



October 21, 2010

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton  
US Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Clinton,

In your July 2010 Krakow speech, you rightly said that behind every crackdown on civil society around the world, “there is an idea, an alternative conception of how societies should be organized.” When that alternative conception is projected and promoted by an emerging power that will influence the development of global norms and institutions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the United States must recognize its vital interest in defending the values that are under threat. As you put it, attacks against champions of human rights, like newly named Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo, are not just attacks “against people we admire, [but] against our own fundamental beliefs. So when we defend these great people, we are defending an idea that has been and will remain essential to the success of every democracy.”

If the stakes are indeed that high – and we agree with you that they are – American policy toward China must begin to reflect them.

We appreciate that you addressed some of these issues in your Krakow and January 2010 Newseum speeches, and we particularly applaud your and President Obama’s strong statements last week supporting the Nobel Committee’s decision to honor Liu. Yet we believe that in an effort to gain short-term cooperation from China on other issues, the Obama administration has not paid enough attention to human rights concerns and ignored the fundamental, long-term challenge to core and universal values posed by China’s intransigent attitude to individual freedoms. The United States has responded weakly to the Chinese government’s increased

persecution of domestic critics, abusive policies in Tibet and Xinjiang, and growing restrictions on civil society, freedom of expression, and the Internet. Indeed, it is unhelpful when the administration repeatedly describes human rights and democracy as issues on which China and the United States will “inevitably” disagree, as if the differences were an immutable product of each country’s national character, rather than a political circumstance that the United States, together with many people in China, have an interest in overcoming.

Rather than smoothing the path for cooperation, the United States undermines its interests and compromises its ability to secure progress on other issues when it subordinates human rights concerns. The Chinese side notes the soft-pedaling of human rights principles and perceives it as weakness, validating their sense of a changing power dynamic between the two countries and their belief that US human rights policy is more political than principled. The Chinese government dismisses private messages about human rights, and human rights activists and ordinary citizens in China who would be bolstered by support from the US and other democratic countries do not hear such private representations.

To accomplish its goals in China, the U.S. must raise—with equal prominence and confidence—human rights issues alongside economic, strategic, and diplomatic concerns. We note that in recent months the US has taken tougher positions with the Chinese government on strategic issues such as the South China Sea and devoted more resources to developing other bilateral relationships as a means to balancing Chinese influence. Comparably strong and visible diplomacy and rhetoric are equally possible in defense of universal human rights. Moreover, pressing the Chinese government on such issues, including the respect for the rule of law and greater government transparency and accountability, advances a range of other US interests with China, from environmental protection, to product safety, to a level economic playing field.

In advance of President Hu Jintao’s visit in January 2011, and in the wake of the Nobel Committee’s decision, the administration has a unique opportunity and solemn obligation to speak out clearly in support of human rights and political freedom in China. We ask that you and your senior officials make a specific and public effort to meet in Beijing and Washington with Chinese, Uighur, and Tibetan democracy and human rights activists, and ordinary Chinese citizens. We urge that your administration reach out to the Chinese people with messages of support for universally-recognized human rights as a key element of productive U.S.-China relations, something that the Chinese government successfully restricted on President Obama’s visit to China. Although the CCP’s control of Chinese media makes this difficult, it is not impossible, and we hope that it will be a high priority in the coming months.

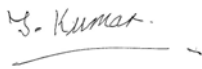
Finally, we hope that you reinforce your comments about Liu and the Nobel Prize by raising the cases of those who have been harassed by virtue of their association with him or Charter '08, and by enlisting the assistance of other Cabinet members who meet regularly with Chinese officials to raise human rights concerns.

In your September 8 remarks to the Council on Foreign Relations, you stated that “when fundamental freedoms need a champion, people turn to us...not just to engage but to lead.” We urge that you seize the opportunities on the near horizon to lead on human rights in China so that activists and citizens there continue to turn to the United States.

We look forward to sharing our ideas and working with you in preparation for the January summit.

Sincerely,

T. Kumar



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