



First Testimony

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Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before this subcommittee on the issue of a serious violation of one important human rights element by the government of the People's Republic of China. I refer to the freedom of religion and its persecution in China.

My testimony is limited to the Roman Catholic Church to which I belong. I know that other religious communities also suffered greatly under the Chinese Communist Government. Their situations, I understand, will be covered by other guests.

Mr. Chairman, the "freedom of religion" is not open to the free choice and conscience of an individual in China; rather, it must be submitted according to the Government's choice. In the case of the Catholic Church, the choice of the government is "The Catholic

Patriotic Association". The Roman Catholic Church is illegal. In effect, there is no "freedom of religion" in China.

Permit me to briefly touch on the difference between the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Roman Catholic Church in China.

The Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was founded by the Chinese Communist Government and is, therefore, regarded as the official Catholic Church in China. It takes instruction from the Religious Bureau of the Government. It rejects the authority of the Pope, appoints its own bishops and ordains them without the permission from the Pope. There is, of course, no persecution in this official church.

In accordance with the Roman Catholic Church's basic doctrine, a Roman Catholic must accept the authority of the Pope who is the successor of St. Peter and is Christ's representative on earth. A Roman Catholic cannot accept just any other church as a substitute without abandoning his faith and status as a Roman Catholic. A Roman Catholic in China, therefore, cannot follow the government's instruction to reject the Pope's authority as the spiritual leader of the Church in spite of persecution. By remaining loyal to the Pope, the Roman Catholic Church is outlawed in China and is known as the underground Church.

There is no true "religious freedom" when a person cannot worship according to his conscience. Tens of thousands of Catholic laymen, priests and religious who chose to follow their conscience and faith were incarcerated nationwide. Thousands gave their lives for the Church. Many of them were executed in public. His Eminence Cardinal Kung was imprisoned for thirty years, His excellencies Archbishop Dominic Tang, S.J. for 24 years, the late Bishop Joseph Fan for 34 years are a few examples. But, the persecution is not history regardless of the significant economic progress of China in recent years. The persecution of the Roman Catholic Church continues.

Two months ago, I made a personal visit to China and also met with Congressman Smith and his delegation in Beijing. While in Beijing, I was invited by the Congressman to participate in two conferences. We were repeatedly assured by the Director of Religious Bureau that there was freedom of religion in China as guaranteed by its constitution and that there were no religious prisoners being held in China. However, one day later on January 6, 1994, Bishop Julius Jia Zhiguo, underground Bishop of Zhengding of Hebei Province, was arrested and put in jail.

Bishop Su Zhimin, auxiliary Bishop of Baoding in Hebei, agreed to offer a Holy Mass for Congressman Smith and his delegation. That is all there is to it - celebrating the Holy Mass. The Mass was said in a private apartment in Beijing. The apartment is very small, run down and with bare-concrete floor. After we left China, while the Secretary of the

Treasury, Mr. Lloyd Bentsen, was still visiting in China, Bishop Su was picked up by Security Bureau on January 20th and disappeared. No one knew where he was detained. I received an urgent message notifying me of Bishop Su's arrest and requesting immediate assistance. I reported this arrest immediately to Congressman Smith who released the news to the media and to his colleagues in the Congress. Largely due to Congressman Smith's effort, Bishop Su was released few days later unharmed. During his 10 days detention, Bishop Su was thoroughly interrogated about his meeting with the Congressman.

That a Bishop was arrested in the midst of The Secretary of Treasury's visit because the Bishop had said Mass for a Congressman is not only tantamount to a grave insult to the United States, but also clear proof that there is no freedom of religion and no improvement in China's human rights situation. In fact, there is a regression in human rights in China.

Arrested together with Bishop Su was a young underground priest, Father Wei Jing-Yi. He is 36 years old and is the Secretary of the underground Bishop's Conference. He is being held in Ging Yuan Xian. Because of his position in the Bishop Conference, he is a very important person in the underground Catholic church. I have been informed that for his refusal to disclose any information on the underground Church, he is hand cuffed and his feet are chained with weights day and night. I plead with you, Mr. Chairman, to look into the arrest of Father Wei at your earliest convenience so that he will not be tortured further for his knowledge on the underground Roman Catholic Church.

News has just reached me very recently that Father Liu Jin Zhong of Yi Xian, Hebei was arrested on February 26, 1994 while celebrating Holy Mass. He is now detained in Gu An Xian.

There was also Bishop Johannes Han Dingxiang of Yong Nian, Hebei. He was arrested in December 1993 and still has not been released.

Bishop Li Side of Tianjin was released from jail about three years ago, but was shortly confined thereafter to a small village on top of a hill. He is under surveillance and is forbidden to come down from the hills to his diocese to perform his apostolic works. As there is no paved road to the top of this hill, he is effectively cut off from his flocks.

There was also the case of Father Chu Tai, arrested in November 1993 while celebrating Mass. He is serving sentence in Zhangjiakuo, Heibei province.

Mr. Chairman, you may have noticed that the Chinese Government has a habit of arresting priests while they are celebrating Mass. The Mass is held most sacred to a

Roman Catholic. The arrests during the celebration of the Mass constitutes an act of sacrilege to our religion.

Then, there was Bishop Joseph Fan Zhongliang in his seventies, auxiliary Bishop of Shanghai's underground Church. He had been jailed many times. The security police frequently took him away for extended interrogation and searched his apartment. In 1992, the government took away the entire treasury of the Shanghai underground Church and many of his personal articles including his Bishop's ring. They are still retained by the Government. Bishop Fan very much wanted these monies and other articles returned to him.

There are many others who are either detained, under house arrest, restricted in movement, or under police surveillance.

Puebla institute has documented a month ago more than sixty cases. Undoubtedly, there must be hundreds more cases of which we have not been informed.

The United States Government has in many instances served notices to the Chinese Government indicating its concern of the jailing of all religious believers. May I appeal to you, Mr. Chairman, that, through your influence, a visit to Father Wei Jing-Yi and other selected prisoners of conscience is to be arranged by one of your embassy personnel or by Red Cross to assure their well- beings. As Father Wei was arrested with Bishop Su in connection with Congressman Smith's visit and also during Mr. Lloyd Bentson's visit in China, it will be most effective for Mr. Warren Christopher to intercede during his visit in China at present. I appeal to you, Mr. Chairman, that you make this recommendation to Mr. Christopher.

During our visit in January, 1994, we also attended a Holy Mass of the underground Church held in an open field in the countryside. The weather was freezing and windy. At least 450 Catholics attended the Holy Mass in spite of the inclement weather. All knelt on the frozen ground. The occasion was an invaluable lesson of faith to us.

The Government confiscated all the properties of the Catholic Church in the early 1950's and have now mostly given ownership back to the Patriotic Association, leaving the underground Church without facilities and funds for subsistence. That is one of the reasons why the underground Roman Catholics still have to attend Mass outdoors like the Roman days of centuries ago.

However, hope still persists. The underground Baoding Diocese recently built four churches. One of these churches was bulldozed by the Government. When the Government went to tear down the second church, many underground Catholics appeared and protected the church by forming a human chain. When the bulldozers

came, the situation became a case of bulldozers against human beings. Remember the scene of the Tiananmen Square when one man stood against a column of tanks? Though not reported, history repeated itself in Baoding. It was a case of the bulldozer, the armed police against the innocent unarmed villagers. One small incorrect move would have become a tragedy. The Bishop pleaded with the Government that there would be lots of blood flowing if the government pulled down the church. After a long standoff, the Government backed down. Another Hebei diocese was not as lucky. A local Bishop built eight small houses for the villagers. All were destroyed by the Government.

On January 31, 1994, Premier Li Pang signed two decrees (# 144 and # 145) into law. Briefly, it prohibits foreigners from undertaking missionary works, prohibits unauthorized religious ceremonies in any churches, and prohibits involvement in any financial activities with overseas parties. Although the new decrees permit foreign believers living in China to conduct private religious ceremony, it does not permit any overseas Chinese to conduct any religious activities in China. Decree # 145 further forbids any activities by the underground churches.

This law has already been enforced. The recent arrest, as reported by Christian Solidarity International, of American Pastor Dennis Balcombe and his delegation for three days and his expulsion from China speaks for itself. These laws legitimize the authorities to arrest anyone whom they dislike in the name of illegal religious activities. It also could allow local authorities to blackmail underground Catholics with exorbitant fines or bail under the threat of arrests since religious activities in private homes are also against the law. These laws and actions amount to self-confession by the Chinese Government that there is no freedom of religion.

Moreover, the constitution of the Chinese Government guarantees freedom of religion. Although Premier Li Pang may have the power to sign these two decrees into law, these laws are, in my opinion, unconstitutional.

Occasional releases of religious prisoners, particularly those who are aged and seriously sick, are hardly evidence of improvement in human rights and in religious freedom in China. Most of these releases usually happen when China is under great pressure from foreign Governments on human rights issue or needed an injection of goodwill on special occasions, such as during some senior U.S. officials' visits, campaigning for the bid of Olympic 2000, renewal of MFN status, etc. Lately, contrary to their usual practice, they stepped up the pressure by making more arrests and by passing new laws to restrict further the practice of religion. These regretful events happened before, during, or as the result of the visits of Congressman Smith, Mr. Lloyd Bentsen, Mr. John Shattuck, and Mr. Warren Christopher. They are occurring a few months before the renewal decision of the MFN status to China. It appears that China is so confident that

the United States government will eventually ignore the principles of human rights and base the MFN status decision on potential trade profits that China is, in effect, daring the United States government to do anything to improve human rights situation in China. These events are concrete proof of the regression of human rights including religious freedom in China.

I, therefore, appeal to the United States Government not to trade the principle of freedom and human rights on which our nation was founded for commercial profits. We must insist on proof of significant improvement of human rights including religious freedom in China as a sign of China's sincere dialogue and friendship with the United States. From this platform, the United States can then form the basis of a decision for the MFN status.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.