pieces in my womb with scissors and then suck it out with a special machine. I did not have any time to think as this most horrifying surgery began by force. I could hear the sound of the scissors cutting the body of my baby in the womb. Eventually," she goes on, "the journey in hell, the surgery was finished, and one nurse showed me part of a bloody foot with her tweezers.

Through my tears, the picture of the bloody foot was engraved into my eyes and into my heart, and so clearly I could see the five small bloody toes. Immediately the body was thrown into a trashcan. The one-child policy," she goes on, "and forced abortion policy have killed millions of innocent lives in China."

Her story is everywoman's story.

No wonder the World Health Organization reports over 500 female suicides per day in China. China is the only country in the world where more women take their own lives than men, and, according to the Beijing Psychological Crisis Study and Prevention Center, in China the suicide rate for women is fully three times higher than for men.

The result of this policy is a nightmarish "brave new world" with no precedent in human history, where women are psychologically wounded, girls fall victim to sex-selective abortion (in some provinces 140 boys are born for every 100 girls), and most children grow up without brothers or sisters, aunts or uncles or cousins.

As Chai Ling has said so well, the one-child policy amounts to multiple Tiananmen Square massacres every day. In the theatrical adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Marius sings a song evocative of the Tiananmen Square Massacre – 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," Marius sings, "there's a pain that goes on and on. Empty Chairs and empty tables, now my friends are dead and gone..." China's pervasive crackdown on dissidents has resulted in empty chairs and empty tables all over China. But empty cribs as well, as the state run by Hu Jintao has slaughtered millions of babies.

Unfortunately, for two years the Obama administration has made nothing but weak, pro forma responses to human rights abuses, in China and around the world.

Our country can't afford to continue doing this. We need to challenge human rights abuses publicly and in language that shows we mean business – and we need to do this above all in China. In fact we need to show that a major factor in estimating the Chinese government's threat to other countries is it abuse of its own people – and we need to encourage other countries to do the same.

For the past twenty years, the key to our global human rights policy has been China. When we take human rights in China more seriously, then it follows that we do so everywhere else – and when we write off China, human rights abusers in Belarus, Vietnam, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, know that we have written off human rights everywhere.

A turning point in our country's capitulation to cynicism was May 26, 1994, when President Clinton delinked MFN trade status from human rights. The Chinese government immediately concluded that we don't really care about human rights – and so did the rest of the world. We lost almost all leverage on human rights, not only in China but globally, and have never regained it. And in 2008 Secretary Clinton quickly confirmed the old Clinton policy when, on her first trip to China as Secretary of State, she pointedly said that human rights couldn't be allowed to 'interfere' with other issues.

This is the wrong road for us to be on – bad for the Chinese people, bad for the people of Vietnam, Burma, Ethiopia, Belarus, and many other countries, and bad for our own people. Human rights are indivisible – but in which direction are they going to be indivisible? With the Chinese government's rapidly increasing global influence, with China serving as the new model for authoritarian regimes throughout Asia and Africa, we have all the more reason for us to defend the rights of the Chinese people. If we are not willing to work to improve the human rights standards by which China is governed, we are one day going to find China degrading the human rights standards the whole world lives by.