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One Hundred and Twelfth Congress

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

April 27, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
2201 C St. NW Ste 7276
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Timothy F. Geithner
Secretary of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Clinton and Secretary Geithner:

In view of your upcoming participation in the annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue (SED), we are writing to express our deep concern about China's deteriorating human rights situation and the flagrant disregard of the rule of law by China's leaders. Against this troubling backdrop, we believe that it is essential that you deliver a strong message to the Chinese authorities that this negative trend has not gone unnoticed, and that, absent improvement, it threatens our bilateral relationship. We strongly urge you to raise human rights at the highest levels during the core SED sessions—and no longer relegate the subject only to the bilateral human rights dialogue.

In addition to raising human rights in the formal exchanges during the SED, we urge that Assistant Secretary Posner and other ranking official visitors to China make time to openly meet with human rights defenders and civil society representatives and attend a house church gathering. A house church, Beijing's Shouwang Church, which Rep. Wolf and our colleague Chris Smith visited during a July 2008 trip to China, recently lost its lease. As its members attempted to meet in a park during the past several weekends, including on Easter Sunday, many were arrested and detained. Visits by U.S. officials to a house church will help remind the Chinese authorities that a commitment to religious freedom is one of our country's core values.

As noted in the State Department's recently released Human Rights Country Reports, the current human rights situation in China is characterized by the Chinese leadership's increasingly arbitrary and harsh grip on civil society and growing disregard for the rule of law. This includes increased use of extrajudicial measures including house arrest, forced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, and extralegal "re-education" camps. It is particularly troubling that these harsh and repressive measures are now being widely applied to civil society and human rights activists, the lawyers who defend them, bloggers, journalists, and religious leaders and adherents of the house church movement

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among others. As you know, these brave individuals play a critically important role in fostering the development of civil society, so current developments are particularly troubling. Accordingly, we request that you direct Assistant Secretary Posner to utilize the human rights dialogue that is currently under way to forcefully convey concerns over the current crackdown. We ask that he raise key cases, by name, and ask to meet with some of the leading activists who have been imprisoned or placed under house arrest such as Liu Xiaobo or Liu Xia.

To ensure that China understands that the U.S. is not alone in its concern over current human rights developments in China, we urge that you immediately convene a meeting of the “human rights exchange” to share human rights-related information and feedback received during the SED. This meeting should be held in a manner that raises the profile of this group and signals to the Chinese authorities and the international community that there are many countries that have significant and substantial concerns about the human rights situation in China and about the well-being of Chinese human rights defenders. Coordinated international pressure is a source of leverage that must be utilized under current conditions.

We also urge that you work with the White House to encourage President Obama to meet publicly with Chinese defenders of human rights and religious freedoms—as did President Bush in 2008. In the face of the deteriorating human rights conditions in China, we need to signal—at the highest levels—our concern over these negative trends. As the Chinese authorities continue their assault on human rights and civil liberties, we must clearly communicate the importance of these basic freedoms. We would be pleased to provide a list of the leading human rights defenders who might be invited to such a meeting.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress