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MISSED OPPORTUNITIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Wednesday, December 10, 2008

Mr. WOLF. Madam Speaker, despite the seemingly heartfelt personal convictions of President Bush, I believe that history will show a legacy of missed opportunities on human rights for this administration—failure to consistently apply their rhetoric; failure to be a tireless advocate for the voiceless.

“From the day of our founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on Earth has rights, and dignity and matchless value because they bear the image of the maker of heaven and Earth.”

These rousing words were spoken by President Bush at his second inaugural address—a stirring articulation of what is at the core of this “shining city on a hill” and a reminder of the hope that is inspired by extending the promise of America’s founding to all the oppressed of the world. But in order for our soaring words about freedom, liberty and democracy to ring true to the ears of countless dissidents languishing in prisons the world over, they cannot only be applied to pariah states like Burma and North Korea, but consistently in places like China, Egypt, Vietnam and Saudi Arabia where these virtues are daily under assault.

While our national interests are complex and manifold, we can be assured that it always befits a great nation to boldly stand with the forgotten, the oppressed, the silenced and the imprisoned. If not America, then who?

And yet, with the State Department, boldness was rare, and in some cases altogether absent. For more than a year during President Bush’s second term the critical position of Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, the lead human rights position within the United States government, went unfilled. It bears considering what message this sent to dictators and tyrants the world over.

Personnel aside, the administration’s policy in this area was unpredictable at best. I have binders of letters I sent over the last 8 years to a host of officials throughout the administration, pleading for action on human rights issues and cases. Many went unanswered and those which did garner a reply were rarely satisfactory.

In January 2001, after having returned from a trip to Central Africa which included Sudan, I wrote the administration urging the appointment of a high-level, high-profile special envoy for Sudan, who would give the same type of attention to Sudan that Senator Mitchell gave to Northern Ireland. It was the first of many letters I would write with this request including an April 2001 letter in which I joined with a bipartisan group of dozens of Congressional colleagues in again urging the administration to appoint a high-caliber special envoy to address the deteriorating situation in Southern

Sudan where over 2.2 million people had died over the previous decade because of the civil war.

Eventually in September 2001, the President appointed former Senator John Danforth as special envoy and his leadership was in fact instrumental in securing the Comprehensive Peace Accord thereby bringing the 20-year civil war to end. I remain grateful for the President’s leadership in helping to bring about an end to the bloodshed in this tortured country for at least a time.

But the Khartoum regime was not finished with its atrocities—they were now pursuing a campaign of terror in Darfur. I wrote President Bush in June 2004 and again in November urging him to take every means necessary to press the United Nations to act quickly to save innocent lives in Darfur. Secretary of State Powell rightly spoke the truth, despite considerable indifference by members of the international community, in calling evil by its name and declaring the atrocities in Sudan genocide. But there was little followthrough.

In February of 2005 I again wrote the administration, this time Secretary Rice, urging appointment of a special envoy to focus on Darfur—hopeful that the model utilized in the South might bear similar fruit in Darfur.

In April of that same year, against the backdrop of genocide, the CIA flew Sudanese intelligence chief Maj. General Saleh Gosh to Washington for “consultations on the war on terror.” Gosh is well-known to be an architect of the genocide. I wrote the administration protesting the visit. While I understand that in the intelligence business it is sometimes unavoidable to deal with unsavory figures, it is hard to conceive of what information he could have provided, here in our Nation’s Capital, which could justify our government hosting such a person.

Several months later, in October, I wrote Secretary Rice after learning that the government of Sudan had hired Mr. Robert Cabelly, managing director, C/R International, to lobby on its behalf. It was appalling that the State Department had granted the necessary waiver to permit a genocidal government to obtain representation.

In July 2006 I again wrote the administration reiterating my request for appointment of a special envoy for Sudan to work to ensure the successful implementation of the CPA and to bring a keen focus to the genocide in Darfur. Other Members of Congress had shown their support for a special envoy by appropriating \$250,000 for this office in an Emergency Supplemental bill. With the funding available, and peace in the region hanging in the balance, I believed that a special envoy would send a clear message to Khartoum that the U.S. was committed to the success of the CPA.

At long last, in Fall 2006, the President appointed Andrew Natsios as special envoy.

An August 2008 New Republic piece had this to say about Sudan: “No genocide has ever been so thoroughly documented while it was taking place . . . In the case of the genocide in Darfur, ignorance has never been possible.” In a heartbreaking account in the same

piece, William Ezekiel, editor of the Khartoum Monitor, is quoted as having great hope in America’s ability to rescue Sudan. In response to a question about the cause of this hope he says, “Americans? They are not angels. But they are keen enough to save the weak from the oppressors.” Sadly Mr. Ezekiel’s hope in this instance was misplaced.

China repeatedly undercut the United States in the U.N. Security Council, and thwarted our attempt to impose sanctions on the genocidal Sudanese government because of their own self-interest—namely energy resources. The China National Petroleum Corp, a state-held entity, has more than a 40 percent stake in Petrodar, a major Sudanese oil consortium. But China’s offenses at home are even more staggering—imprisoned pastors, brutal crackdowns in Tibet, North Koreans refugees forcibly repatriated, reporters silenced—the list goes on and on.

In 2006, the administration afforded Chinese President Hu Jintao full military honors at the White House. Hu Jintao first visited Washington in May 2002 as vice president, and summarily refused to accept a letter from four members of Congress raising various human rights concerns and urging China to release political prisoners, including 25 Tibetans, who had been imprisoned during the vice president’s tenure as party secretary in Tibet.

I was deeply troubled when the so-called “Butchers of Beijing” were awarded the honor of hosting the 2008 Olympic Games. I urged the president not to attend the Games, fearing that it would communicate a tacit approval of the Chinese communist government, and would dishearten the countless political dissidents and people of faith who languish behind bars.

Once it became clear that the president was set on attending the Games I maintained hope that he would mark his time in China with more than mere sporting events. He could have worshipped with the underground church. He could have given a major speech in China, like President Reagan did at the Danlov Monastery in Moscow during the height of the Cold War, publicly calling on the government to promote religious tolerance. He could have boldly laid a foundation in his words and actions, such that when the Olympic flame was extinguished in Beijing, and the eyes of the world looked elsewhere, the flickering flame of freedom would burn yet more brightly.

In fact just weeks before the Games got under way Secretary Rice was in China on official business and failed to publicly even mention the fact that several notable Chinese pastors and activists were arrested during her visit. Instead she limited her public remarks to the topic of preferred Olympic sporting events.

And now that the Games have ended, we see once again that China’s repression knows no bounds. Just this week, Christianity Today reported that “Amid post-Olympic shifts in China’s attitude toward the West, the government decided that sacred music should disappear” including the seasonal masterpiece Handel’s *Messiah*.

In short, the State Department's relationship with the Chinese government did not help.

I shudder to think what the dissident, rotting in prison for 19 years now, for the "crime" of marching through Tiananmen Square with a paper maché statue of lady liberty, thought when much of the world, including the United States, spoke glowingly during the Summer Games of how far China had come? What about the peace-loving Buddhist monk who, because he expressed loyalty to the Dalai Lama, is living under house-arrest? Or the Uyghur Muslim mother who had her second child forcibly aborted? What of the Protestant house church leader who lives in fear every time he gathers his flock to disciple them or the Catholic bishop who administers holy communion under government surveillance? What message was communicated to the Falun Gong practitioner in a reeducation camp or the labor activist toiling in the logai who hears that leaders of the free world came to his country for the Olympic Games and failed to raise their plight with the man to whom their captors answer?

I have repeatedly been assured that high-ranking U.S. government officials are raising these "sensitive" matters privately when they meet with their foreign counterparts. But whispered pleas are not the same as public proclamations. Countless dissidents from Sharansky to Solzhenitsyn can attest to this truth. Their lives in captivity did not improve because President Reagan quietly urged Gorbachev to set them free, but because he publicly shamed them.

In Egypt opposition leader Ayman Nour, who was himself inspired by President Bush's call for democracy in Egypt, challenged Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the 2005 elections and was jailed prior to the election. His wife has tirelessly advocated for his release with inconsistent help from the U.S.

Nour's plight is indicative of a confused policy in Egypt and throughout the Middle East which gave occasional lip-service to human rights and freedom and then rarely stood with reformers who dared to answer the call.

In 2002, the administration boldly threatened to withhold additional foreign assistance to Egypt, the second largest recipient of U.S. aid since 1979, largely because of their imprisonment of pro-democracy activist Saad Ibrahim. This was the first time that any administration linked the human rights of a Middle Eastern country to its eligibility to receive foreign assistance. The efficacy of this approach was apparent when Ibrahim was eventually released.

The amount of aid we give Egypt is a powerful means of prompting political reform and protection of vulnerable minorities, like the 9 million Coptic Christians—an ancient community withering under tremendous pressure. But the visionary approach of the early days of the administration quickly faded to business as usual with the U.S. expressing only mild disapproval over Mubarak's February 2006 announcement of the delay of municipal elections and aid continuing unabated.

Vietnam is another example, like China, where trade has trumped human rights for the last 8 years. Just this summer, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited the U.S. but the focus of talks with the President was almost solely on economic cooperation with little to no mention of human rights abuses particularly of political dissidents and the Christian minority.

Since 2004 Vietnam had been on the Countries of Particular Concern list annually put out by the State Department which names the worst violators of religious freedom. But in 2006, on the eve of the President's visit to Hanoi, Vietnam was removed despite persistent abuse, harassment and detention for those seeking to practice their faith outside of government approved religious organizations. Shortly after the removal the government launched a crackdown. Sadly we had relinquished a major diplomatic tool for bringing about reform.

If China is any indication of the future, we would be naive to assume that more trade between our two countries will bring about political reform.

The list of missed opportunities goes on and on. The ancient community of Iraqi Christians is on the verge of extinction, Egypt's Bahais continue to be denied basic rights, the people of Tibet are helpless to do anything as their homeland is plundered, a sobering assessment on this International Human Rights Day which marks the 60th anniversary of the U.N. adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

President Reagan once said, "To prisoners of conscience throughout the world, take heart; you have not been forgotten. We, your

brothers and sisters in God, have made your cause our cause, and we vow never to relent until you have regained the freedom that is your birthright as a child of God."

A word to my Republican colleagues as our party seeks to once again find its voice in the aftermath of a difficult election year: we must return to the principles at the heart of the Republican Party—the party of Lincoln and Reagan. We must affirm that we stand for the defenseless, champion liberty, confront injustice. In the words of our own party platform let us not forget that, "the international promotion of human rights reflects our heritage, our values and our national interest."

And to my Democratic colleagues, specifically President-elect Obama, I pray that the words which rang out on the night of his historic victory will in fact be realized during his administration. He rightly spoke directly to those "huddled around radios in the forgotten corners of the globe," and told them that the "true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope." I would go a step further. America is never more strong, never more fully America, than when we are seeking to secure these ideals the world over: for the Egyptian opposition leader, the Chinese house church pastor, the Vietnamese reporter, the Darfuran refugee.