

Feb. 14, 2012

Statement of CECC Chairman Christopher Smith and Cochairman Sherrod Brown on Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping's Visit to the United States

The chairmen of the bipartisan Congressional-Executive Commission on China today called on Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping to take concrete steps to improve human rights and the rule of law in China.

"It is our fervent hope that Vice President Xi can reverse the course of his predecessors and usher in positive changes in China. But we remain extremely concerned, as the run-up to Vice President Xi becoming the next leader of China has been accompanied by one of the worst crackdowns in recent memory," said Representative Chris Smith, Chairman of the Commission. "Beyond that, China's oppression of house churches, censorship of the Internet, and one-child policy continues unabated."

"As China's likely next leader, Vice President Xi has a unique opportunity to improve relations with the United States," said Senator Sherrod Brown, Cochairman of the Commission. "But in order to win the respect of the American people, Vice President Xi must make every effort to ensure China plays by the rules, abides by its international obligations, and guarantees the fundamental rights of all its citizens."

Vice President Xi, who is expected to assume President Hu Jintao's leadership positions in the Communist Party and government in 2012 and 2013, arrived in the United States on February 13.

Both Smith and Brown expressed concern over the government's treatment of human rights activists and called for an end to a government crackdown that began in February 2011.

"The well-known activists Gao Zhisheng and Chen Guangcheng have endured some of the most brutal conditions imaginable, and the alarming lack of access to them by diplomats, concerned citizens, and their families raises serious questions about their health and safety. We call on Vice President Xi to do all he can to ensure their safety and secure their immediate release," said Chairman Smith.

"The impact of the major crackdown that began in February 2011 has amounted to silencing a significant number of China's most outspoken dissidents for years to come," said Cochairman Brown. "Instead of making China more free, China's expanding trade relations through China's membership in the WTO appear to have given China's leaders greater confidence to trample on the rights of its citizens and dash any hopes for democratic reform."

In the past two months, three democracy advocates—Chen Wei, Chen Xi, and Li Tie—received heavy prison sentences, joining a growing list of Chinese citizens sentenced to

nine or more years in prison for peaceful political dissent. That list includes 2010 Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo and democracy advocates Guo Quan, Liu Xianbin, and Xie Changfa. Another democracy advocate, Zhu Yufu, was just sentenced to seven years in prison for pro-democracy activities, including a poem and other writings that allegedly "incite subversion."

Chairman Smith and Cochairman Brown noted at least 20 Tibetan self-immolations reported to have taken place since March 2011, ongoing repression against Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and controls on freedom of religion.

"Officials have refused to address the underlying repressive policies against Tibetans' religion, culture, and language that have likely contributed to this unprecedented tragedy. Instead, they reportedly have fired on Tibetan protesters, tightened security even further, and closed off Tibetan areas to the outside world," said Chairman Smith. "Vice President Xi should protect the freedom of religion and spiritual belief of all those in China, whether they be Buddhists, Muslims, Protestants, Catholics, or Falun Gong practitioners."

"Instead of condemning the Dalai Lama, Vice President Xi should recognize that the Dalai Lama remains the best hope for restoring stability to Tibet and guaranteeing the genuine autonomy that is the right of Tibetans," said Cochairman Brown. "Vice President Xi should end discrimination against Uyghurs, allow them to practice their religion freely, and stop the harassment of Rebiya Kadeer, her family, and other peaceful Uyghur activists."

Smith and Brown continued to note troubling signs that call into question China's commitment to commercial rule of law and worker rights.

They noted that the WTO recently decided that Chinese restrictions on raw material exports violate WTO rules. "The WTO decision on raw materials is just further evidence of the Chinese government's willingness to cheat and game the system at the expense of our companies and our workers," said Chairman Smith.

The chairs also observed recent high-profile reports about the Foxconn manufacturing company detailing horrific conditions at Chinese factories, including dangerous work environments, long hours, and low wages. "The reports underscore the need for China to allow workers effective and independent labor representation, and for the Chinese government, domestic Chinese companies, and multinational companies to do much more to improve China's poor worker safety record," said Cochairman Brown.

The Commission's chairs call on Vice President Xi to take the following concrete steps:

- Release all political prisoners and guarantee all Chinese citizens the freedom of expression, religion, and assembly to which they are entitled under international human rights standards, including Articles 18, 19, and 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- Amend China's Criminal Law to remove vaguely worded crimes used to punish peaceful political and religious activity and ensure that anticipated revisions to the Criminal Procedure Law do not "legalize" enforced disappearances that put Chinese citizens at risk of torture or abuse.
- End unfair trading practices, such as currency manipulation, industrial policies, and the use of quotas and subsidies, that are inconsistent with China's commitments to the World Trade Organization and incompatible with the rule of law.
- Pursue policies that protect the fundamental rights of Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other ethnic minorities, including their cultural, linguistic, and religious rights, and engage in substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives.
- Reevaluate China's population planning laws and regulations to bring them into conformity with international standards and cease all coercive measures to implement these policies.
- Improve conditions for Chinese workers and allow them to organize independent unions.