



2nd GENEVA SUMMIT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRACY

March 8-9, 2010

Session: Rising Powers, Rising Rights Compliance? Case Study of China

Speech by Yang Jianli, Activist in 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, former political prisoner, founder of Initiatives for China

Good morning friends, delegates, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

I have been asked to share my personal story with you. My story is important not because it is different or exceptional, but because it is very similar to the stories of my 1.3 billion fellow citizens.

I was born 3 years before the Cultural Revolution which lasted an entire decade. At an early age, the unspeakable sufferings that most families had at the hands of the communist dictatorship, including mine, made me disenchanted with the Communist party. However, I was enticed into joining the party with the idea of reforming it from within. This all changed when I returned from my Ph.D. studies in the U.S., to join thousands of my fellow students as army tanks, at the

direction of the Communist Party hardliners, rolled across Tiananmen Square on the morning of June 4, 1989.

After Tiananmen, I narrowly escaped back to the United States. While I went on to finish my Ph.D. degree in mathematics at Berkeley and then another PH.D. degree in political economy at Harvard, I immersed myself in advancing a peaceful transition to democracy in China. Forgive me, but time and respect for my audience does not allow me to elaborate except that I decided to return to China in 2002 to help the labor movement with non-violent struggle strategies. During my attempt to leave China, I was arrested by Chinese authorities and sentenced to 5 years in prison. Much of those years I spent in solitary confinement. I resorted to composing poems in my head and committing them to memory as a means of maintaining my sanity. Thanks to the overwhelming international support generated by the persistence of my wife Christina, and with incredible help from Jared Genser who represented my case in US, my treatment in prison gradually improved.

My prison experience gave me the perfect analogy to describe the course of China under the communist dictatorship. The events of Tiananmen caused a seismic rupture in Chinese society. It was as if China separated into two landmasses: One containing the ruling elite; the other containing the vast majority of powerless Chinese citizens.



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The “Two China” society is not so different from the society I experienced in jail: A society of tyrants and slaves. In jail the tyrants make up all the rules, arbitrarily administer justice, and control what the slaves eat, read, and do.

After Tiananmen the communist rulers discarded any pretense of communist ideology. They threw open the doors to rapid economic development at any cost. The political elite quickly bonded with the economic elite to become the ruling tyrants of China Incorporated. China, Inc. uses its vast wealth and power to compromise and neutralize the intellectual elite. China, Inc. impresses many observers with its enormous wealth and astonishing growth rate. These observers begin to believe that one-party dictatorship is a good model for economic growth and the progress of society. China Inc. promotes this idea by controlling all the channels of communication. Over 300,000 “cyber cops” monitor and censor information over the Internet. The recent disclosures regarding Google reveal that government Cyber espionage is a fact of life for everyone inside and outside of China. China Inc. makes its voice loud enough and suppresses other voices so outside observers believe that they represent China, the whole China.

But there is another China. A China increasingly separated economically and socially from China Inc. Data shows that 70% of China’s national wealth is divided between just 0.4% of Chinese households. That means that a billion Chinese citizens have benefitted very little from

the economic growth. China's minimum wage is only 15 % of the world's average, ranking number 159 globally. The minimum wage's contribution to GDP also ranked number 159 globally. What ranked on the opposite end of the spectrum is its Tax Misery Index. It ranked 2 or 3 for several years in a row. These data do not take into account any undocumented but heavy and widespread fees and uncompensated property takeovers. Up to today, the powerless China has been refused to any form basic universal social security. However, a member of China Inc. enjoys all kinds of privileges until death. A billion Chinese citizens have no political protection or means for redressing grievances. The judicial system of China reports into the Communist party. Under the glare of the Olympics, more than 300,000 people in Beijing were displaced without compensation for "beautification projects". Freedom of expression and ideas are systematically repressed. Increasingly the picture of two Chinas on the Mainland comes into focus: China Inc, the tyrants; and the citizens of China, the powerless and exploited.

History tells us that a society divided into tyrants and slaves cannot last for long. So too China Inc. and the powerless, exploited China will not endure for long. The question is how can these two Chinas be made whole again in a way that is peaceful and enduring.

The vehicle for a peaceful unification of these two Chinas is already designed. Charter 08 has defined the terms and set the language for building a new bond between rulers and the ruled. It defines a new covenant of governance through the rule of law and the respect for cultural diversity. Despite every possible attempt by the Chinese government to eradicate it, over 11,000 Chinese citizens have given their real names and signatures to this document.



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Like Charter 77, the designers of Charter 08 can be jailed and vilified, but the ideas they drew live on. Charter 08 provides the vehicle to carry a billion Chinese citizens to the threshold of freedom. This is why the communist rulers reacted so harshly in its handling of many Chinese civic leaders represented by Liu Xiaobo, a leading signatory of Charter 08 who was sentenced to 11 years in prison on the eve of Christmas of last year. These civic leaders believe in and work for integration of the two diverged societies based on justice. But the Chinese government is afraid of such a integration and therefore has always tried to contain and persecute Chinese civic leaders. Some of them have been sent into exile overseas, others were put in jail. Still others were followed, monitored, or put in house arrest. They must have public space before China can make any real progress toward democracy. So we must work relentlessly on their freedom.

If Charter 08 is the vehicle to carry the citizens of China to freedom, then the Internet is the highway along which they will travel. The Internet is the product of the Information Age and represents a new ladder for human civilization. Wherever the Internet reaches, it enhances commercial productivity, increases government transparency and stimulates social vitality, to the benefit of all mankind. Only the CCP regime views the Internet as a scourge, and exhausts its mental, financial and manpower resources to infiltrate, intercept, block and close it off, creating a succession of Internet "Berlin Walls" such as "Golden Shield" and "Green Dam," and training and employing myriad Internet police, informers and "50 Cent Party" members. In a recent

meeting of the Party leadership, President Hu Jintao emphasized that the survival of the Communist Party's leadership was dependent on its ability to control the Internet.

But the economics of Internet control does not bode well for the tyrants of China Inc. As the Internet base expands in China, the costs of censorship outpace the cost of bypassing that censorship by a factor of 10:1. Soon there will be so many holes in the great firewalls that like the proverbial dike, it will be impossible to maintain. Without the ability to control the Internet, China will not be able to control the will of one billion Chinese citizens.

As that day approaches, a crisis of confidence will emerge during which the power elite will be thrown off balance and the one billion citizens of China will realize they are no longer slaves. It will not be a green or a velvet revolution but perhaps it will be called the cyber revolution. But non the less a crisis will occur, just as the crisis occurred in 1989. The key to insuring that this crisis ends peacefully and concludes with the transition to a democratic form of governance will be the response of the International community.

China must determine its own future. But just as America looked to France during its struggle for independence and Europe looked to America for its liberation from National Socialism, the citizens of China will be looking to world to weigh in on the side of the people. It cannot for the sake of China and the future of stability of the world, stay on the sidelines as it did in 1989.