

December 1, 2009

The Right Honorable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
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Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2  
FAX: 613-941-6900



Canadian Coalition  
on Human Rights in China

Coalition Canadienne  
pour les droits humains en Chine

Re: Your State Visit to China

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

On the eve of your first official visit to China, we, members of the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China,<sup>1</sup> urge you to use the occasion to publicly push for an improvement in China's poor human rights record and to press the Chinese government to show the world that it is serious about meeting its obligations under international human rights law.

Twenty years after the Tiananmen Square massacre, China's human rights record has continued to deteriorate by almost every measure. Despite much-touted promises, the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games did not bring about positive changes to the rule of law and respect for the rights of citizens and, in fact, led to numerous human rights violations.

The distinguished Canadian writer, Denise Chong, in a newly released book, portrayed the moral courage of individuals in effecting change within China. We hope that the government of Canada will also show moral courage in addressing human rights issues with Chinese authorities. We have recently seen two examples of the government of Canada taking a clear stand on the cases of individual Chinese dissidents—both Lu Decheng (the subject of Chong's recent book, *Egg on Mao*) and Jiang Weiping have been able to settle in Canada with their families because Canadian officials took action.

The recent growth in human rights advocacy within China has been remarkable. But thousands of Chinese activists and human rights lawyers continue to face arbitrary detention, harassment and imprisonment following unfair trials. Authorities continue to execute more people than the rest of the world combined. Human rights defenders pursue their work within the Chinese legal system, yet that system is persistently used against them. They face unfounded and concocted charges. They are subject to blatantly

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<sup>1</sup> The coalition currently includes Amnesty International Canada (English & Francophone Branches), ARC International, Canada Tibet Committee, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Canadian Labour Congress, Falun Dafa Association of Canada, Federation for a Democratic China, PEN Canada, Rights & Democracy, Students for a Free Tibet Canada, Toronto Association for Democracy in China, the Uyghur Canadian Association and the Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement in China.

unfair trials. Our Coalition has provided the government with a list of eleven such cases. We hope that you and your officials will make an opportunity to discuss these cases with Chinese authorities. We hope as well that you will raise the case of Huseyin Celil, a Canadian citizen of Uyghur origin, serving a life prison term in China after an unfair trial.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government has stepped up efforts to silence internal criticism or challenge, despite the country's massive economic growth. At the same time, there continue to be widespread and grave human rights violations against Tibetans, Uyghurs and followers of Falun Gong, among other groups.

We understand that our concerns compete for attention among the many issues on the agenda for your trip to China. But progress on any of these momentous issues will ultimately require the talents, the vision, and the involvement of the entire citizenry of both our countries—and in China, some of those most engaged in envisioning China's future, and most committed to engaging their fellow citizens in questions that matter, are currently in prison.

We ask that you not be persuaded by those who would argue that speaking out on human rights concerns is somehow counterproductive or inappropriate to the occasion.

Some might argue, for example, that pressing the Chinese government too forcefully about human rights is bad for business and that Canada's trade with China will suffer. Trade statistics do not support that position. In 1997, when the Canadian government abandoned public criticism of human rights violations in China and opted instead for a policy of quiet diplomacy, Canada had a 1.41% share of the market for total imports into China. During the years of quiet diplomacy that dropped, to 1.06% in 2003 and .97% in 2006. More recently, your government suspended the quiet human rights dialogue process with China and, coincidentally or not, Canada's share of Chinese imports modestly increased to 1.12% in 2008. In short it seems clear that quiet diplomacy with China has not benefitted Canada economically, nor does frankness about Canadians' concerns over China's human rights record hurt Canada economically either.

Canada has a long and friendly relationship with China; Dr. Norman Bethune is regarded as a national hero in China. Dialogue on sensitive issues like human rights is not only appropriate; it is a measure of the respect between nations.

We urge you, as Prime Minister, to take the opportunity of your upcoming dialogue with Chinese leaders to show that Canada, along with the rest of the Western democracies, views human rights as a central plank of its relationship with China.

We entreat you to speak out, confident that your personal intervention will give hope and strength not only to political and human rights activists in prison in China, but to all Canadians who share our belief that freedom of expression is both a sign of strength and a human right that cannot be compromised.

Sincerely,

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