



An Appeal to Xi Jinping

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Excerpts of opening remarks by Co-Chairman Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ)

Washington DC—September 22, 2026

Today's Congressional-Executive Commission on China hearing will come to order.

Behind every statistic about political prisoners is a person with hopes and dreams, and a life filled with isolation and pain.

Behind every person in a Chinese prison is a family waiting, praying, and hoping that someone will not forget them.

And behind many of those families is an entire community that feels threatened and intimidated.

Perhaps, that is what the Chinese Communist Party wants.

It wants the prisoner isolated.

It wants the family frightened.

And it wants everyone watching to conclude that speaking out is either futile or simply too costly.

But today, we are here to say: we will not look away. The real cost is failing to speak out. Silence is not an option.

Today, we appeal to Xi Jinping to release women and men of conscience and goodness—as a tangible good faith expression of good will, benevolence, respect, and strength.

We appeal to Xi Jinping's heart.

We again ask President Trump—who helped Pastor Ezra Jin gain his freedom—to appeal to Xi Jinping to show compassion and courage.

Pastor Jin founded Beijing Zion Church, which grew to a congregation of approximately 1,500 people before Chinese authorities forcibly shut down its sanctuary in 2018. Even after the physical church was closed, the congregation continued to meet, worship, teach, and evangelize across China. By 2025, Zion Church had nearly 100 meeting points in 40 cities.

The response from the Chinese Communist Party was a nationwide crackdown.

In October 2025, authorities carried out arrests in 11 cities, taking approximately 30 pastors and church leaders into custody. Eighteen were ultimately criminally detained.

Pastor Jin was one of them.

His amazing daughter, Grace, came before this Commission and told us what his imprisonment meant for him and their family.

Both Congress and the President listened and acted.

The House passed my resolution, [H.Res. 1259](#), asking the President to help secure Pastor Jin's release during engagement with Xi Jinping.

President Trump personally pushed for Pastor Jin's freedom, and he was released and reunited with his family this summer.

That is something worth celebrating.

Pastor Jin himself has said that he believes the direct intervention of President Trump with President Xi was instrumental in securing his freedom. And he returned to America after eight months apart from his family.

But Pastor Jin's freedom also reminds us of the people who are still behind bars.

Eight of his Zion Church colleagues remain detained.

And according to our Commission, their families have raised concerns about extreme temperatures, malnutrition, inadequate medical care, and mistreatment in detention. Even the lawyers attempting to defend them have faced pressure.

We also must remember Americans who remain imprisoned in China.

Nelson Wells Sr. has been here before, almost two years to the day.

On September 18th, 2024, he [testified at the CECC hearing, "Bringing Home Americans Detained in China,"](#) I chaired about his son, Nelson Wells Jr., who has now spent more than a decade imprisoned in China.

Nelson Jr. was arrested in 2014 after traveling to China for medical treatment. He was initially sentenced to life imprisonment; that sentence was later reduced to 22 years, leaving him incarcerated until 2041. His family has also reported serious and debilitating medical problems.

Mr. Wells' testimony was heartbreaking.

He told us about the call that changed his family's life—the call telling them that their son had been arrested in China.

And he told us about the deterioration of Nelson's health.

His father and mother have spent years trying to bring their son home.

The tragedy of Dawn Michelle Hunt's imprisonment has also taken a devastating toll on her family. After more than 12 years without his daughter, Dawn's father, Gene Hunt, passed away on January 25, 2026, without ever seeing her come home.

Her brother, Tim Hunt, is with us today and has continued the fight their father began, promising to do everything he can to bring Dawn back to her family. Dawn is reportedly in declining health, making the family's plea for her humanitarian release all the more urgent.

Gene's greatest wish was to see his daughter free; his family now carries that hope forward and asks that Dawn be given the opportunity to come home.

That is why I introduced [HR 5491—the Nelson Wells Jr. and Dawn Michelle Hunt Unjustly Detained in Communist China Act.](#)

The legislation recognizes that we need more than expressions of concern.

We need a coordinated American response.

The bill would strengthen the government's ability to identify Americans unjustly detained in China, coordinate their cases, engage with their families, pursue humanitarian releases and prisoner transfers, and identify additional tools for holding responsible Chinese officials accountable.

Because when an American is unjustly detained, that person's family should not have to navigate the Chinese Communist Party's system alone.

And this repression is not limited to Christians, Americans, or any one community.

Last week, our Commission heard a compelling appeal from [Jimmy Lai's son, Sebastien](#). Both Sebastien and his sister, Claire, are asking that their heroic father be freed.

Gulshan Abbas is a retired Uyghur doctor, who was detained in Xinjiang and sentenced to 20 years in prison.

Her detention came just days after her sister, Rushan Abbas—who will testify today—spoke publicly here in Washington about the persecution of Uyghurs.

Gulshan's case is an example of transnational repression because of the obvious connection between her detention and her sister's advocacy in the United States.

We must also remember the Falun Gong practitioners who have endured decades of persecution.

Falun Gong was banned by the Chinese government in 1999, and practitioners who refuse to renounce their beliefs have faced imprisonment, forced organ harvesting, and other forms of repression.

The Commission's 2025 annual report identified 485 Falun Gong practitioners among cases of active detention.

But once again, the repression does not necessarily end at the prison gate.

Falun Gong practitioners living here in the United States have reported surveillance, harassment, threats, physical assaults, property damage, and reprisals against relatives in China. The Justice Department has also prosecuted individuals for acting as agents of the People's Republic of China in efforts targeting Falun Gong practitioners in the United States.

Today's hearing is a heartfelt appeal to Xi Jinping.

Let these wonderful people go.