

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing, and
Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing
on
China, Genocide and the Olympics

May 18, 2021 - 1:00 p.m.
Virtual, via WebEx

Statement of Dr. Yang Jianli
Founder and President
Citizen Power Initiatives for China

In choosing Beijing to host the 2022 Winter Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has chosen to either trust the Chinese government’s assurances regarding human rights – even though Beijing’s record in preparing for the 2008 Olympics was deplorable – or not to care at all. Or both.

“The decision in 2001 to give the games to China was made in the hope of improvement in human rights and, indeed, the Chinese themselves said that having the games would accelerate progress in such matters,” former IOC member Dick Pound has written. The IOC, when it gave the Olympics to China, seemed to think they could change China by granting it the opportunity to host the highest attended world event. Unfortunately, it turned out that the Chinese government wanted only to change the world’s image of China through it.

As the world watched, the Chinese government committed gross human rights abuses in the run-up to the 2008 Games.

But just before the IOC’s final decision in 2015 to choose China for the 2022 Winter Olympics, IOC official Mark Adams said in a letter that Beijing had given the IOC new “assurances” concerning “human rights, the right to demonstrate, media freedom to report on the Games with no restrictions on the Internet, labor rights, displacement, and environmental protection.” He said the IOC “is confident that the Government of China would take all necessary measures to ensure the Olympic Charter” and its IOC contract “would be respected should they be elected.” In other words, it’s 2008 all over again. Actually, much worse.

The [Uyghur genocide](#), the crushing of political and civil freedoms in [Hong Kong](#), the deepening [assault on Tibetan culture and religion](#), the [forced erasure of Mongolian](#) and other ethnic minority identities, rampant torture of prisoners of conscience, mass digital surveillance of

the entire population, “[hostage diplomacy](#),” unremitting [attacks on human rights lawyers](#), [rule of law](#), [freedom of expression](#), [freedom of religion](#) — [the list goes on and on](#).

Here we are again: The U.S. and other democracies are facing a difficult test. Just like any other test, one either passes or fails.

There is every reason for rights-respecting governments to stay far away from the 2022 Beijing Olympics. They should and can.

Both IOC president Thomas Bach and Chinese dictator Xi Jinping are loudly proclaiming that sports and politics don’t mix and that the Games should not be “politicized.”

We, as human rights activists, are all too familiar with what is meant by the “politicization” of an event, be it academic, sports, cultural, business or entertainment. By Xi’s definition, any stance on any issue is an act of politicization if he does not like it. Period.

According to the Olympic Charter, [the goal of Olympism](#) is “to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.” Genocide is the antithesis of the “harmonious development of humankind”! Forced labor is not for the preservation of human dignity. The Olympics are bound to be political if these issues are defined to be political. At the same time, as legal expert Andrea Worden [points out](#), we cannot deny that the modern Olympic Games have always been political, and wishing otherwise doesn’t change the reality that they are, in fact, deeply political. As political scientist and Olympics expert Jules Boykoff aptly puts it: “To say the Olympics transcend politics is to conjure fantasy” [[Power Games: A Political History of the Olympics](#) (Verso, 2016, p.2).] Beijing 2022 will be Xi Jinping’s Games just as the 1936 Berlin Olympics were Hitler’s. Let’s see why this is so.

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, which will be attended by diplomats and dignitaries from the world’s major powers from every continent, will serve Xi Jinping’s political agenda in many ways, all intended and planned by the CCP regime:

1. Allowing Beijing to host the Games, without protest or opposition, will serve as tacit approval of the CCP’s model of authoritarian capitalism, digital totalitarianism, and rights-free development.
2. By supporting, attending and participating in the Games, the entire world will become complicit in China’s Uyghur genocide and other atrocious crimes against humanity, enabling China to actively promote and globally export its repressive human rights agenda and views.
3. The Games will serve as a *de facto* international coronation of Xi Jinping, essentially recognizing him as leader-for-life prior to his official coronation 8 months later when he is set to break the previous two-term presidential limit and enter his third term of leadership.

4. The Games will serve as a vehicle to drive Chinese nationalistic fervor, which is a major source of legitimacy for the rule of the CCP, particularly of Xi Jinping.
5. The Games will be a propaganda spectacle through which the CCP and Xi Jinping boast about their successful containment of COVID-19, economic recovery, “harmonious society” and “ethnic unity”; and will serve as a vehicle for propagating the view that “Chinese (Xi-ist) wisdom” and a “Chinese solution” pave the way towards a happy, prosperous, pandemic-free world. The CCP will not spare a second to try to project to the global audience a “soft power” which China lacks and is eager to obtain in order to rise on the world stage.
6. Participating in or attending the Games will serve as tacit recognition of Xi Jinping’s vision of a “community of common destiny for mankind” (*rénlèi mìngyùn gòngtóngtǐ*), which is poised to become one of the key narratives of the Games. Zhang Jun, China’s ambassador to the United Nations, made this clear when he [introduced the Beijing 2022 Games to the UN General Assembly](#) in December 2019. He said: “The Olympic Games is not only an arena for athletes, but also a bridge of friendship for people of all countries. ... As we share the same world and a common future, China will always be a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, a defender of international order and will work towards building a community of common destiny for mankind.”

If we don’t want to have a common destiny with Xi Jinping and his totalitarian regime, and if diplomats and dignitaries from the U.S. and its democratic allies don’t want to be part of Beijing’s propaganda spectacle and be used by Xi Jinping and the CCP to help enhance their power and legitimacy, bolster CCP-centered nationalism, and promote a “community of common destiny for mankind,” then we must send a clear message in opposition. Echoing many other human rights activists and scholars, I am calling on the U.S. and its allies to do the following: initiate a joint political boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics; urge businesses and athletes not to participate in the Games; and, if they do participate, encourage them to find creative ways to express their condemnation of the CCP’s crimes against humanity.

While a full boycott of the Games is unquestionably justified, and would be a rightful and powerful symbolic gesture, the sad reality is that neither a full boycott nor unconditional participation is likely to improve the human rights situation of any Chinese, Uyghur, Tibetan or Hong Konger. I urge the U.S. government to use this opportunity to make its actions not only punitive but also constructive. A “conditional boycott” thus deserves careful consideration as a way to engage China in a much-needed process of examining and incrementally changing abusive practices and aggressive policies that not only threaten world peace, but China’s own progress and stability as well.

The timing of the Games carries both opportunities and risks for Xi Jinping. Not long after the Games are to begin, at the 20th Party’s National Congress, he hopes to begin an unprecedented third term as General Secretary of the CCP to assume king-like dominance. Olympic boycotts would tarnish Xi’s image not only abroad, but, more importantly, at home. Moreover, in any

dictatorship, political crises inevitably arise revolving around the succession of power – no exceptions. Xi will be extremely vigilant of any factor that could trigger a power struggle within the CCP. In fact, any factor may have such potential during this most critical and most sensitive time. Xi may not want to have the world’s most highly-attended event turn into one of these factors. There is a chance, albeit very slim, that he may choose to be more flexible than usual.

The situation demands mutual flexibility. The U.S. and its allies may consider modest, unambiguous and measurable conditions that China could realistically meet in order to give states and civil society more confidence that participation in the Games, which are an inspiring global event, does not signal support for wide-ranging CCP policies that contradict human rights principles. We propose the following:

- An independent and transparent United Nations investigation of massive detention centers in Xinjiang where Chinese authorities have confined as many as three million Uyghurs and other Chinese Muslims, and in Tibet, where the linguistic and cultural identity of Tibetans has been harshly repressed.
- The immediate release of detained, peaceful pro-democracy political figures and protesters in Hong Kong.
- The release of Canadian citizens Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, who were detained on trumped-up espionage charges and have been held in secret prisons since December 2018, in retaliation for the detention of Meng Wanzhou, who is the chief financial officer of Huawei, on a United States warrant.
- Finally, as a confidence-building measure, Chinese authorities should release Dr. Wang Bingzhang, founder of the overseas Chinese Democracy Movement, who has been serving a life sentence since 2002, allowing the ailing 73-year-old to join his family, who are United States and Canadian citizens.

The decision to boycott or not is dividing not only the American political community, but members of the international community as well. Such division can only work in Beijing’s favor, which is why a conditional boycott approach can be a unifying strategy, as well as one that might well have concrete, positive effects.

For a “conditional boycott” approach to be effective, countries must be resolute in insisting that the degree of boycott should be determined based on how much these conditions are met before participating in the Games, and ready to boycott the Games if they are not. Yes, it would require a complex process of negotiation and coordination between the United States and its allies, but this would, in the long term, be an exercise in human rights diplomacy outside of discredited United Nations processes.

Moreover, it offers Olympic athletes, and civil society around the world, a way to help improve human rights in China. A full boycott would deprive athletes of either a full field of competitors,

or the ability to participate altogether. In contrast, a conditional boycott approach would establish a process in which athletes, who have the greatest stake in the success of the Games, could appeal to the Chinese government to meet the conditions that would ward off boycotts.

We have hope but don't count on the conditional boycott to yield concessions from Xi Jinping on human rights issues. In any case, the U.S. and its democratic allies must make their stance of opposition strong and clear; and they must ensure their threat of political boycott is credible if the CCP fails to make the necessary concessions. Whatever action we take, it may not change the CCP's behavior in the short term. But this is not a one-shot game. It is a long and arduous contest between democracy and dictatorship. As Andrea Worden [stated](#) in her recent article, "a diplomatic boycott, together with our allies and partners, is about upholding our shared values and principles, our shared embrace of human rights and a shared moral duty not to be complicit in genocide and other horrific human rights abuses. It is incumbent upon the like-minded democracies to clearly communicate, through actions and words, that we condemn the CCP regime's human rights atrocities and its contempt for the rules-based international order, and that we refuse to participate in the celebration and glorification of Xi Jinping and his New Era."

Due to the time limit, I will present on another occasion to Congress my suggestions on what else the U.S. should do about China's genocide, torture, forced labor and growing digital dictatorship as well as share information about China's increasingly common use of torture against prisoners of conscience.

Before closing, I would like to urge all concerned parties to ask the IOC two questions.

- (1) [China responded](#) to the COVID-19 epidemic by covering up its outbreak, cracking down on whistleblowers, falsifying casualty data, and misleading the world. How can the IOC guarantee China's transparency if another wave of the pandemic breaks out in China during the Games, which will last 8 weeks? This concerns the safety of the athletes and all other participants.
- (2) I mentioned earlier that in 2015, before the IOC made its final decision to let Beijing host the 2022 Winter Olympics, IOC official Mark Adams stated in a letter that Beijing had given the IOC new "assurances" concerning "human rights, the right to demonstrate, media freedom to report on the Games with no restrictions on the Internet, labor rights, displacement, and environmental protection." Can the IOC make China's assurances public?

Meanwhile, the IOC contract appears to demand media freedom only for the eight-week period before the Games and only concerning the sporting events themselves. Therefore, Beijing is free to deny visas to journalists seeking to report on the development of the Olympic venues, to censor reports about human-rights abuses and labor rights violations, and to use its array of national security laws to threaten or arrest journalists publishing inconvenient reports.

Beyond media freedom, the rest of Beijing's commitments are unknown and have been shielded from public scrutiny in confidential documents cited by the contract.

If the IOC is serious about producing a better outcome in 2022 than it did in 2008, it must make public its evaluation of Beijing's performance on human rights, labor rights and environmental protection the last time around. The IOC's report after 2008 said merely that, "To those who have criticized the IOC on human rights issues, one can argue that the Games have elevated international dialogue on such issues among governments, world leaders, politicians, NGOs, and pressure groups." That is a big lie.

This is just another example of why Chinese leaders always get a new license to act with impunity. Enough is enough.