

Statement by Rep. Alcee L. Hastings

Before the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission

Hearing on "Access to Information in the People's Republic of China"

July 31, 2007

Chairwoman Bartholomew, Vice-Chair Blumenthal, Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on how the Chinese government is limiting its citizens' access to information.

As Chairman of the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Commission), I am well aware of central role that the free flow of information, including access to information from diverse sources, plays in nurturing democratic reforms and sustaining all facets of a democracy. In fact, this Thursday I will be Chairing a hearing before the Helsinki Commission on freedom of the media in the OSCE region. If you can control access to information - through the media, through the Internet, or through other means - then you can control *an awful lot*.

I want to start off with a little quiz-it's not too hard, but something to get the audience thinking this morning. What do Jenna Jamison, the Dalai Lama, and the Paris riots have in common?

This is not meant to be a bad joke-this unlikely grouping of people and events is actually a sample of what you would find on the Chinese government's censorship list. China is attempting-and in many ways succeeding-to micromanage the messages on television, newspapers, the Internet and even text messages on mobile phones.

Over 130 million Chinese are now online, and 440 million cellphones are in use in the country. The communication revolution has certainly not passed China by, but just as the Chinese took Marxism and made it their own, the current government in China has created the Internet with Chinese characteristics. Unfortunately those characteristics are not representative of the creativity and innovation that the Chinese are capable of. Instead of the free flow of ideas and information, they have chosen a course of containment and suppression.

In China, information is a double-edged sword. And the government wants to wield it strategically, carefully crafting and controlling at every stage. Not only do they continue to control all print media, but also have established elaborate high and low-tech means to control information on the Internet. What's interesting is that the control goes not just to what we think of dissident speech, but also to careful burnishing of the image of the Party and the government.

But even the Chinese government has recognized some limitations to this approach. Six months ago they started allowing journalists to interview individuals and organizations without asking government approval first. The caveat is that this only applies to foreign journalists and it is scheduled to end with the conclusion of the Olympics on October 17, 2008. It is unfortunate to see such a blatant example of an expiration date being put on media freedom.

I don't need to go into the many, many examples that can be made of how China is controlling information. Later in today's hearing you will hear from the experts on that. I would like to spend a few minutes, however, in drawing a few conclusions on what censorship in China means for the United States.

To put it bluntly, it means a lot.

This is not about China trying to clean up society by banning pornographic websites-this is about the Chinese government propaganda machine trying to maintain control in a rapidly shifting domestic and international landscape.

The Chinese government's control and manipulation of information has led to increased ultra-nationalism and hatred of America. Recent polls in China have shown that the characterization of the United States as a hegemon pervades all Chinese perceptions about America today.

This is a national security issue for the United States.

Chinese Government censorship is also a continuation of the culture of fear and a culture of secrets. And history has shown us that societies do not thrive and governments do not govern well under a veil of secrets and lies. The Chinese population is too big, it's military too strong and its economic influence too great for us to ignore what is happening and the implications for stability.

How much do we let alone the Chinese people know what the Chinese government is doing in Africa in its quest for oil and other natural resources? China's investment in Africa now stands at \$1.5 billion a year, there are at least 700 Chinese enterprises operating on the continent, and China's trade with Africa is approaching \$50 billion. This has made China the second-largest trading partner with sub-Saharan Africa. China has a long history with Africa, but it has never been in the position it is now of offering incredible sums of aid as well as incredible opportunities for investment and infrastructure development.

It is also offering what are reported to be incredible sums of money to dictators that others countries have steered away from. What would China's 17 millions bloggers say if they knew?

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe, for example has turned away from Western food aid that comes with too many strings attached because China is providing aid with no

strings attached. President Mugabe has repeatedly said he prefers to forge strong relations with China because it, unlike the West, does not place any political conditions on its investments and aid.

Sudan is yet another example. What do the Chinese people know about China's involvement in Sudan and what is by all accounts its interference in an international solution to the Darfur crisis?

Finally, let's bring this even closer to home and talk about the implications for the safety of food and drug imports. We've all seen the recent reports of tainted dog food and tainted toothpaste. The Chinese themselves, however, have suffered through numerous scandals, albeit many never hear about the danger until it is too late: fake antibiotics leading to the death of children after what should have been routine treatment; laundry detergent mixed into baby formula leading to malnutrition and death for infants; meat and fish products contaminated with chemicals.

Just as Upton Sinclair's book, "The Jungle," and the related articles he published brought about a radical shift in thinking in food safety 100 years ago here in this country, we can say with certainty that a free media and free exchange of ideas not only can improve our lives, it can save our lives. Will a Chinese Upton Sinclair have the opportunity to bring about change in China? I fear not under the current system.