

December 15, 1999: Why are U.S. Mayors and Governors Apologizing to China?

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Lawrence J. Goodrich, Communications Director, (202) 523-3240

The U. S. Commission on International Religious Freedom today deplored apologies to the Chinese government by American mayors and governors for earlier proclamations honoring the Falun Gong spiritual movement and its founder, Li Hongzhi. According to press reports, officials in Seattle, Baltimore, San Francisco, and the state of Maryland, under pressure from the Chinese ambassador to the United States, have either rescinded their own proclamations or, in one case, offered a "humblest and most sincere apology" for giving offense. Falun Gong is a spiritual movement combining traditional Chinese exercise with elements of Buddhism and Taoism. The Chinese authorities have banned the movement, claiming it is a dangerous cult, and detained thousands of Falun Gong practitioners. At least several hundred are still detained in jail or labor camps, while several leaders have been sentenced to long prison terms. At least one Falun Gong practitioner was reported beaten to death by provincial police. The State Department identified China as a "country of particular concern" under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 for Beijing's suppression of Falun Gong as well as Tibetan Buddhists, Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians, and Muslim Uighurs. Under the act, President Clinton extended for two years a ban on U.S. exports of crime-fighting and crime-detection equipment to China. The President has also publicly criticized the crackdown on Falun Gong. "It's an outrage for U.S. mayors and governors to kowtow to the Chinese government and its slanderous campaign against what all evidence indicates is a peaceful spiritual movement," said Rabbi David Saperstein, the Commission's chairman. "There are thousands of Falun Gong practitioners in the United States and its founder now lives here. Since when do the objections of the Chinese ambassador trump our nation's commitment to religious freedom as a fundamental right and its concomitant opposition to religious persecution?"

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