

## Response to a reader's question on

- (1) Logistics of a forum that Mr. Matas has attended;
- (2) Whether presenting together with Falun Gong members at invited forums undermines the investigation team's neutrality; and
- (3) The nature of Falun Gong

By David Matas

Thanks for this.

In the course of presenting our report, we have spoken at a number of venues organized by a wide variety of individuals and institutions. Some of the events are co-sponsored by several organizations. In principle, I do not consider it appropriate to reject an invitation simply because of who is sponsoring it. The invitations to speak, whoever the sponsor, do not constrain what we say.

As well, in the course of our talks, we have appeared sometimes alone, sometimes with others. Again, I do not consider it appropriate to say who else should be allowed to speak alongside me or what that person should say.

In Tel Aviv, at Beilinson Hospital, I spoke a week ago Sunday on a panel where one of the speakers was the first counselor at the Chinese Embassy in Israel. A representative of Falun Gong had been scheduled to appear on the platform. The Chinese embassy insisted that the Falun Gong representative be removed from the program and he was.

I was not happy with this arrangement but continued to participate in the program. Your view, I guess, would have been that I should not have. But I do not feel I was endorsing in any way what the Chinese embassy had to say by appearing on the same platform as one of their representatives, particularly when I disagreed explicitly with him.

My own preference would be to have both a Falun Gong representative and a representative of the Government of China on the same platform with me. But if the Government of China continues to insist that a Falun Gong representative not be allowed to speak as a requirement for their representative to accept an invitation to speak, then, in my view, no such invitation should be given.

At the end of the Israel program, there was a question and answer period. I took advantage of this session to ask Roy Bar Ilan, the Falun Gong practitioner who had been removed from the panel, his response to the comments of the representative of China. The chair of the session, rather than let the practitioner answer, concluded the session abruptly, without closing remarks, without thanks, without any further announcements. This was an unsatisfactory conclusion and hardly worthy of emulation in any form.

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Of course, the logistics of any event in which we participate can, in hindsight, be improved. Virtually all of the events in which we participate are planned by amateurs, not by people in the business of organizing speaking events.

Your comments about how the event could have been better organized are well taken. The trouble for us is that there is no one to whom to tell them. We do not travel with a professional organizer, nor do we contract a professional organizing company to plan our speaking engagements.

The planners of the next event are likely going to make as many planning mistakes and oversights as the planners of previous events. But we have neither the time nor the inclination nor the abilities to engage in the planning of these events ourselves. It is simpler as well as more polite to leave the planning to those who invite us, even if the organization is not all that it should be.

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But I do have some concerns about the substance of your remarks. I feel you are engaged in false symmetry between perpetrator and victim. The Government of China violates the human rights of Falun Gong practitioners. About that there is no doubt. The debate in which we are currently engaged is whether a particular form of violation is occurring, organ harvesting, not whether there are violations at all.

The human rights reports of governments, including your own, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations are replete with the details of this victimization. Falun Gong are by far the leading victims of human rights violations in China, surpassing the next largest victim group, the Uighurs, by a factor of six.

The Falun Gong, in contrast, are innocents. They harm no one. They do not even use force in self defense.

We are certainly not engaged in a debate about whether Falun Gong should or should not be the victims of human rights violations. Between a perpetrator and victim, there can be no neutrality. On this issue, we are not neutral; nor should anyone who is concerned with respect for human rights.

We like to think we are objective in approaching the particular issue we have been asked to address. But that is not the same as neutrality on the question whether the Government of China is behaving properly by violating the human rights of the Falun Gong. Before we started our report, we both had long ago decided to stand against human rights violators and on the side of victims.

As you can see from our report, we addressed the issue whether or not the Falun Gong is a cult. The bit in our report on the issue is an excerpt from larger text I have written. That larger text says this about the cult issue:

"Why does the Chinese government denounce so viciously and repress so brutally this one group, more so than any other victim group? Falun Gong has none of the characteristics of a cult. It is not an organization. It has no memberships or offices, no officers or leaders. Falun Gong has no funds and no bank accounts.

Falun Gong practitioners live at home with their families. They do not live separately with co-practitioners. They are not expected to make a financial contribution to the Falun Gong and, as I have noted, no place to which to direct such a hypothetical contribution.

There is no penalty for leaving the Falun Gong, since there is nothing to leave. Practitioners are free to practice Falun Gong as little or as much as they see fit. They can start and stop at any time. They can engage in their exercises in groups or singly.

Practitioners, though predominantly ethnic Chinese, come from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds. They lead ordinary daily lives, working in the whole gamut of professions and trades, eating the same foods as everyone else, studying at the same schools and universities as non-practitioners.

Li Hongzhi, the author of the books which inspired Falun Gong practitioners, is not worshipped by practitioners. Nor does he receive funds from practitioners. He is a private person who meets rarely with practitioners. His advice to practitioners is publicly available information - conference lectures and published books.

The Chinese government labeling of the Falun Gong as an evil cult is a component of the repression of the Falun Gong, a pretext for that repression as well as a defamation, incitement to hatred, depersonalization, marginalization and dehumanization of the Falun Gong. But this labeling does not explain why that repression arose. The "evil cult" label is a manufactured tool of repression, but not its cause. The cause lies elsewhere."

The text goes on to talk about what that cause is. Your attempting to determine whether or not Falun Gong is a cult strikes me as misplaced, not a serious subject worthy of inquiry. It seems the equivalent of an investigation to determine whether there is a Jewish conspiracy to control the world.

Bigotry is troubling not just because the answers which are given, but because of the questions which are asked. Are blacks dirty? Do Jews control the world? Are Serbians bloodthirsty? Are Tutsis genocidal? Are the Falun Gong a cult? The very attempt to answer these questions is demeaning.

The evil of incitement to hatred is not only in the conclusions reached. It is in the questions being asked. Hate propagandists approach the world with a frame of reference which is skewed to conform to their own world view. Hate propagandists live in a self contained world of delusive paranoia where the vilified group is the enemy and they are the defenders of virtue.

An investigation into whether a particular piece of incitement to hatred is true adopts the frame of reference of the propagandist. The investigation asks the question the propagandist asks, adopts the approach to the world the propagandist has. Such an investigation may reject the answers of the propagandist. Yet, it accepts the question of the propagandist as a valid one, and gives credence to it.

The allegation that the Falun Gong is a cult is so far removed from reality and so closely identified to the Chinese decision to persecute the Falun Gong, a decision which came about for other reasons, reasons which are part the public record, that I really wonder whether it makes any sense for you to investigate this allegation. It sounds to me like an investigation whether the Chinese are right to kill and torture the Falun Gong for their beliefs, surely an inappropriate line of inquiry.

Thank you for coming to hear me speak and your continuing interest in our work.

David Matas, Esq.  
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