

Remarks of Li Hai, Falun Gong practitioner and former member of Department of Treaty and Law, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, honorable Members of Congress. I would like to thank Chairwoman Ros-Lehtinen for holding this important hearing and inviting me to participate.

I began practicing Falun Gong in 1995, when completing my masters in international law. I felt that the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Tolerance that Falun Gong taught people to follow were how I wanted to live my life.

In 1997, I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its Department of Treaty and Law. Several other people in my department also practiced Falun Gong. My local practice site had 50-100 people from all strata of society.

In July 1999, our lives were turned upside down, when Jiang Zemin became jealous and fearful of Falun Gong's popularity. Between July 1999 and January 2012, I was detained four times, the longest for seven years.

I would like to focus my oral remarks on a few key points. My written testimony has more details about what I experienced and witnessed.

1. The persecution is still brutal, lawless, and pervasive, reaching every segment of society.

Millions of Falun Gong practitioners continue to live the nightmare that I survived and escaped.

In November 2002, plainclothes police abducted me for distributing video CDs about Falun Gong.

I wanted to help Chinese people see through the Communist Party's lies about Falun Gong. With other practitioners, we gave out 100,000 VCDs.

The officers didn't take me to a police station, as required by law, but to a hotel outside Beijing. They asked my address, but I refused to tell them to protect the other practitioners.

They kicked and punched me. But I refused to talk. Then, they brought out electric batons. They shocked my neck, my palms, my genitals, and other sensitive body parts. The pain was unbearable. I couldn't walk for several days.

In April 2004, Beijing's No. 2 Intermediate People's Court put me and eight others on trial for distributing VCDs. It was a total sham. I was sentenced to nine years and sent to Qianjin prison.

I was in prison until May 2010. When I left, 60 to 70 Falun Gong practitioners were still there. There are three other prisons and labor camps holding Falun Gong practitioners just in Beijing, and hundreds of others around the country.

The Falun Dafa Information Center and independent experts estimate that hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners are in custody at any given time.

From what I saw, I believe these estimates are true.

2. The core of the Communist Party's persecution is to "transform" Falun Gong Practitioners

What is "transformation"? At the prison, they had a special, well-known method for "transformation." They didn't let me sleep and forced me to sit upright on a tiny stool without moving, with my knees closed, and my hands on my knees. They hardly let me use the bathroom. I sat for 12 to 20 hours a day.

It was a simple torture method, but extremely painful. As I sat there, guards came to threaten me and curse Falun Gong.

After a few weeks, I couldn't bear it any more. I gave in and signed the papers denouncing Falun Gong, even though it was all lies. I knew in my heart that Falun Gong was good. But I wasn't confident I could endure nine years of torture.

Even after I signed, they didn't leave me alone. They made me write a "thought report" every day.

Think about what you most fundamentally believe is good and true. Maybe it is your belief in Jesus or the Jewish god. Maybe it is your belief in freedom and dignity. Then imagine being forced every day to say that this idea you believe in is bad and false.

That is "transformation." It makes you feel hopeless, weak, defeated, hating yourself.

After I gave in, I felt like a walking zombie.

3. Despite the Communist Party's best efforts, the persecution is failing.

Actually, 80 percent of Falun Gong practitioners start practicing again once they are released, as I did. This terrifies the Communist Party.

I also noticed a big difference in people's attitudes in 2010 compared to 2002. More and more people really hate the Communist Party, and aren't afraid to say so.

When I talked to them about Falun Gong, it was easier for them to understand that we are being wrongfully persecuted.

I feel that despite the money and brute force the Communist Party has poured into censorship and repression, it is losing the true battle for the hearts and minds of the Chinese people.

Improving human rights in China

As the United States government thinks about how to improve human rights in China, I hope you can keep this in mind: if we truly want to free China, we need to free Falun Gong.

Every day, hundreds of thousands, likely millions, of Falun Gong practitioners around the country experience abuses like I did. Once every three days a new case of a Falun Gong practitioner killed from abuse is reported, but this is just a drop in the bucket.

But the victims are not just Falun Gong. They are also the prison guard pressured to torture practitioners. Or Chinese diplomats, like my former colleagues, who believe they are acting in the national interest,

but are actually helping spread lies about Falun Gong around the world and in that way helping the persecution. They are among millions of Chinese who have been deceived, made to betray their conscience, and forced to help a tyrannical regime.

Then, is it really possible for China to move towards better human rights or the rule of law when these atrocities are happening on such a massive scale and involving so many people?

So, what can the U.S. government do? A public condemnation of the persecution of Falun Gong—including by President Obama himself—would be a strong start.

Thank you again for inviting me to share my experiences with you today.