

NY legislators call for end to persecution in China

By JOSHUA PHILIPP
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NEW YORK—Nearly a third of the New York State Assembly co-signed a letter to President Barack Obama, asking him to denounce the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) persecution of Falun Gong.

In a 72-hour time frame, more than 50 members of the Assembly signed. "I've been in politics a very long time, almost three decades, and I've never had an issue get that much interest and support in such a short period of time," said 8th District Assemblyman Phil Boyle, who initiated the letter.

He initiated the letter on June 18. Its signing comes just weeks before July 20, which will mark the 10th year of the CCP's brutal suppression of Falun Gong.

More than 3,000 Falun Gong (also called Falun Dafa) practitioners are confirmed to have been killed by the CCP, although the full number cannot be confirmed. Countless others have been thrown in prisons and "re-education" camps where brutal torture methods are often used on them.

Boyle said that in the New York

State Assembly "there was such strong support for Falun Gong practitioners," adding that the response was "amazing because we got started with only a few days left in our Assembly session."

When asked why there is such a strong stance against the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in the New York Assembly, Boyle said, "I think they appreciate what Falun Gong represents."

The practice is the most popular qigong discipline in China and was once regarded favorably by the ruling party, due to its health benefits. Between 1992 and 1999, an estimated 70 to 100 million people began practicing Falun Gong in China, according to a state poll that was conducted in 1999.

Its widespread popularity is often attributed to its free teachings and its foundation in the values of being truthful, compassionate, and tolerant. Its popularity was also considered one of the factors that spurred the CCP to persecute the practice.

When asked what the interest in foreign human rights is to the New York State Assembly, Boyle said that

around the world, human rights are "coming to the forefront of foreign policy."

"It's our hope that in his dealings with leaders of communist China, President Obama will keep the CCP's persecution of Falun Gong practitioners at the forefront of his mind when he's dealing with leaders in Beijing," Boyle said.

He added that the CCP's violence has stretched into U.S. communities, as was witnessed in the numerous attacks against Falun Gong practitioners in Flushing in the borough of Queens, N.Y.

These attacks were addressed specifically in the New York State Assembly's letter to Obama.

The letter states that "The persecution of Falun Dafa followers by the Chinese communist regime is not limited to the People's Republic of China. Pro-communist mobs have berated, threatened, and physically attacked Falun Gong adherents in New York City. New York City police officers have had to arrest several members of an anti-Falun Gong mob for attacks against practitioners, with charges ranging from assault to resist-

ing arrest."

Boyle said that he was "outraged" upon hearing of the attacks taking place in Queens, adding that such attacks need to be prosecuted to the full extent of the law "because if the thugs that carried out these assaults and intimidation think they can get away with it because of their connections back in Beijing, then there's no end in sight of what they may try in the future."

Boyle thought that many people including the President might be concerned that demanding the CCP end its persecution of Falun Gong could upset the regime and affect trade relations with China.

He said, "The President is going to need to stand up and show that courage to say: We know these are tough economic times, but human rights is the most important principle that we stand for in the United States, and with or without the Chinese government, we'll get through this crisis as a country."

"I think we should have similar letters being sent to President Obama from around the country," said Boyle.

Google Framed in China

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The NGO vice-director, Xi Wei, did demonstrations in front of a computer that complemented what Gao had to say. Xi in particular showed how Google's Suggest function greatly expanded the list of possible pornographic terms and Web sites.

Bloggers in mainland China, who may have Googled Gao Ye to learn more about him, have reported that he is in fact an intern at the CCTV station.

CIIRC would probably not be identified as an NGO in the West. Its Web site says the Center is supported by the "Ministry of Information Industry, the Ministry of Public Security, and the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China."

INAPPROPRIATE SEARCHES

The grounds for the accusations on CCTV had been carefully prepared, with the regime apparently using the functionality of Google's own search engine to condemn Google.

Beginning on June 10, a large number of searches on Google.cn for unusual phrases that might be linked to sex began appearing. The frequency of these searches increased dramatically between June 10 and June 17. After peaking on June 17, the number of these searches just as rapidly declined.

At one point in the "Focus Report" program, the reporter demonstrated Google's purported saturation with obscene materials by showing that even Googling benign words such as "son" and "mother" could lead one to obscene information on the Web. He showed this by typing in the Google search the Chinese term for son ("erzi"), and immediately the phrase "son, mother, inappropriate relationship" (inappropriate relationship between son and mother) emerged through Google's Suggest function as the most popular phrase.

Google Suggest is a feature in Google's search function that attempts to guess what users are trying to search for and provide suggestions before they have completed typing their search terms. The company says it uses algorithms with a "wide range of information" to predict the queries, including how popular the search terms are. However, it appears the service is susceptible to manipulation.

In fact, the frequency of the searches for the phrase "son, mother, inappropriate relationship" during the previous week appear to have raised its ranking so that on June 18 Google's Suggest function returned the phrase as the top result for a search for "son."

According to bloggers in China who have analyzed the data, the number of searches for this phrase increased by 5,950 percent during the week of June 10–17. One hundred percent of these searches originated from somewhere in Beijing.

According to a statement from the Beijing Internet News Information Evaluation Committee, the Chinese regime ordered the Suggest function be disabled on June 18.

A Google spokesperson on June 30 confirmed that the Suggest function was still "temporarily" disabled.

SUGGESTING A MOTIVE

On June 24, Google.cn was temporarily shut down by the authorities. The next day, the Chinese Communist Party's official paper, People's Daily, reported on a statement by the Beijing Internet News Information Evaluation Committee that sharply criticized Google for spreading "pornographic, lewd and vulgar content."

Many of China's bloggers laugh at the pretext of the regime's shut-down of Google, and with good reason. China's public life sometimes seems to be saturated with sex. Strip clubs are common. Billboards feature naked women, and trade shows sometimes feature naked women to entice interest

at booths. In some recent cases, female protesters in Beijing have stripped their clothes off simply to get attention for their protest.

On the Chinese Web, explicit pornography is very easily available, particularly through the Chinese-owned Baidu, the leading search engine in mainland China. One blogger searched for the words "pretty female" on both Baidu and Google.cn and showed screen shots of the results. The Baidu search seemed to have significantly more of the content the regime claims to be concerned about.

Baidu only searches mainland China Web sites. The access Google provides to content around the world has always been a challenge to the regime's efforts to control the Chinese Internet. In January 2006, Google, in a kowtow to the regime, purged Google.cn's searches of Web sites not approved by the regime, such as Web sites dealing with Falun Gong, Tibet, the Tiananmen Square Massacre, and freedom of speech.

But even though Google attempted in this way to appease China's censors, its searches have continued to be an embarrassment for the regime. The Suggest function, which provides keywords and links for related topics, provides the mainland China Internet user with links to sites that the regime has blocked. Google had kept open this small window for the free flow of information—the news that there are specific Web sites the regime will not let one see.

THE USES OF PORNOGRAPHY

The attack on Google is part of a larger campaign. On the Web site of CIIRC, one sees articles titled "68 More Porn Web Sites Closed," "Anti-Porn Campaign Extends to Mobile Messages," and so on.

A June 25 report by Singapore's United Morning Post, which is reputed to be very close to the Chinese regime, says: "Because the authorities have already announced the enforcement of installing the Green Dam software in all computers, this policy has received a lot of criticism both domestically and internationally. What happens to Google right now is seen as the authorities' effort to lay a path for enforcing the Green Dam program."

The mandatory installation of the Green Dam software, announced on May 18 by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology as effective July 1, is the regime's most audacious attempt yet to control the Chinese Internet. Billed as filtering software meant to protect families from pornography, researchers have found that this program has, in addition to a list of pornographic sites, a very large list of keywords related to Falun Gong in particular, and some other forbidden search terms as well.

Green Dam not only prevents the user from accessing sites with the forbidden keywords, it also takes screen shots of the computer every three minutes and records every key stroke. All information about the use of the computer is relayed to a central data base.

Green Dam, in other words, extends China's censorship from the level of the Internet to the level of the personal computer. Any attempt to use a computer with Green Dam installed on it to defeat the Internet censorship would be reported to the authorities by the computer itself.

The accusations against Google came a little less than two weeks before the July 1 deadline and on the heels of a series of tough critiques of Green Dam in the Western press, objections from U.S. computer manufacturers, and an appeal from the U.S. Commerce Secretary.

The targeting of the U.S.-based Google provided the domestic Chinese audience with a prominent example in the anti-pornography campaign while giving the regime a convenient opportunity to push back against Western pressure regarding Green Dam.

On June 30, the regime announced it was delaying implementation of the Green Dam software. Whether this represents

Scorched Earth—Scorched Intervention

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In early 2009, I arrived in one of these refugee camps by traveling down the Salwin River along the Thai/Burma border. Here the border camps have become a bottleneck of trapped refugees and I was told by my KNU contacts that I needed to see them firsthand. Thus, I crossed the river in the dead of night by longboat.

Upon arrival in "Ei Tu Tah" refugee camp, I was greeted by the camp's leader, a former KNU soldier. He told me this camp had over 4,000 refugees. In the morning I wandered through the camp interviewing refugees, as my guides kept watch with the aid of walkie-talkies. Hut after hut the stories were the same—of shootings, relatives tortured and killed, and villages burned by the SPDC.

I met a Karen woman who spoke English and she told me of rapes and murders of Karen girls by Burmese soldiers. I asked if I could speak to any survivors but she shook her head saying it was culturally impossible for the victims to speak of their ordeal. Nevertheless, as I walked through the maze of huts, victims of other atrocities appeared as readily as rain.

I met a legless landmine victim, a child with a bullet-riddled arm. A man blinded in one eye, with numerous bullet wounds in his back and shoulder. An old woman hobbled over to me and showed me a bullet wound in her thigh. The SPDC burned her

village in 2008 and she couldn't escape in time, and so the SPDC shot her. Now she is crippled. Hut by hut I met dozens of these gentle tribal people, women with babes strapped to their backs, families, all who described fleeing the Burmese army.

Of the 4,134 refugees in the camp over 1,200 were children. The camp leader said they received only rice and salt from aid groups, and that in the interior, the Karens were struggling under worse conditions. Over the mountains he said there was another nearby refugee camp called "Ler Per Her." On June 3, this camp would be attacked by the SPDC, resulting in thousands of Karen refugees fleeing into Thailand.

This deplorable situation has no effect on the SPDC who run the country like a giant mafia, albeit a mafia with powerful allies. China (though certainly not the only culprit) hovers over Burma like the grim reaper, supplying billions of dollars of arms to the SPDC, including tanks, helicopters, and automatic weapons that bring only death to the Burmese people. China is not only the SPDC's biggest arms supplier, but also their chief investor. Thus, it's Beijing's money, arms, and trade that keep the SPDC regime alive.

Nevertheless, the KNU have gallantly held their own in eastern Burma as the war against them reaches its 60th year. David Thark-

abaw, Vice President of the KNU, reports that in March and April 2009 the KNU had over 200 clashes with SPDC troops and repelled another SPDC offensive. An impressive yet desperate feat, given that the SPDC has some 200,000 soldiers at its disposal compared to the Karen who have only 8,000 regular troops. Tharkabaw states that what they lack in numbers, the KNU makes up in dedication to save their people. While unable to defeat the KNU and other ethnic minority armies, the SPDC, unfortunately, is showing no sign of going away.

Also, reports abound, indicating Burma is today trying to "go nuclear," emulating Iran and North Korea in its aspirations to stay in power. I spoke with longtime Burma activist Roland Watson of Dictatorwatch, who reports in 2008 that KNU soldiers had intercepted SPDC communications describing attempts to shoot down unmanned drones flying over their military sites. Presumably, the drones were CIA, launched for spying on the SPDC's nuclear capabilities. What we do know, however, is the SPDC first announced in 2001 that Russia was supplying them with a nuclear reactor, and ever since, reports have surfaced implicating collaboration between the SPDC, North Korea, and even Iran on nuclear proliferation.

Watson points out that the Obama administration is months overdue in

publishing its mandatory report on Burma's nuclear capabilities (as required by the Jade Act). Exposure of Burma's nuclear plans might, however, complicate matters as seen by the latest incident involving a North Korean cargo ship, the Kang Nam 1. Since June 17, a U.S. destroyer has been trailing this ship, which is reportedly carrying missiles and nuclear materials bound for Burma. A UN Security Council Resolution authorizes U.S. intervention, but in reality the resolution is almost unenforceable, having been watered down by pro-Burma allies, China and Russia.

Given the history of global impotence with the Burma problem, the world may soon have another rogue state joining the "nuclear club," and once "in the club," it becomes almost irreversible, while making it much more difficult to enforce respect for human rights or compel obedience to follow some UN resolution. China no doubt will be watching the spectacle and rubbing its paws with glee, for it has an oil and gas cross-border pipeline deal to construct with the SPDC. An estimated 400,000 barrels of oil a day will one day flow from Burma into China and in return, China will surely keep the sale of weapons flowing to the SPDC.

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Sarkozy pushes strongly for 2025 "Grand Paris"

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In 2010, a public debate shall serve as an idea incubator for the project, but Sarkozy could make rapid beginning on the plan, given that in October this year a new law will be submitted to the French Parliament to hasten the tender process for related projects and have the concrete operations started by 2012.

"The goals are so broad that we need new procedures," said Sarkozy to the press. "This law will accelerate the process so as to avoid lengthy discussions and unending debates."

KYOTO AS A MODEL

A dozen of teams of architects and urbanists have already been working to draft a proposal that prepares for a "green" Grand Paris, respectful of the environment. According to this project, nearly 1 million trees would be seeded around the Charles de Gaulle airport to create a new "lung" to the Paris area. Large areas would also be kept from new building so as to create large public parks, using as a model Manhattan Central Park.

THE COST ISSUE

All of this will cost no less than 35 billion euros (nearly CA\$57 billion)

for the transport infrastructure only. Sarkozy fully justifies the spending: "Versailles did cost a lot at the beginning, and was largely criticized. Yet seeing all the money generated from it, I would say it was worth the investment," quoted BFM radio.

If it is clear that the national loan expected to be started by the government before the end of the year will provide some fuel to the investment needed, it is much less clear how far such fuel will go. Gilles Sarrez, Member of the Parliament in charge of evaluating funding possibilities, is confident that 25 to 27 billion euros (CA\$40–43.8

billion) will be found from now to 2025. That should be the amount needed for "Arc Express," a new ring transportation system around Paris. As for the missing tens of billions that are supposed to fund a transportation network that links hot spots of activity, the issue remains as of today a "financial dead end."

The Ile-de-France region, which includes Paris, generates one third of France's interior revenue and is home to one fifth of the French population. For the 12 million French living there, the "Grand Paris" should become a reality in a little bit more than 15 years.

'Misshapen' Fruit and Vegetables Now Allowed on EU Market

By JASPER FAKKERT
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AMSTERDAM, Netherlands—From the first of July specific marketing standards will be removed in the European Union, allowing the sale of "curvy cucumbers, curious carrots, and bendy beans."

Last December the European Union Member States voted in favor of commission proposals to cancel specific marketing standards for 26 types of fruit and vegetables. The initiative is part of the Commission's ongoing efforts to simplify EU rules and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy.

"It's a concrete example of our drive to cut unnecessary red tape. We simply don't need to regulate

this sort of thing at EU level. ... In these days of high food prices and general economic difficulties, consumers should be able to choose from the widest range of products possible. It makes no sense to throw perfectly good products away, just because they are the 'wrong' shape," said Mariann Fischer Boel, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development.

For ten types of fruit and vegetables, including apples, kiwis, and nectarines, marketing standards will remain in place. But Member States can for the first time allow shops to sell these products which don't meet the marketing standards, as long as they are labeled "product intended for processing" or equivalent wording.



'INCORRECTLY SHAPED': EU nations gave July 1 the green light for bent cucumbers and other misshapen fruit and vegetables to be sold in supermarkets and elsewhere, as part of a drive to cut red tape and stop food being dumped.

MYCHELE DANIAU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES