

**PERSECUTION OF FAITH COMMUNITIES IN CHINA, IRAN, PAKISTAN
AND EGYPT**

**Revised Notes for Hon. David Kilgour, JD.
Parliament of Canada
Ottawa
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Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen,

Congratulations for having this hearing today, especially as the world this week honours Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest advocates of dignity and equality for all human beings.

‘Naming and shaming’ several governments today will at least make some who persecute faith communities uncomfortable, and might encourage those who seek religious freedom across the world as promised by U.N. and other international instruments. I’m delighted that spokespersons will speak today about major religious liberty problems in Iran, Pakistan and Egypt. For time reasons, these comments will relate to China only.

China

My respect and affection for the Chinese people is longstanding. It grew during several visits to the country and in meetings with members of the vast Chinese Diaspora. It is no accident that more than one million Canadians of origin in the Middle Kingdom are now our most-educated cultural community. It was an honour to represent some of them in our Parliament for almost twenty seven years.

Two years ago, educator Jan Harvey of Vancouver and I wrote about persecution of faith communities across China in the preview issue of *Convivium* magazine, published by Canadian Catholics. You can access the article on the Internet at <http://www.david-kilgour.com/2011/convivium2011.pdf>. Another piece was written this month by Geoffrey Johnston in Kingston’s *Whig Standard* newspaper and can be accessed at <http://www.thewhig.com/2013/12/05/faith-communities-persecuted-in-china>.

Among the timely points Johnston makes:

- Freedom of religion, faith, conscience and belief, guaranteed under the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has not discouraged China’s Communist overlords from establishing a system that oppresses and brutalizes people of faith.
- “I think China is one of the most significant religious freedom abusers in the world,” says Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett, vice-chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.” China is focused on persecuting a number of groups...For example; Christians who do not belong to state-sponsored churches are singled out for harsh repression”.
- When Communists seized control of China in 1949, the new regime established state bodies to oversee religion. The regime also founded state-controlled national Catholic and Protestant churches, which ordain and control clergy. All Chinese

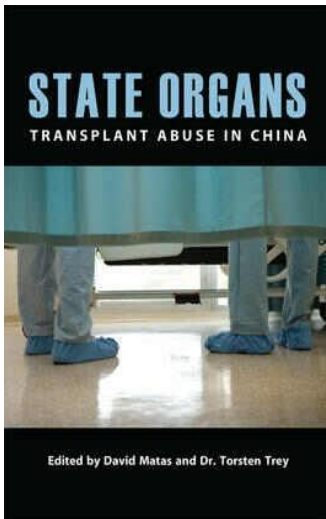
Christians are required to register with either of the official state-sanctioned churches.

- The Communist version of the Catholic Church “does not acknowledge the authority of the Pope,” says Charles Burton, a Brock University associate professor specializing in comparative politics, government and politics of China, Canada-China relations, and human rights. “The Roman Catholic Church is an illegal organization in China,” says Burton, a former counsellor at the Canadian Embassy in Beijing. “But most Catholics in China do not affiliate with the CPA, so they have to worship ‘underground’.” He adds that churches “not registered with the State Administration for Religious Affairs are subject to harassment.”
- “While an increasing number of unregistered churches in China are able to operate with greater freedom than before, there continue to be cases of arrest, disappearance, harassment and confiscation of property among their members,” says Kiri Kankhwende, a spokesperson for Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). “In areas like Xinjiang, where citizens typically face more restrictions on their civil and political rights, even registered religious activities by Muslims, Catholics and Protestants are closely monitored and often restricted,” (she) says.
- “Apart from the repression of Christian churches, the government is guilty of severe repression of Tibetan Buddhism in Tibetan areas of China; and a brutal clampdown on Muslims in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” says Amnesty International Canada’s Michael Craig.
- “I think probably the single most persecuted community in China would be the Falun Gong,” says Swett. (It) is a peaceful movement based on certain moral principles and a series of gentle physical exercises. According to Swett, China’s Communist rulers once encouraged the practice of Falun Gong, “because they felt it inculcated all sorts of virtues...But when they realized that the popularity of this particular movement was so great that it posed a potential threat to the Party’s dominance and influence in the lives of the people, they suddenly did a complete about-face...There’s been mind-boggling persecution of the Falun Gong, including arrest and torture,” says the USCIRF vice-chair. “Some of the most horrific reports have to do with the harvesting of organs from Falun Gong prisoners.”
- “Although China is a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees freedom of religion or belief, it has not yet ratified it,” says Kankhwende. “The Chinese government should be encouraged to ratify the Convention and to ensure that officials in central and local government, as well as law enforcement officials, are adequately trained to protect and promote freedom of religion of belief for all, in line with its own constitution and its obligations under international law,” (she) says.
- When it comes to defending human rights and religious liberty, Swett thinks America needs “to be a little bolder, a little braver” in its dealings with Beijing. “We need to have a little more steel in our spine when it comes to advocating for these very important causes.” “The same could also now be said of Canada’, concludes Johnston’s piece.

Hong Kong

Here is a bit more relating to points in Johnston’s article which I voiced at a public forum in the theatre of the Federation of Medical Societies of Hong Kong this past July:

David Matas and I concluded that 41, 500 organs from Falun Gong prisoners of conscience were trafficked in the years between 2001 and 2005 alone. The appalling commerce continues today. Matas and I visited about a dozen countries to interview Falun Gong, who managed to leave both the camps and the country. They told us of working in appalling conditions for up to sixteen hours daily with no pay and little food, crowded sleeping conditions and torture. Inmates made a range of export products, including Christmas decorations, for multinational companies. This constitutes both corporate irresponsibility and a violation of WTO rules and calls for an effective response by all trading partners of China. Our governments should ban forced labour exports by enacting legislation which places an onus on importers to prove their goods are not made in effect by slaves.



In the 2012 book State Organs, writer/researcher Ethan Gutmann estimates that 65,000 Falun Gong were killed for their organs during the years 2000-2008, selected from about 1.2 million of them interned in China's forced labour system. As with the camps created by Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, on which the ones across China were adapted by Mao in the 1950s, a police signature alone remains sufficient to commit anyone to one of them for up to three years. Mark Mackinnon of Canada's Globe and Mail put it well, "No charges, no lawyers, no appeals". In 2007, a U.S. government report estimated that at least half of the inmates in 340 such camps were Falun Gong. Leninist governance and 'anything is permitted' economics encourage organ trafficking to continue across China.

Suppression of Dissent

The Party uses force to suppress voices that advocate religious freedom in China. One is Gao Zhisheng, a twice Nobel Peace Prize-nominated lawyer in the tradition of Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. A decade ago, Gao was named one of China's top ten lawyers by its Ministry of Justice. The Party released its full wrath, however, when Gao, a Christian, decided to defend Falun Gong practitioners. The suppression began with the removal of his permit to practise law, followed by an attempt on his life, a police attack on his wife and two children, and denying the family any income. It intensified when Gao responded in the nonviolent tradition of Gandhi by launching nationwide hunger strikes calling for equal dignity for all Chinese nationals. In one of his articles, he described more than 50 days of torture in prison. In 2009, his wife, Geng He, their 16-year-old daughter and 6-year-old son escaped China and reached the United States, seeking asylum. He remains in prison.

Rule of Law

It is difficult for many outside China to understand that trials there are mere theatres. The deciding 'judges' usually don't even hear evidence given in 'courts'. Canadian Clive Ansley practised law in Shanghai for 13 years, handling about 300 cases in their courts before returning to B.C. He explains the reality of what happened to Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo, Gao and so many others: "There is a current saying amongst

Chinese lawyers and judges who truly believe in the Rule of Law and this saying, familiar throughout all legal circles in China, vividly illustrates the futility of attempting to ‘assist China in improving its legal system’ by training judges. The saying is: ‘Those who hear the case do not make the judgment; those who make the judgment have not heard the case’.... Nothing which has transpired in the ‘courtroom’ has any impact on the ‘judgment’.”

Ambassador Andrew Bennett

I’m delighted to add that Canada’s religious freedom ambassador, Andrew Bennett, today said that he’s deeply troubled by the Chinese party-state’s “egregious” treatment of religious communities, specifying “unacceptable” treatment of Falun Gong practitioners as well as Buddhist Tibetans, Uighur Muslims and Christians.

“In the case of China, and in the case of Iran and other countries that really are fairly egregious violators of religious freedom, we will issue frank statements,” Bennett said. “In engaging on the Chinese question with respect to religious freedom, we will have opportunities, I know, going forward to speak out forcefully on all of these questions of persecution.”

(CalgaryHerald:<http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/national/China+treatment+minorities+troubles+Canada+religious/9265847/story.html>)

Conclusion

The international community should remain engaged with Beijing despite the constant difficulties created by its governance model. The Chinese people should know that Canadians stand with them, not with their government, just as we did in central Europe during the cold war, and with South Africans, particularly during the late ‘80s and in the lead-up to the election of Nelson Mandela.

The world’s democrats, including our national governments, civil society institutions and businesses, should, of course, remain engaged with the new government in Beijing and the broadest possible range of citizens across China despite the difficulties created by autocratic governance. Democracy with very Chinese features is probably closer than many think. How many ‘experts’ anticipated the fall of European totalitarianism in 1989 or the Arab Spring more recently? No-one on the democratic side should forget in this engagement that the values we represent are universal ones, including human dignity, the rule of law, multi-party democracy, corporate social responsibility and the need for people everywhere to have access to good jobs.

The Chinese people want the same things as the rest of us, religious freedom, respect for all, education, safety and security, good jobs, the rule of law, democratic and accountable governance and a sustainable natural environment. If the party-state ends its systematic and gross violations of human rights at home, especially in respect of Falun Gong practitioners, and abroad and begins to treat its trade partners in a transparent and equitable way, the new century can bring harmony and coherence for China and the world. The first step in a better direction is to end organ pillaging now.

Thank you.