

Full text of Ann Noonan's presentation for the discussion on Chai Ling's book *A Heart for Freedom*

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What can we do to show our support for our brothers and sisters in Christ who live in China?

We can speak out. We can pray. We can pay attention - and we can be sure that no one diminishes a free flow of information they desperately seek through services provided by VOA Radio.

Jing Zhang, Chai Ling, distinguished guests and friends, thank you for inviting me here today to be part of this special event to discuss the current state of affairs involving religious persecution in China and China's one-child policy.

My presentation will focus on aspects involving Catholics and other Christians who are persecuted. This is in no way meant to diminish the ongoing suffering of Tibetans, Uighers and Falun Gong practitioners. My knowledge of China is limited, but I think everybody in China who takes religion seriously is a target of oppression and for that matter even non-religious but ethical Chinese people who oppose the government will suffer.

The US Congressional-Executive Commission, led by Congressman Chris Smith recently released its 10th annual review and analysis of China's worsening human rights record. The Report declares that 'in areas of human rights and rule of law this year, China's leaders have grown more assertive in their violations of rights, disregarding the very laws and international standards that they claim to uphold [thereby] tightening their grip on Chinese society.'

Congressman Smith testified that "Christians of every stripe—Protestant, Catholic and Evangelical—who practiced outside government control continued to be severely harassed and jailed." He said that "House church pastors and Catholic priests and 'at least 40 unregistered Chinese Catholic bishops are in detention, home punishment, or surveillance; are in hiding; or have been missing for years, such as Bishops Su Zhimin and Shi Enxia.'

The free exercise of religion in China is prohibited. For example, China's government does not allow anyone under the age of 18 to practice their faith, thereby refusing the baptism of infants. Under its one-child policy, China's government does not allow pro-creation without the government's permission. China does not permit Catholic clergy or faithful to recognize the authority of the Pope who is the Holy Father for Catholics throughout the world.

In September, New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan encouraged us to offer our prayerful support for China's Catholics. In an article, he wrote "What if one of your brothers or sisters told you they were being harassed just because of their faith? Wouldn't you want to help?"

As a Catholic, I have to say yes.

Catholics believe that "religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person."

Human dignity is respect for the value of each person as we are all made in the image and likeness of God. Human dignity is inviolable. It is inalienable and it is our inheritance as humans.

The human dignity of each person needs to be respected – whether it is in the person on death row or the unborn child. It requires that we treat each other like brothers and sisters.

While we must respect each other, this does not mean that we have to respect bad behavior nor human rights violations.

In fact, it is our responsibility to bear witness to those who suffer and to seek justice through peaceful means to end human suffering.

In 1995 when I attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, as American attendees, we were warned to not discuss the one-child policy even though it involved more than 20% of the world's women.

Aside from a brief mention of this topic by former First Lady Hillary Clinton, not a word was mentioned at the conference.

A country where forced abortion and forced sterilization causes so much anguish for so many women and their families. A country where girls are aborted just because they are girls. A country with an extremely high rate of suicide among women. A country where women are not allowed to even discuss the pain they endure and their families endure because of this horrific policy.

A country where women are monitored at their workplace to be sure that they are not pregnant. What American woman would ever tolerate such oppression?

Chai Ling is a victim of China's one child policy. However, something in Chai Ling has awakened her spirit as a Christian and now helps us all to choose Jesus with no fear of China's government.

She knows, like many of us here know: God's love is indescribable and His mercy is infinite.

Chai Ling has given voice to the countless women in China who have suffered under that one-child policy. Through her book, she gives voice to all aborted women in China who have been indoctrinated to bear this abuse silently.

This choice may not make her popular with China's government leaders who would prefer for this suffering to remain quiet. We know that Americans are aware and concerned about the suffering of women and families in China. While there are some who will remain focused on a need to curry favor with China's government as some sort of economic partner for the 21st century, more Americans are unwilling to sit back and turn their blind eye toward this suffering.

Chai Ling's book is a great gift of hope for countless women and families who want to be heard. Her book is a spiritual awakening for Americans who want to know more.

In order to save our friendship with China's government, Americans are not going to wash our hands of the blood of the countless innocent victims of China's oppressive one-child policy. Instead, we will keep our prayers and our actions with the people in China who deserve the freedoms we enjoy here in the US.

We have the benefit of reading Chai Ling's book in the free society. As Americans, we can rest assured that news services like Voice of America's Cantonese and Mandarin services will allow for people in China to listen to a discussion about her book and all of the other topics that involve democracy, freedom and human rights that are otherwise censored by China's government.

Who would have thought that a young priest in listening secretly to Voice of America would become the leader of the Catholic Church and would help to bring down the Soviet Empire and communism in Eastern Europe. No one would have predicted this in the 1950s when Karol Wojtyla, later cardinal, and then pope, was a parish priest in Poland and served as a spiritual advisor to university students.

Pope John Paul II thanked the director of VOA Polish radio broadcasts for providing uncensored news and information for him and for the people in Poland still living under communism.

Remember that the Voice of America was not just one of several Western radio stations broadcasting news to the Communist block. It was a symbol of America's support for human rights.

Likewise in China today, young fighters for democracy listen to VOA radio. We don't know who is listening and where. Radio listening - unlike the Internet - cannot be easily monitored or blocked. Although radio signals can be partially jammed,

they can never be completely silenced – unless the U.S. government decides to end these broadcasts, as it was proposed by the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Let's hope and pray that will NEVER happen as long as there is no freedom of expression in China or as long as the Chinese people want to learn about America.

We can be sure that human rights activists under police surveillance or house arrest - like Chen Guangcheng - can't get their news easily and directly from the Internet. Neither can 750 million poor people in China who don't have Internet access and can't afford it. But they can afford to buy a cheap radio that includes shortwave bands.

It is these people that America must not forget - the most oppressed and the poor. Fighters for freedom and democracy who do not always come from privileged and rich families. Lech Walesa was a faithful listener to the Voice of America radio - he would not have money to buy a satellite TV, as many people in China still don't.

We don't know who the leader of democratic China will be. What we can do is to make sure that anyone in China who wants access to uncensored news, information and ideas is not excluded. We also want to make sure that they all know that the information and support comes from the Voice of America, the voice of American people.

Radio is inexpensive, radio penetrates most barriers, and radio cannot be blocked or censored like the Internet. Radio reaches those who are under surveillance for pro-human rights activities. Unlike Internet text communications, Voice of America radio establishes a direct link between China and America. Radio and its real voices can offer hope - something that text on a computer screen cannot do as well.

In closing, I'd like to encourage everyone to remain vigilant. Stay informed. And have hope – because women like Chai Ling and Jing Zhang and groups like All Girls Allowed will make a difference. As Pope John Paul II reminded us, “Be not afraid!”

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