

**HUMAN DIGNITY IN CHINA TODAY
FOR FIRST STEP FORUM (FSF) ANNUAL MEETING**

Hon. David Kilgour, J.D.

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A practice of our annual meetings, held mostly in differing European capitals each January now over 15 years, is to assign topics of concern to participants which often relate to a part of the world where we are not gathering. This year, among our colleagues speaking, my topic is China today from a human dignity perspective (The views expressed are personal, not those of FSF or any other member).

Bishop Songulashvili

Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili of the Baptist Church in Georgia provides lessons about caring and inclusion partly through his solidarity with various communities. By championing the rights of Muslims, LGBT citizens, the unemployed and female clergy, he unravels stereotypes and urges us all to learn the ways of compassion so that there might be equal rights and opportunities for all.



He is an excellent example of 1 John 3:18 “...let us love not in word and speech, but in action and truth.” Baptists in the Republic of Georgia are not afraid to stand up for the interfaith harmony with Muslims and other spiritual communities across Georgia.

We congratulate him on his book published last September, *Evangelical Christian Baptists of Georgia -The History and Transformation of a Free Church Tradition*. Using archival sources in Georgian, Russian, German, and English—translating many of these crucial documents for the first time into English—he has recounted the history of the EBCG from formation in 1867 to the present.

Tragically, there have been others in the region who have not loved their neighbours. Consider this about Joseph Stalin from Paul Ginsborg’s book, *Family Politics-Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival 1900-1950*: “ Stalinist Terror came in waves with different targets... the French historian Nicolas Werth has only recently fully brought to light (that)...(b)etween August 1937 and November 1938 some 750,000 Soviet citizens were arrested as ‘enemies of the people’ and killed after summary trials. It was, according to Werth, ‘the greatest state massacre ever perpetuated in Europe in times of peace’...”

China Today

Let me now turn to China, starting with one of its former leaders, Mao Zedong. Most historians today include him with Stalin and Hitler as the three worst mass murderers of the 20th century. His most objective biographers, Chang and Halliday, note that “over 70 million perished under Mao’s rule” in peacetime.

Many governance and other major problems in China today result from the mixing of Mao’s totalitarianism and his successor Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms.

Violence/Corruption

Every decade or so since it seized power in 1949, the Communist Party has unleashed violence on a minority, at least partly to promote fear and obedience among the Chinese people generally. Consider four of the campaigns since 1950:

- Mao’s ‘Great Leap Forward’ collectivization of farming and industry (1959-61) in which an estimated 45 million persons were worked, starved or beaten to death,
- The Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, which reduced the country to chaos, denied an entire generation formal education, and saw perhaps another two million killed for no reason,
- The Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, where soldiers killed thousands who were seeking dignity for all, openness and democracy, and
- The ongoing persecution today of Falun Gong, Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Christians.

Let’s look more closely at the community of peaceful Falun Gong practitioners. Since mid-1999, vast numbers of them have been sent to forced labour camps across China without hearings, convictions or appeals on police signatures only. There they are tortured and blood tested; the unlucky ones are murdered on demand for their vital organs, which are trafficked for huge profits.

Dr. Dana Churchill of the United States, one of the founding board members of Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH), said last October,

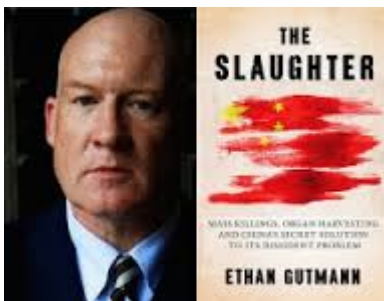
The world has never seen a more horrific and barbaric crime (than) the Chinese Communist Party has committed against Falun Gong. But... the Uyghurs, Christians, [and] Tibetans have all been organ harvested while they are alive, unwilling, and between 20 and 40 years old—the prime of their life... With Falun Gong, approximately 65,000 have been murdered since 1999.

Background

Ten years ago, David Matas and I were approached by the Coalition to Investigate the Persecution of the Falun Gong in China (CIPFG) to research allegations of organ harvesting. We agreed to do so on an independent and voluntary basis. The conclusion of our

report was so disturbing that we termed what we found a “new form of evil on the planet”. When he initiated the persecution of Falun Gong in mid-1999, the former head of the Party, Jiang Zemin, set out to “ruin their reputation, bankrupt them financially and destroy them physically.”

A grassroots exercise and spiritual movement, Falun Gong grew exponentially in the 1990s to between 70 and 100 million practitioners. The persecution of them after mid-1999 for the first time filled the vast network of slave labour camps with healthy, exploitable prisoners of conscience who were well-suited to trafficking in vital human organs. According to exiled surgeon Enver Tohti, the practice continued with Uyghur political prisoners after 2009, and then expanded to some Tibetans and members of Christian churches.



In 2014, after eight years of research, Ethan Gutmann published *The Slaughter*. He estimates that at any given time, from 450,000 to a million Falun Gong practitioners languish in prisons and labour camps. He concludes that approximately 65,000 Falun Gong, and two to four thousand Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Christians were killed for their organs in the 2000–2008 period. His estimates regarding Falun Gong practitioners are similar to those of Matas and myself for overlapping time periods.

U.N. Torture Panel

Last month, Nick Cumming-Bruce of the *New York Times* described questioning of Beijing’s representative in Geneva by a U.N. Panel on Torture. The panel focused on the recent clampdown on human rights lawyers, the prolonged detention of dissidents and activists, the common practice of torture by police and anticorruption investigators, the independence of ‘judges’, prisoner access to lawyers, the length of pre-trial detention, forced repatriation of North Koreans, and psychiatric treatment/shock therapy on prisoners.

President Xi Jinping last July launched an all-out attack on China’s tiny human rights legal community. Since assuming the Party leadership in 2013, Xi has increasingly cracked down on perceived western-style freedoms in China. The aspirations of the Chinese people and their international friends for gradual reform, leading to the rule of law, a sustainable natural environment, and democracy--undoubtedly one with very Chinese characteristics—have been set back.

Clive Ansley



The most recent abuses have been well documented by the respected sinologist/lawyer, Clive Ansley, who practised law in Shanghai for 14 years until 2003, when he could no longer bear its ‘legal system’ and returned to Canada.

In a recent article for Lawyers’ Rights Watch (www.lrwc.org – lrwc@portal.ca), Ansley and Gail Davidson make many important points, but let me refer only to two:

- “As a member of the United Nations and state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), China is obligated to ensure the enjoyment by all of the rights and freedoms recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and guaranteed by the ICCPR.”
- “The courts and the judiciary are controlled by the Communist Party of China and are therefore not independent. This means the Communist Party of China... will continue to retain control over the ‘courts’, the police, and the procuratorate (state organs of legal supervision)...”

Wang Yu



Wang Yu began taking on human rights cases in 2011 after spending several years in prison and has become a fearless champion of the abused, defending feminists, Falun Gong, and Ilhan Tothi, the respected Uyghur academic, who was last year jailed for life for ‘inciting separatism’.

In 2013, Wang observed, “Many people think: ‘China is rich, developing quickly ...has tall buildings, wide highways, fancy cars...’ They don’t know that Chinese people are like animals that don’t have any basic rights”. Wang is featured in the U.S. Government’s [FreeThe 20#](#) campaign (www.humanrights.gov), which draws attention to the plight of women political prisoners in particular.

Gao Zhisheng

Human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, known as ‘the conscience of China’ and twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, was moved in August 2014 from prison to house arrest, but could at the time barely walk or speak. On September 23, 2015, in his first interview in five years Gao told Associated Press that he was tortured with an electric baton to his face and spent three years in solitary confinement since 2010.



“Every time we emerge from the prison alive, it is a defeat for our opponents,” Gao told AP. He survived only from his faith in God and his unwavering hope for China. Even while President Xi was visiting America, it was revealed that Gao had been re-arrested in Beijing.

<http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/1766521-tortured-china-rights-lawyer-gao-zhisheng-speaks-out/>.

The Party

One of the best analyses of contemporary China is *The Party* (2010), by Richard McGregor, formerly *Financial Times* Beijing bureau chief. “Terror”, he notes, “was the system for extended periods of Mao’s rule... (it) remains essential to the system’s survival and is deployed without embarrassment when required.” He adds: “China is deeply corrupt... Since 1982, about 80 per cent of the 130,000 to 190,000 officials disciplined annually for malfeasance by the Party received only a warning. Only 6 per cent were criminally prosecuted, and of them, only 3 per cent went to jail.”



‘Crony capitalism’

Joe Nocera wrote recently in the *International New York Times* that China’s “debt load today is an unfathomable \$28 trillion”. *The Financial Times* reports that a “national team” of state-owned investment funds and institutions spent about \$200 billion attempting to prop up the Shanghai stock market, which is down about 37 percent since mid-June. There appears to have been a further drop of about 13 percent this week.

Large sums continue to be removed from China by both nationals and foreigners; the regime has been spending billions daily to manipulate its currency. The highest echelons of the Party have amassed unimaginable wealth. President Xi Jinping’s family is reportedly worth several hundred million dollars.

In short, the ‘crony capitalism/Maoist governance’ model is currently experiencing severe strains. The Tianjin tragedy and its opaque handling before, during and after the explosions also reflect a profound and growing discord between the Party and the people of China. The recent mudslide disaster in Shenzhen is only the latest in a long history of industrial accidents.

A view from David Shambaugh



David Shambaugh, named one of America’s top 20 China watchers by the China Foreign Affairs University, is now convinced that we are witnessing the “endgame of Chinese communist rule.” He wrote:

In 2014, Shanghai’s Hurun Research Institute... found that 64% of the ‘high net worth individuals’ whom it polled—393 millionaires and billionaires—were either emigrating or planning to do so. Rich Chinese are sending their children to study abroad in record numbers...

... since taking office in 2012, Xi has greatly intensified the political repression that has blanketed China since 2009. Targets include the press, social media, film, arts and literature, religious groups, the Internet, intellectuals, Tibetans and Uyghurs, dissidents, lawyers, NGOs, university students and textbooks...

(Corruption) is stubbornly rooted in the single-party system, patron-client networks, an economy utterly lacking in transparency, a state-controlled media and the absence of the rule of law..."

Better Governance

Among China's neighbours, India, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan are stable democracies. It is self-serving sophistry to claim, as Party apologists in Beijing do, that democracy and universal values don't work well for Asians. Since the end of the First World War, multiparty democratic governance has been adopted throughout much of the world, albeit with periodic setbacks, as the best means of creating improved citizen lives.



The world-renowned Beijing artist/democrat Ai Weiwei's comments are revealing:

"...Because the Chinese government refuses to face elections, the public has never express(ed) its opinion about the leadership... The Communist Party is ethically and philosophically too weak to meet any challenge in public discussion. Over the coming years, the Communist government will finally... realize that it can only continue to govern if supported by the constitution and true rule of law... (If it continues to reject any public role in its decision making and hopes to distract Chinese with spectacles ... the regime will only hasten its own end..."

Conclusion

I believe the Chinese people, with all their accomplishments during more than 5000 years, want respect for all, education, safety and security, good jobs, the rule of law, democratic and accountable governance and a sustainable natural environment.

We democrats around the world should stand with the people of China, just as we did in east and central Europe during the Cold War, and with South Africans, particularly during the late '80s and lead-up to the election of Nelson Mandela. If the party-state in Beijing ends its systematic violations of human rights, this century can bring harmony and prosperity for all.

In closing, I would like to thank the conference organizers for allowing me this opportunity to express personal concerns about China's government and congratulate them on their efforts to bring the Christian and Muslim communities together in Georgia.

Thank you.