

SPEECH TO HENRY JACKSON SOCIETY EVENT – CHINA: 30 November 2016

Thank you very much indeed Fiona.

May I start by thanking the Henry Jackson Society very much indeed for hosting this event. I am a big admirer of the Henry Jackson Society, I have had the privilege of speaking on other topics, particularly Burma, to you on several occasions in the past, and the words of Henry Scoop Jackson are words which motivate my daily work for human rights: *“If you believe in the cause of freedom, then proclaim it, live it and protect it, for humanity's future depends on it.”*

May I also pay the warmest possible tribute to you, Fiona, for your leadership of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, and for your courage in speaking out on human rights issues so consistently and persistently even when it is not always easy or convenient to do so.

May I also say what a great privilege it is to be speaking on this panel with my friend Ethan Gutmann, who along with the Canadian lawyer David Matas and the Canadian former parliamentarian David Kilgour has done more than anyone in the world to bring to light the horrific crime against humanity of forced organ harvesting in China. Ethan has given evidence to our Commission on this issue several times, leading to us producing a separate report specifically on organ harvesting. It's also a privilege to be speaking alongside

Yaxue Cao, who kindly stepped in at the last minute after Angela Gui informed us she is unwell and unable to join us. Angela has sent a written statement which I will read out on her behalf after my own remarks. It's worth noting that Angela spoke at the launch of the China report that is the focus of our discussions today, alongside the former Governor of Hong Kong Lord Patten and Miss World Canada Anastasia Lin, who I know has also addressed the Henry Jackson Society.

I first went to China in 1992, when I was 18 and I went to teach English in my gap year. In all the 24 years of following China since then, I can honestly say that I have never seen a period in which human rights have deteriorated so dramatically as they have done in the past three years. And that's why we conducted this inquiry and published this report.

Let me say a few words about how the report came about.

It was in July last year, when hundreds of lawyers in China were rounded up and arrested, that I first realised something was very desperately wrong. China has always had a bad human rights record. We all know that. But there used to be a belief that as China opened up economically, it would eventually reform politically. With the crackdown on lawyers last year – and, I must add, the crackdown in Hong Kong following the Umbrella movement from 2014 onwards – I knew that things were regressing very seriously.

Last summer and autumn, Fiona tabled several questions in Parliament and in particular an Urgent Question during Xi Jinping's State visit, and afterwards I suggested to Fiona that we hold an in-depth inquiry, to enable us to receive and examine evidence about the range of human rights issues in China: the crackdown on lawyers, the destruction of crosses in Zhejiang, wider abuses of freedom of religion or belief including restrictions on Christians throughout the country, persecution of Falun Gong, the situation in Tibet and Xinjiang, organ harvesting, the repression of freedom of expression, the tightening of restrictions on civil society, increasing censorship and propaganda, and the situation in Hong Kong.

We held two three-hour long hearings, where we heard from a range of Chinese dissidents, international China scholars and human rights organisations. We also put out a call for evidence and received over 30 written submissions – including from people as distinguished as Hong Kong's former Chief Secretary Anson Chan, the founder of Hong Kong's Democratic Party Martin Lee, the leader of the Umbrella Movement Joshua Wong, the blind human rights defender Chen Guangcheng, as well as organisations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, China Aid, Christian Solidarity Worldwide and many others.

And without exception, the unanimous view of everyone who gave evidence was that the situation in China, including Hong Kong, has indeed deteriorated dramatically. Some say it is the worst situation since the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. We chose the title from the words of a Chinese activist Yang Jianli, who wrote in his submission to our inquiry: “this is the darkest moment for Chinese human rights in years”.

And it continues as we speak. In the past few days the abduction of human rights lawyer Jiang Tianyong has been reported, as has the disappearance of two website editors. There is the issue of the Hong Kong democratically elected legislators denied their seats because of their stand on the oath, and the regime’s new regulations tightening restrictions on religion even further.

And so the question we ask – and continue to ask – is this: is now really the time to be declaring we wish to be China’s best friend and pursue a golden era? To use Lord Patten’s phrase, “do we ever have a bottom line”?

Too much kowtowing does not make for good foreign policy. As James MacGregor, chairman of APCO, said during Xi Jinping’s visit to the UK: “If you act like a panting puppy, the object of your attention is going to think they’ve got you on a leash. China does not respect people who suck up to them.”

So what do we do? Our report, which was endorsed by both Lord Patten and former Foreign Secretary Sir Malcolm Rifkind, and is available on our website, sets out 22 recommendations for the United Kingdom.

We urge the British government – especially as we have a new Prime Minister and a new Foreign Secretary – to conduct a radical review of our China policy, and to adopt a position where we put concern for human rights in China and Hong Kong at the centre of our relationship with China. When China is experiencing its “darkest moment” for human rights, it is not the time to pursue a “golden era”. It is right to engage, to trade, to build a relationship – but it must be one where human rights are raised, actively, repeatedly, and publicly as well as privately. And that can be done. Germany’s Angela Merkel proves that – and I set out in an article for the Wall Street Journal what our government could learn from her in handling China, for she has spoken out consistently on human rights and yet Germany remains China’s top trading partner in Europe.

Let me conclude by saying that it is not only morally right, but also in our own interests to speak out for the values of freedom and human rights in the world today, and nowhere more so than in our relationship with China. Daniel Johnson, the editor of Standpoint, said in a recent lecture that: “To be a conservative means to reject the politics of negativity — anger, revenge,

hatred, guilt and resentment — and instead to pursue a positive vision: a liberal-minded vision of generosity and justice, of peace and prosperity, of democracy and conviviality under the rule of law. ... We are responsible for the preservation of the civilisation that has formed us and of which we in turn must endeavour to be worthy. Our primary duty is to the civilisation of the West; but our responsibilities do not stop there. Wherever in the world the forces of barbarism seek to destroy humanity and liberty, we must resist and overcome them. If we do not, they will seek us out sooner or later. Even if they fail in their attempt to annihilate us, physically and culturally, the barbarians may do great damage.” Under Xi Jinping, the barbarians are in charge.

In 1949 Chairman Mao said that the Chinese people had stood up. Now, it falls to us and everyone in the international community to stand up for the Chinese people.

Thank you.

Benedict Rogers
East Asia Team Leader

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CSW, PO Box 99, New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3YF
T: [+44\(0\) 845 456 5464](tel:+44(0)8454565464), E: admin@csw.org.uk, W: csw.org.uk