

## Interview with the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture: Manfred Nowak, part III

Manfred Nowak on Xinjiang

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Epoch Times Staff

Manfred Nowak, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture, described the events in Xinjiang last month as "a wave of immense suppression" in a recent interview with The Epoch Times.

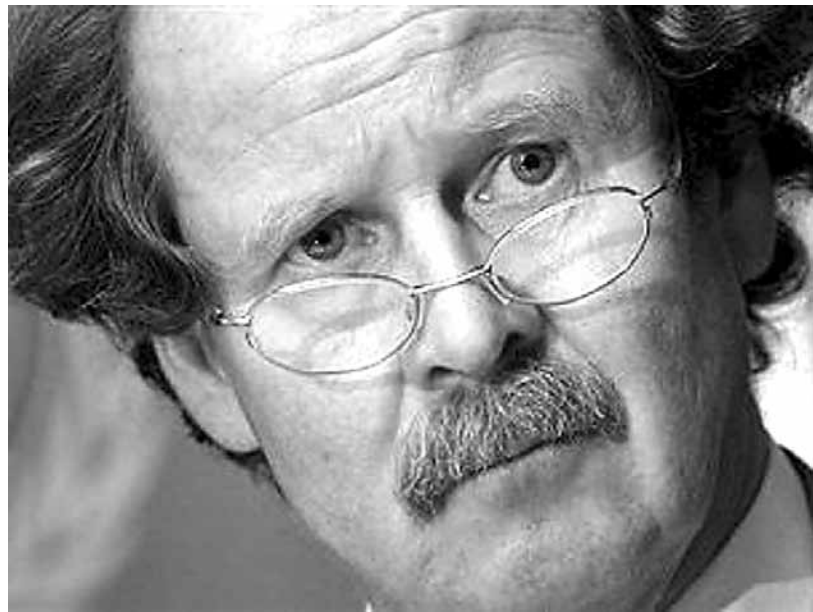
Nowak, an Austrian, has been the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment since 2004. His job includes transmitting appeals about torture cases, going on fact-finding missions, and submitting annual reports about human rights abuses. The last time he went to China was in 2005; it took ten years to negotiate the visit.

The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region lies in northwest China and represents one-sixth of China's total territory. Xinjiang borders several Central Asian countries and Chinese provinces, including Tibet.

### SITUATION IN XINJIANG REGION

"This represented a wave of immense suppression. But, one needs to understand that the separatist forces in Xinjiang are much stronger than those in Tibet. The terrorist acts there are unseen in Tibet, and there is also a loud call for separation from China. We have to admit that the allegation of separatism is to a certain degree of greater legitimacy than in Tibet.

"On the other hand, everyone who demonstrates in that area or is close to Uighurs, Muslims, and so on, is very easily accused of separatism.



Manfred Nowak, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture. FABRICE COFFRINI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

They are generally under suspicion, or rather, suppressed. The fact that the Chinese authorities made it very difficult internationally to glean information, and as there were major difficulties for journalists, is an indication that the Chinese regime is very nervous. By all means, this is definitely comparable to the events in Tibet before the Olympic Games."

### HUMAN RIGHTS IN CHINA SINCE THE OLYMPIC GAMES

"Sorry to say, but what many had hoped for [an improvement in human rights] did not materialize, that is that the situation because of the Olympic Games, or at least afterwards would ease up. On the contrary, it escalated immensely in Xinjiang."

### WHAT CAN THE UNITED NATIONS DO?

"It is extremely difficult. The Geneva Human Rights Commission is relatively weak and China plays a significant part in this. The EU-China dialogue is, in reality, in a stalemate. Essentially, the Chinese dictate the conditions with the EU.

"The EU-China dialogue was chosen as an alternative to the confrontational politics during the 1990s. It didn't prove to be of the value we had looked for. We had hoped that within the scope of the EU-China dialogues progress would have been made in a legal sense. There was small progress, but it stagnated during the past few years. I don't see any improvement at the moment, but in many ways I see a certain escalation."

## Workers' health sacrificed to boost China's economy

### CONTINUED FROM P1

Frustrated by his two-year-long struggle to get an accurate diagnosis, Zhang requested the painful surgical procedure of thoracotomy, a surgery his family could just barely afford. In a thoracotomy, the surgeon cuts the rib muscles and spreads the ribs apart, so that a piece of lung may be removed for analysis. The lung sample obtained showed that Zhang did indeed have pneumoconiosis.

The Zhengzhou ODPTC, however, didn't surrender easily. It said that only the pathology diagnosis from the removal of a whole lung lobe or from a dead body, not a single piece of tissue, could be accepted as the basis for a conclusive diagnosis. The ODPTC also asserted that no other hospitals are authorized to diagnose job-related illnesses.

Zhang had apparently spent his family's last savings without obtaining a correct diagnosis from the ODPTC.

But his dramatic decision to undergo open-chest surgery in order to try to get his case treated fairly caught the attention of the media. Public opinion was soon on Zhang's side, which caught the attention of the provincial authorities. Suddenly, everything started to move forward in the fast lane.

The Henan Provincial Public Health Bureau set up a joint investigation team; the Zhengzhou Public Health Bureau instructed the Zhengzhou ODPTC to redo the diagnosis; three health officials were removed from their positions, including the deputy director of the Public Health Bureau of Xinmi City; three persons who did the misdiagnosis were stripped of the right to issue diagnoses; the Ministry of Public Health published revised new diagnostic criteria for pneumoconiosis; and Zhang Haichao got 10,000 Yuan (CA\$1,595) compensation from the local authorities.

### ZHANG'S CASE UNUSUAL

Zhang's story appeared to have a happy conclusion: the media widely covered the story; public opinion was heard by high level officials; the persons responsible were punished; Zhang Haichao at least doesn't have to worry about his medical costs in the near future.

Generalizations made from Zhang's case would be misleading, according to Ms. He Qinglian. He,

the author of "Modernity's Pitfall," is an economist who often writes about the hidden costs of China's economic growth.

Recent cases similar to Zhang's in which disabled workers received publicity of their plight but did not receive compensation help make He's point. Several months ago, the mainland Chinese media reported that at a village in Yunnan Province, 50 villagers who worked at a sand company in Anhui Province developed an unknown disease, and 12 of them eventually died. It was confirmed that they had pneumoconiosis.

Five years ago, an editor at the Hangzhou City Express reported on a patient from his hometown. After having worked at a factory, the patient got sick and short of breath. Since this worker couldn't submit any of the required five documents necessary to apply for a job-related disease exam, he had not been diagnosed. The editor took him to a local ODPTC. The doctor told him that he could take an X-ray but wouldn't tell him if the diagnosis was pneumoconiosis nor which stage the disease was in.

Even though both of these cases, and many other similar cases, had been widely reported by the media, the patients didn't benefit from the reports.

### SYSTEMATIC ABUSE

China's legal code requires that workers be given protective gear on the job. However, He says the law is not enforced.

"Because the Labor Department has a deal with the factories, there are benefits for the department, so the inspectors just pretend they don't see anything. This is systemic," He says.

The workers are also not told of the dangers they face on the job. "If they told the workers, would mean that the employers are doing something wrong while completely aware of it. Wouldn't that be a disaster for them?"

"Nowadays factory bosses are very cunning," He says. "Usually the bosses use employees for two or three years, then fire them, and don't let them come to work. Why is that? So this way the workers won't become ill when they're still at work. This way the boss won't need to provide medical expenses."

Should a worker like Zhang seek medical treatment, the

system is designed to give maximum leverage to the employers. According to China's "Prevention and Treatment of Occupational Diseases Law," workers must have written permission from the employer to go to the state-designated institute to be examined. The obstacles that Zhang encountered when he went to his local ODPTC are typical.

When a worker is denied treatment, all he can do is, "Just wait for death. Go home and wait to die," according to He.

Statistics from 2006 show there were more than 16 million businesses in China with poisonous and harmful materials. Two hundred million people were affected. Eighty percent of the patients with occupational diseases were diagnosed with pneumoconiosis. Since the 1950s, according to the state's statistics, 580 thousand pneumoconiosis cases have been reported, one hundred forty thousand of these have already died. These numbers are only from state-owned businesses that have better work protection than privately owned small companies.

According to He, independent researchers have found there are a million new cases of lung disease each year among workers and those who live in the vicinity of the factories. Some places are even called black lung villages.

Within this context, the fast reaction in the Zhang Haichao case looks more like a public relations effort meant to save face for the local authorities, not the emergence of a solution.

He says, the state wanted to demonstrate in Zhang's case that it "cares a lot about the situation. If you look at the statistics you'll realize that the government actually doesn't care."

Discussions about cheap labor in China usually refers to low salaries. The plight of workers like Zhang demonstrates much more is involved in keeping costs down. The workers working in a toxic environment don't have any protection, can't get the permission from the employer for a medical examination, can't get the right diagnosis from a state-designated institute and never seem to get the free treatment and compensation to which they are entitled. There is no independent union to help them, and the authorities are not on their side.

Reflecting on Zhang's case, He said, "Why does the whole world use China as their factory? Because the authorities don't protect workers, and don't protect the environment."

Additional reporting by Matthew Robertson.

## World Bank pledges more help for ambitious Rwanda

KIGALI (Reuters)—World Bank President Robert Zoellick pledged on Wednesday to boost development aid to Rwanda to help the rebuild the country ripped apart by genocide.

The tiny landlocked east African state is reviving its economy with spending on tourism, agriculture, and mining after 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were killed over a 100-day period in 1994.

Reforms and new programs have turned the nation around in the 15 intervening years.

"On issue after issue, this is a country on the move," Zoellick told reporters after talks with the government, including a lengthy meeting with President Paul Kagame.

"It's a country that also brings great momentum."

Zoellick said the World Bank wanted to bolster the areas of infrastructure, farming and private sector development.

After several years of strong growth, Rwanda has been hit hard by the collapse in global trade and commodity prices.

Lower levels of foreign direct investment are seen slashing growth to around 5 percent this year from 11 percent in 2008.

Over the past three years, World Bank assistance to Rwanda totalled about CA\$436 million.

"I'd like to do more," Zoellick said at the end of his visit to the capital Kigali.

He said Rwanda could benefit from international investment in agriculture and revenues generated by new global climate change initiatives for nations that protect their forests.

"This is a country where you feel for every dollar you spend, or every hour you put in, you get a tremendous return," he added.

Kagame is a former rebel leader whose fighters invaded to stop Rwanda's genocide. He has won praise for running a disciplined administration



Rwandan refugees at the Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda. World Bank President Robert Zoellick has pledged further development aid to Rwanda, lauding it as a country "on the move." Walter Astrada/AFP/Getty Images WALTER ASTRADA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

and attracting foreign investors, but critics say his leadership style is authoritarian.

Zoellick is on a three-nation tour

to Africa visiting countries emerging from conflict including Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

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