

## **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND FALUN GONG IN CHINA**

**Address by**

**Hon. David Kilgour**

**Amnesty International Headquarters**

**Laurier Ave East**

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Recently, I was attempting to raise legislator awareness about the organ snatching nightmare faced by many Falun Gong practitioners in China (The Matas-Kilgour report is available in 17 languages at [www.organharvestinvestigation.net](http://www.organharvestinvestigation.net)). We arrived at a national parliament in Europe, expecting to meet an all-party MP group, only to find that the MP entrusted to invite others had at the last moment decided not to do so. His stated reason was that his caucus is faith-based and Falun Gong is a different religion from his own.

In all of the 26 countries David Matas and I have now visited separately or together on this issue since our report came out, I have never heard a Falun Gong practitioner speak other than positively about other spiritual communities. Which religion, moreover, cannot identify with the Falun Gong core principles of “truth, compassion and forbearance”? The inner serenity and non-violence its practitioners have demonstrated in the face of beatings, imprisonments, torture and murder across China since July, 1999 are strikingly reminiscent of what early Christians faced with Roman despots.

If anyone thinks that persecution of religions has diminished in recent centuries, permit me to point out that the last century was undoubtedly the worst in recorded history for brutality directed at believers. One estimate of the number of human beings of all nationalities who died prematurely for their faiths between 1900 and 2000 is a staggering 169 million, including: 70 million Muslims, 35 million Christians, 11 million Hindus, nine million Jews, four million Buddhists, two million Sikhs and one million Baha’is.

Too many of these victims died in inter or intra-faith violence, but most by far perished at the hands of totalitarian regimes, which detest all religions mostly because believers’ deepest loyalties lie elsewhere. Stalin, Hitler, Mao and other dictators had murdered untold tens of millions of their fellow citizens. This attitude towards religion is one reason for the persecution Falun Gong practitioners have faced in China since mid-1999. The second was its immense popular appeal across China because of its deep roots in Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism and other features of Chinese spiritualism, culture and physical exercise. By 1999, there were by the government’s own estimates more than 70 million Falun Gong practitioners across China—far more than the members of the Communist party with its European origin ideology. These factors explain why the regime developed a special hatred for Falun Gong.

### **Falun Gong is No Cult**

I might add here that the Government of China’s Big Untruth, i.e., that Falun Gong is an “evil cult”, reminds one of the messages the government in Rwanda broadcast through its party media about the Tutsi community before the terrible events between April and June of 1994. There has been such a stream of propaganda against Falun Gong in the

government-controlled media across China since mid-1999 that many Chinese nationals and even some outside China unfortunately appear to have accepted the Party line.

Permit me to mention that I spoke about the dangers of cults at a conference at the University of Alberta a few years ago, the text of which is available on my blog (david-kilgour.com). A better source on the subject is Professor David Ownby of the University of Montreal, who is cited in our report and did specific research on Falun Gong. He concluded:

- Falun Gong practitioners in North America are well-educated and tend to live in nuclear families. Many work with computers or in finance; some are engineers.
- Falun Gong Practitioners do not have financial obligations to their faith community; as well, they do not live in isolation and are law-abiding.
- Falun Gong is not a cult

Ownby's conclusion accords with that of many independent observers, including David Matas and myself. In the 70 or so countries where it exists, there is only one, China (and possibly Singapore), where its practitioners appear not to be considered good citizens and exemplary members of their respective civil societies.

### **Religious Liberty Indivisible**

One researcher on the persecution of religions in China suggested several years ago that there were probably as many Christians attending services there each week--mostly in secret--as were doing so openly across Europe. In standing up for the principles of the United Nations Universal Human Rights Declaration for a young spiritual community like Falun Gong, the MP mentioned above would ultimately be defending freedom of religion generally in China. The constitution of China says its citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" (art. 36), although those outside the so-called "patriotic churches" are not permitted to practise their faith.

China's government in fact considers all spiritual communities to be misguided, deviations and mistakes in accord with the dialectic materialism of Karl Marx. Enter, for example, "Chinese government persecution of Christians" on Google.ca and fully 835,000 entries come up, many of them deeply appalling. Replace "Christians" here with any of a host of other targeted groups and you get:

- Muslims-772,000 entries
- democrats-812,000
- women-837,000
- athletes-110,000
- Falun Gong-481,000
- Tibetans-approximately 400,000
- Gays and lesbians-226,000
- Uyghurs-989,000
- journalists-approx. 750,000
- lawyers-651,000
- investors-323,000

- entrepreneurs-293,000

In the current issue of an important publication, China Rights Forum, published by the NGO Human Rights in China ([www.hriChina.org](http://www.hriChina.org)), there is a list of the known persons in China by category, who will still be in prison during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Consider the breakdown:

- 1989 Democracy Movement-70 individuals
- Ethnic minorities
  - Inner Mongolia-one
  - Xinjiang-38
  - Tibet-33
- Democratic Party of China-12
- Internet journalists-40
- Workers-16
- Catholics-26
- Protestants-39
- Falun Gong-68

This list, no doubt, highly understates the number of persons in all categories, especially the Falun Gong, who are mostly in forced labour camps (which are not prisons for this list), making products for export, including Christmas decorations, in violation of WTO rules. The breakdown by category indicates the real nature of the regime in China.

Google “Chinese government corruption” and you get 1.7 million items. “Chinese government secretly executed” brings 714,000. (Presumably some of these relate to the three Christians killed secretly in prison in western China in late November: Xu Shuangfu, Li Maoxing and Wang Jun. Xu led a church with evidently more than 500,000 adherents nationwide. Their lawyers said they were convicted by confessions obtained by torture.) Another that caught my eye was “Government of China denies”, which has fully two million entries. The government specializes in denials, including such matters as whether there was a 2003 SARS epidemic in China, whether anyone died at Tiananmen Square in June, 1989, and whether it sells the organs of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience.

### **Chinese People Humiliated**

The Chinese people, with all their history, culture, art and other accomplishments during more than 5000 years continue to be humiliated by the totalitarian and corrupt party in power since 1949. The population is among the most hard-working on earth, but is exploited by its own government in countless ways. If you doubt this, examine some of the many campaigns the Party has launched against its own nationals since 1950, including:

- The terror campaigns of the 1950s, during which as many as three million citizens were executed,
- The Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957 in which about 300,000 of the nation’s intellectuals were arrested, imprisoned and subjected to “re-education” for criticizing party policies,

- The Great Leap Forward of 1959-61 in which a terrible famine caused by Mao's forced collectivization of farming and industry caused the deaths of an estimated 30 million persons,
- The Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, which reduced the country mostly to chaos, denied an entire generation formal education, and saw perhaps another two million killed for no reason justifiable in human terms,
- The Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989.

The government of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao is today showing little willingness to learn from past human rights disasters. Indeed a recent meeting of Amnesty International leaders from numerous countries evidently concluded unanimously that human rights have deteriorated significantly across China over the past two years. If this trend continues, which athlete, government, company or spectator of conscience would want anything to do with Olympic Games held in Beijing in 2008?

In applying for the coming Games, the government of China undertook to improve human rights; it continues to move briskly in the opposite direction. Can the government then be trusted to keep others of its Games undertakings even remotely in line with the Olympic spirit? If not, should the International Olympic Committee not move the event to one of the other cities which sought the privilege of hosting them?

### **Middle Kingdom Economy**

This brings me finally to the economy of China, which we all know has grown at a phenomenal rate since the late 1970s. As the Australian Paul Monk put it in his 2005 book, *Thunder From The Quiet Zone*, starting with a tiny GDP of \$US 106 billion in 1970, China's economy by 2004 stood at \$US 1.3 trillion, which is in the same range as what was produced that year by about 32 million Canadians. One must, moreover, keep in mind that even with such growth China's economy in 2004 was, for example, less than 12 per cent of the gross size of the US economy. The per capita GDP of \$US 1200 that year in China was about five per cent of Canada's per person level.

My own view is that the particular model of capitalism Deng Xiaoping unleashed at the end of the 1970s is essentially heartless and without even remotely adequate social safety nets. Everything, including work conditions, the natural environment, and the consequences for people with jobs in other countries, is sacrificed in order to produce consumer goods for export at low prices. Most Chinese workers are exploited mercilessly by what is really a carnivore economy, which would make American robber barons in the 19<sup>th</sup> century green with envy. Perhaps nothing demonstrates the inhumanity of it all better than the practice of murdering Falun Gong prisoners of conscience to sell their vital organs often to foreigners. The sums paid by foreigners involved in "organ tourism" are enormous.

There is no rule of law in China as Canadians understand it; the courts are mostly theatre, where judges normally announce decisions made by local party committees. Not long ago, for example, the Beijing appellate court rejected the appeal by the New York Times researcher, Zhao Yan. His lawyer pointed out afterwards that his client was not allowed

to call witnesses or present certain evidence. How can any responsible person invest other people's money in such a legal jungle, where party apparatchiks behave like lions?

Only recently as well, the world learned that Gao Zhisheng, one of China's best and most courageous lawyers was charged with "inciting subversion" after being held in prison without charge since mid-August. The news in recent days indicates that police have beaten up his wife severely and even continue to harass their two young children. It reminds us all of the sorts of things that go on in the regimes of Omar el-Bashir of Sudan, Burma's Senior General Than Shwe, Kim Jung-il of North Korea and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, which are not coincidentally all close allies of the government of Messrs Hu and Wen.

### **Conclusion**

Human dignity today is indivisible around the world. All faith communities and other members of civil societies everywhere should be fully united on issues like the ones facing Falun Gong practitioners have faced daily for too long across China. If the peoples in open societies around the world don't unite on such matters, some of the world's remaining 40 or so dictatorships will only repeat the terrible ravages of the last century.

Here are some specific ways we can demonstrate Canadian concerns about basic freedoms in China:

1. Use every political, diplomatic and economic venue to raise and highlight religious freedom issues with the government Beijing. Let's also avail ourselves of every opportunity to raise such issues with any official visitor from China;
2. Human rights dialogues should be held in public fora, not behind closed doors, because they are matters of widespread Canadian interest;
3. Canada-China relations should be based on fundamental human values, not commercial interests alone. A democratic and open society in China is in the long-term interest of peace, prosperity and security for the world;
4. Some additional funding from Canadians for supporting religious freedom in China, much in the same way pro-democracy movements elsewhere are supported;
5. Parliament should bar our companies from supplying suppression technologies to the government of China, such as surveillance devices and arms; and
6. Hold frequent conferences to address religious freedom issues in China.

Thank you