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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

January 23, 2012

The Honorable Ron Kirk
U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th St NW
Washington DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Kirk:

Given your position in the administration, you will likely have the opportunity to travel to China in an official U.S. government capacity. During the course of such visits I encourage you to take time to attend a service at one of China's underground house churches.

It is not uncommon for U.S. government officials to attend one of the state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement churches. But these same officials rarely, if ever, visit any of China's house churches, which constitute a significant segment of China's faith community and consistently face persecution and repression at the hands of the Chinese government.

The challenges these believers face are well-known and documented. The State Department's recently released *International Religious Freedom Report* found that "The government's level of respect for religious freedom in law and in practice declined during the reporting period." The report continued, "Only religious groups belonging to one of the five state-sanctioned "patriotic religious associations" (Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant) are permitted to register and to hold worship services. Religious groups, such as Protestant groups unaffiliated with a patriotic religious association, or Catholics professing loyalty to the Vatican, are not permitted to register as legal entities." Further, the department found that, "Authorities often confiscated Bibles in raids on house churches."

In light of these realities, people of faith in China often live in fear as they seek to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Perhaps counter-intuitively, many of those in China's house churches welcome visits by high-profile government officials from the U.S. Not only do such visits give decision-makers in the West a clearer sense of the repression that the church in China faces at the hands of their own government, but in some cases they afford protection from future harassment and persecution and lend credibility to the churches themselves.

Mr. Bob Fu, who has himself spent time in China's prisons for attempting to practice his faith, now heads the China Aid Association, which was founded to draw international attention to China's persecution of house church Christians. Mr. Fu is a hero and advocate for many house church leaders and lay people alike. He can provide you with reliable information about select house churches which have made it clear that they welcome western dignitaries.

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I strongly encourage you to consider making this a part of your next trip to China. Please contact Mr. Fu at (432) 689-6985 if you are interested in visiting one of these Chinese house churches and he can help coordinate the logistics.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

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IT IS IMPORTANT

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