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Dr. Lily L. Zhang

Forum Coordinator

The Epoch Times

P.O. Box 3481

Gaithersburg, MD 20878



# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-1405

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WASHINGTON OFFICE:

2185 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-1405  
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-2276

DISTRICT OFFICES:

8900 KEYSTONE AT THE CROSSING  
INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46240  
TELEPHONE: (317) 848-0201  
TOLL-FREE: (800) 382-6020

209 SOUTH WASHINGTON STREET  
MARION, IN 46952

TELEPHONE: (765) 662-6770  
TOLL-FREE: (877) 846-2936

[www.house.gov/burton](http://www.house.gov/burton)

Dear Dr. Zhang:

As a senior Member of the House International Relations Committee, I have worked – along with like-minded colleagues in the House and Senate – to send a strong, consistent message to repressive regimes like the PRC that membership in the community of nations requires a real commitment to support and advance democratic governance, political openness, respect for human rights, and promotion and protection for the freedom of speech and religion. Tragically, this message continues to fall upon deaf ears and the persecution of religious freedom continues; as best exemplified by the PRC's campaign of repression against members of the peaceful Falun Gong movement.

Many of us have become familiar with the case of the Falun Gong – also known as Falun Dafa – a religious movement which combines a regimen of exercise with meditation. According to its practitioners, the beliefs of Falun Gong are derived from qigong, a set of movements that stimulate the flow of vital energies throughout the body. As I understand it, the practice teaches the virtues of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance, while warning against moral degeneration and materialism.

Since 1999, because the members of this peaceful practice dared to ask their government for official recognition and their constitutional rights to free speech, press, and assembly, the PRC has systematically and ruthlessly cracked down on the practitioners of Falun Gong. Yet the Falun Gong were only one of many groups to face persecution. On October 30, 1999, China's National People's Congress promulgated an "anti-cult" law, retroactively suppressing the Falun Gong movement and thousands of other religious sects across the country; closing 67 teaching stations and 1,627 practice sites in Beijing alone.

Subsequently, the PRC detained and questioned over 30,000 followers nationwide, and charged Falun Gong leaders with numerous crimes, including: organizing superstitious sects, disrupting public order, leaking state secrets to foreigners, and engaging in unlawful assembly and publication. Between 150 and 450 group leaders and other members were tried and sentenced to terms of up to 18-20 years in prison; and an estimated 10,000 to 100,000 citizens have spent time in detention or "labor re-education" camps solely because of their religious beliefs.

In fact, the U.S. State Department's *International Religious Freedom Report of 2004* stated that "the Government [of China] continued its repression of groups that it categorized as 'cults' in general and



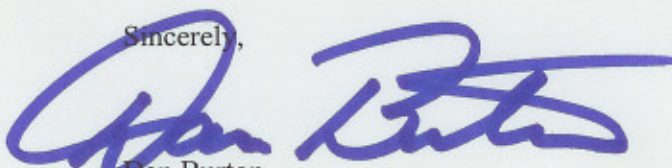
of the Falun Gong in particular.” Moreover, the arrest, detention, and imprisonment of Falun Gong practitioners continued as they respectfully refused to recant their beliefs. As a result, they are being continually subjected to harsh treatment in prisons and re-education through labor camps – many times resulting in deaths due to torture and abuse. For example, in December 2003, Falun Gong practitioner Liu Chengjun died after reportedly being abused in custody in the Jilin Province. The report went on to state that the Chinese Government “tends to perceive unregulated religious gatherings or groups as a potential challenge to its authority, and it attempts to control and regulate religious groups to prevent the rise of groups or sources of authority outside the control of the Government and the CCP.” The U.S. Department of State – for six consecutive years – has designated China as a “Country of particular concern” for “particularly severe violations of religious freedom,” especially as it pertains to the persecution of Falun Gong members.

It is in part due to the brave and courageous writers, such as yourself at *The Epoch Times* – publisher of the *Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party* – that we have an accounting of this religious persecution and the numerous other dangerous activities of the PRC. The *Commentaries* present an uncensored and honest history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), effectively and poignantly detailing the brutal conditions under the CCP which have prompted over three million Chinese to make public statements renouncing all ties to Communism. By now, over 300 public forums of the *Nine Commentaries* and 100 public rallies – with tens of thousands of supporters – have been held in more than 50 major cities throughout the world. I applaud and commend their tireless efforts to show the world what is truly happening inside China.

The right to religious freedom is firmly enshrined in the United States own Bill of Rights as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18; and a nation’s adherence to this principle is now widely understood to be a strong indicator of the good governance required to protect the rights of minorities and safeguards of social peace. The importance of promoting religious freedom cannot be overstated. In many ways, the promotion of religious freedom is intimately connected to the promotion of other fundamental human and civil rights, as well as to the growth of democracy. Once believers cannot convene, worship, and publish their literature, there is essentially no freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of press.

As we work to spread the ideals of democracy to areas of the world that have languished in the shadow of tyranny, we must also carry forward the simple but powerful message that every person has a right to religious freedom and fight to roll back the tide of religious repression whenever and wherever it threatens to spread across the globe.

Sincerely,



Dan Burton  
Member of Congress