

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MR. ERPING ZHANG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN RESEARCH
Submission to US Congressional Committee, September 29, 2006

Let me begin by thanking the Members of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations for the opportunity to speak here today. It is my privilege to address those assembled here on the topic of Falun Gong more generally. In particular, I would like to thank Chairman Rohrabacher who, over the years, has proven to be an unwavering champion of human rights and basic freedoms in China. Mr. Chairman, we applaud your work and we call upon others to follow your example.

First, a simple question: What exactly is Falun Gong? I would first answer qualitatively, by saying that it is part of a longstanding Chinese tradition of self-improvement. Falun Gong's values and aspirations, like those of Buddhism or Daoism, are markedly spiritual. For many, practicing Falun Gong begins with a desire to be more healthy or whole. Through special, yoga-like exercises and cultivation of moral values, the person arrives at a greater sense of balance, peace, and vitality. At its pinnacle is the possibility of spiritual attainment called in Chinese "achieving the Dao," or "enlightenment." Its teachings revolve around three values, which the practitioner strives to live by, namely: truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance. Speaking quantitatively, Falun Gong is practiced in some 80 countries around the world; as of 1999, an estimated 100 million persons in China alone were practicing.

I should also speak in the inverse, if you will, and spell out two things we are not. As representatives of China's regime have actively tried to share their rather crude and skewed picture of Falun Gong with members of our Government including of this Congress, it's possible there is some confusion. Firstly, Falun Gong has no political agenda or aspiration of any sort. It is a spiritual discipline; this it always has been, and always will be. It is merely that since 1999 those who practice Falun Gong have faced tremendous—and often violent—persecution at the hands of China's communist regime. So inhuman has been the maltreatment that nearly 3000 adherents are now known to have died from torture in police custody; hundreds of thousands are currently held in jails and labor camps simply for who they are. Practitioners of Falun Gong are denied schooling, deprived of jobs, denied custody of their own children, publicly humiliated, raped and sexually assaulted by police, and stripped of most every basic right we in the free world believe a human being is entitled to. Furthermore, China's regime has invested untold millions of dollars in propaganda meant to breed hatred and discrimination against the group—both in China and around the world, including here. Some victims have even been paraded through the streets in a cangue, much like during the Cultural Revolution.

Atop all of this, the regime has robbed Falun Gong of any voice by burning its books in mass rallies, banning all Falun Gong related literature, and blocking all Falun Gong websites and even Western news reports. Under this circumstance we have been left with no choice but to speak out. Our goal has been simple and singular: to let people hear our side of the story; to expose those violating our rights; and to, by doing so, end the genocide we face. We are not interested in political power. We would love nothing more

than to meditate quietly in parks. But when people beat down our doors and arrest and torture our parents, friends, and children, when they try to wipe out our very existence, we feel duty-bound to speak out. Martin Luther King Jr. is not remembered as a criminal for fighting unjust laws; he is a hero.

Secondly, I would point out that Falun Gong is not deviant, weird, or dangerous, as China's regime has tried to portray it. Consider the bigger picture. For one thing, all of the accusations the regime has made came overnight, with the banning of Falun Gong in 1999; during the seven years before then, from 1992–1999, Falun Gong was practiced by millions and totally mainstream, and even praised by various official bodies of the Chinese state. That is to say, the accusations were a sudden political invention. And these accusations, it is worth noting, are something Chinese officials do not allow outsiders to investigate; those who try are arrested. Or from another perspective, we might note how none of the accusations made by the regime are made in Taiwan, another Chinese society. There, hundreds of thousands on the small island practice Falun Gong freely. There, Falun Gong is, to this day, enormously popular and praised by government officials and doctors alike as healthy and beneficial to society. Falun Gong is there taught in hospitals, schools, and even prisons. Then we might ask: is it that Falun Gong is so radically different on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, or is it the political systems? Taiwan, after all, is a democracy. Indeed, we can see that China's regime does not allow other groups to exist freely—be they religious groups, labor unions, or political parties.

What this means, then, is that China's regime has tried to scandalize Falun Gong. It has done so for at least three reasons:

1) doing so paints the oppressor in a rosy light, as if it were stomping out society's bad elements; if people knew the truth about what Falun Gong is they would be outraged at the communist regime's actions

2) by shifting attention to Falun Gong's beliefs, the spotlight is removed from the practices of China's regime, which include the brutal torture and even murder of Falun Gong's followers;

3) by painting Falun Gong as weird, cultish, or different from you and me, it hopes to scare people away from the issue, make things seem terribly messy, and dull the listener's humanity, as it were.

In a word, the attempt is to undermine sympathy and support for Falun Gong, to alienate the group, and to justify what is in essence simply another attempt by the Chinese leadership to exercise totalitarian control.

So, it is important that today we are focusing the discussion on what is real and what is dire, and I wish to applaud the committee for its courage.

In closing, I would like to mention one initiative that is occasion for hope, and symbolizes our efforts for justice in China. The Global Internet Freedom Consortium

which consists of five U.S.-based organizations has launched a project called, "Cyber Freedom for China and the World." The project, now in its seventh year, has been extremely successful in advancing freedom of information in China. At the present time, essentially every website blocked to mainland Chinese users is accessible through the consortium's anti-blocking technology. This includes the web sites of Voice Of America and Radio Free Asia, as well as the uncensored versions of Google and Yahoo. In 2005, hits by mainland Internet users through our technology averaged 30 million per day. It has created a safe, secure online virtual environment where Chinese people can practice and realize the freedom of speech, association, and belief that does not exist elsewhere in China. The positive impact is both very real and important—we are not only bringing Internet freedom to China as well as all other repressive countries, but also facilitating the peaceful transformation in China that the world has long hoped for.

Our efforts are done fully for the welfare of China's people, and even, insofar as we seek to uphold the law and constitution, for the sake of the country. There is nothing "anti-China" about supporting constitutionally-guaranteed rights when they are abused, or pointing out the perpetrator. In America, we call this being a good citizen. I call it, in our case, being a friend of China. Surely "China," after all, is the people of that vast country—and not its unelected rulers, who so regularly abuse and exploit her people for their narrow, private interests.

We would urge this Congress and our Executive Branch to take every opportunity to raise Falun Gong issues to the CCP leaders and help save innocent lives by taking concrete steps to end this persecution soon. History will not only judge we have done, but also what we haven't when we could.

Thank you for your time and concern.