

## A CHRISTMAS OPEN LETTER TO ALL PEOPLES SUFFERING UNDER THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY'S REPRESSIVE RULE

24 December 2020

***To everyone throughout China, Hong Kong, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) better known as East Turkestan, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and beyond – to every prisoner, to every activist, to every religious believer, to every blogger, to every journalist, to every lawyer, to every ordinary person who yearns to be free:***

I am writing firstly to wish you a peaceful and blessed Christmas and New Year.

There are some who say “Christmas is cancelled”, but the truth is that Christmas – in its truest sense – can never be “cancelled”: not by pandemics, nor by brutal, inhumane, mendacious and corrupt dictatorships, for “Christmas” is not simply a material event, but an event in history which lives on in the hearts and minds of those who choose to believe it. The Christmas story – and the values and message it represents – is about birth, life, love and liberation, and while regimes, restrictions and viruses can restrict our activities, movements and interactions, they can never imprison or kill the spirit of Christmas. So, I wish you a merry Christmas.

Secondly, I want to say that I love China, its culture and peoples, and I wish all the peoples of China and everyone living under the Chinese Communist Party regime’s rule a blessed Christmas. You have suffered so much for so long under the repressive rule of this regime, and yet you have developed an economy that has grown with dynamic and impressive speed. It is your entrepreneurialism and talent that has grown the economy of China, not Xi Jinping or the Chinese Communist Party regime’s. Imagine how much greater and more prosperous China could be if it were free.

I first went to China when I was 18 years old. I lived and taught English for six months in Qingdao. I made many friends there, and returned many times. I have travelled often in China, from Shanghai to Kunming, from Guilin to Shenyang, from Suzhou and Hangzhou to Yangshuo and Dali, from Guangzhou and Shenzhen to Beijing and Nanjing. I have been to the birthplace of Confucius in Qufu and climbed Taishan. I began my working career in Hong Kong, living in that great city for the first five years after the handover. It is because I love China and the peoples of China that I devote my energies to advocating for their basic rights and dignity.

I want China to take its rightful place as a great nation on the world stage – but it can only do so when its regime stops repressing its own people, committing crimes against humanity and flagrant breaches of international treaties, and stops its aggression against its critics beyond its borders too. The regime that rules China is rapidly losing friends and reputation in the world, but the people of China will never lose friends or reputation. Let’s learn to distinguish between the two and stand on the side of the people.

It is in that spirit that I had intended to hold a 12-hour vigil and protest outside the Chinese Communist Party regime’s embassy in London on Christmas Eve. I had planned it with the theme of the “12 Days of Christmas” in mind – 12 hours of protest, with 12 demands. I had intended to sit outside the embassy in a cage, and I know others, including Uyghurs, Tibetans, Falun Gong practitioners and Hong Kongers had planned to join me at different times.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new restrictions we are under, I have had to change plans. But I am not abandoning the essence of what I had planned. Instead of sitting in a cage outside the Chinese embassy, I will be at home. Instead of a 12-hour protest, I will stage a 24 hour fast and hunger strike. I call it both a fast and a hunger strike because both terms carry meaning. ‘Fasting’ is a spiritual act, accompanied by prayer. A ‘hunger strike’ is a political act, accompanied by protest. I want to do both. So I will do 12 hours of fasting and prayer and 12 hours of hunger strike and protest.

And with what purpose? To let you, the peoples of China, Hong Kong, Tibet and East Turkestan (peoples under Chinese Communist Party rule) – and especially those imprisoned by the Chinese Communist Party regime – know that they are not forgotten and not alone. And as they sit in their prison cells or concentration camps in different

places across China this Christmas Eve, I hope they may know in their spirits that there are people in the free world speaking their names, calling for their release, ensuring that the world does not ignore their cries: Free Jimmy Lai, Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow, Ivan Lam, Andy Li, Free the 12 Hong Kong Youths jailed in Shenzhen, Free Gui Minhai, Free Li Ming-che, Free Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, Free Pastor Wang Yi ... and all the others whose names we do not know or cannot record here.

And in addition to all the individual prisoners of conscience across China, there are the big picture tragedies that keep my soul and conscience awake at night too: the genocide of the Uyghurs, the atrocities in Tibet, the persecution of Christians, Falun Gong practitioners and other religions, the repression of civil society, lawyers, bloggers, journalists, whistleblowers and dissidents, the broken promises and dismantling of freedom in Hong Kong, the barbaric forced organ harvesting, torture and slave labour. These things must stop.

Finally, I want to awaken the world. The regime that Xi Jinping leads not only represses its people, it threatens the free world. But we must not allow this to continue. The Chinese Communist Party regime is a bully, and if there's one thing every kid in the world knows in the school playground, it is to stand up to bullies. So this Christmas I urge everyone everywhere around the world – after fasting or hunger striking with me – to buy as much Australian wine as you can, and ONLY Australian wine, and enjoy it.

So, friends, in keeping the theme of the '12 Days of Christmas', I present my 12 demands.

1. Free Hong Kong and all Hong Kong political prisoners, especially Jimmy Lai, Joshua Wong, Agnes Chow, Ivan Lam and the 12 Hong Kong youths imprisoned in Shenzhen
2. Stop Uyghur Genocide
3. Stop atrocities in Tibet
4. Stop persecution of Christians and Falun Gong in China
5. Stop Forced Organ Harvesting
6. Free Gui Minhai, the Chinese-born Swedish national abducted from Thailand and serving ten years in prison in China
7. Free Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, the two Canadian hostages detained in China
8. Free Li Ming Che, a Taiwanese human rights activist jailed in China
9. End Slave Labour in Global Supply Chains and say #NoGenocideTrade
10. End Torture in China
11. To the free world - stop #CCP bullying
12. To the free world – Buy Australian Wine and stand up to CCP bullying

Friends, I know this Christmas letter is not short. But it's not as long as some of Xi Jinping's ridiculous speeches to the National People's Congress or Carrie Lam's absurd Policy Address. And it's more comprehensible than Xi Jinping Thought or Carrie Lam's statements.

In 1949, Chairman Mao declared that the Chinese people had stood up. In 2020 it is up to those of us who have freedom to stand up for the Chinese people – and that's what I am doing this Christmas Eve. I hope others around the world will stand up with me for the peoples of China and against the Chinese Communist Party's repressive and mendacious rule, and that the real spirit of Christmas – the spirit of love and liberation – will enflame our hearts and minds and spread quicker than the virus which the irresponsible regime failed to contain, and with much more positive effect.

With my prayers and love for you all,

Benedict Rogers

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