

Activist Eyes 2008 Olympics if China Continues Religious Persecution

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WASHINGTON - A human rights activist has proposed a campaign in which American businesses would withhold investment in the 2008 Olympics if persecution of religious groups continues in China.

The Rev. Bob Fu, president of the Midland, Texas-based China Aid Association, told a congressional committee examining religion in China that the U.S. government should compile a list of religious persecutors in China and make it public. It should then, he said, encourage U.S. corporations to not do business in provinces and cities where severe persecution is taking place.

Speaking Thursday (Nov. 18) before the Congressional Executive Commission on China, Fu said an estimated 20,000-plus members of underground religious groups "have been arrested, detained, kidnapped or placed under house arrest" since 2002.

Fu, whose expertise is in underground, Protestant "house churches" that resist registering with the government, said that figure would be much higher if Falun Gong, a spiritual movement that incorporates exercise with Buddhist and Taoist principles, were included.

The hearing was part of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, established in 1998 to monitor and make independent policy recommendations to the president, secretary of state and Congress on freedom of religion.

While Fu recommended punishing China, Commission Chair Preeta D. Bansal advocated a more positive approach, extending bank loan breaks

to U.S. businesses that promoted Chinese religious freedom.

"One area that needs more thought and development is how to offer incentives to businesses to establish innovative approaches to promote religious freedom and related human rights outside the United States," she said.

Bansal said now that China has made significant economic progress, it must turn its attention to human rights.

"It can no longer be argued that human rights violations are a temporary trade-off to achieve economic development," Bansal said. "Achieving the full measure of economic development depends on improving human rights protections."

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