

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy On The Persecution Of Falun Gong Practitioners

Today marks 21 years since the Chinese government launched a brutal campaign to eliminate Falun Gong, a traditional Chinese religion based on a philosophy of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

Since July 1999, the Chinese government has arbitrarily detained millions of Falun Gong practitioners, effectively exiled many who have traveled abroad, and revoked the licenses of lawyers who defend Falun Gong in court. As I and others have described before, Falun Gong practitioners have been interred at reeducation camps, beaten, electrocuted, force-fed, sexually assaulted, starved, and tortured in countless other horrific ways in an effort by the Chinese government to force them to renounce their beliefs and denounce their communities. Many have been murdered. For years it has been reported that Falun Gong practitioners have been one of the main targets of forced organ harvesting committed throughout China. At the very least, thousands have died as a result of such torture and other abuses.

Like the systematic brutalization of Tibetan Buddhists and Uyghur Muslims, the Chinese government has relentlessly repressed Falun Gong because it fears any religion or association it cannot control. We will probably never know how many innocent people have been the victims of this brutality or the extent of the harm that has been inflicted on these communities, because the Chinese government denies these practices to the outside world while justifying them to their own citizens.

I will repeat what I have said in the past, as we have reached grim milestone after grim milestone. The Chinese government should immediately cease its arbitrary detention and brutalization of Falun Gong practitioners and other religious and ethnic minorities. It should release political prisoners from reeducation centers, decriminalize religious and spiritual practices, and allow international human rights groups and journalists to interview survivors. It should commit to ending the use of torture, organ harvesting of prisoners, and propaganda against minorities.

Year after year I have heard from Vermonters and others asking Congress to speak out on behalf of Falun Gong, as well as countless other causes whose followers are being targeted in brutal crackdowns by their own governments. To many, these atrocities are a tragic statistic that can be learned and forgotten. But the victims deserve to be remembered. The plight of Falun Gong in China demands our attention and condemnation.