

China: Why not—why not release Mr. Wei Jingsheng.

WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise today to call for the immediate release of Wei Jingsheng, China's most prominent political prisoner.

Wei Jingsheng is no stranger to harsh unjust treatment. He has spent all but 6 months of the last 18 years in prisons or in labor camps, often in solitary confinement. Now serving his second sentence of 14 years for the crime of peacefully advocating democracy and human rights, Wei Jingsheng is terribly ill. His expected release date is 12 years from now—the year 2009—and that is assuming he lives that long.

At 46 years of age, Wei suffers from life-threatening heart disease, he cannot lift his head, and he complains of severe back pain. His requests for medical attention have gone unfulfilled and all indications are that he has not seen a doctor in more than a year.

A former electrician at the Beijing Zoo, Wei has been one of the strongest voices of China's democratic movement. In recognition of his efforts, Wei was named the 1994 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award laureate and, every year since 1995, Members of Congress have nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

While in prison serving his first sentence, Wei was allowed to write letters on certain topics to his family, prison authorities, and China's leaders. Because most of these letters urged democratic reforms, they were seized by authorities and never sent. Wei was later able to retrieve them and release them publicly, and they have now been translated and published as a book. Today, May 13, is the publication date of this book, "The Courage To Stand Alone: Letters From Prison and Other Writings." This book states what is obvious to Wei and should be clear to Americans: China needs democratic freedoms. Unfortunately, China's leaders continue to show a flagrant disregard for human rights.

In 1994, over the strenuous objections of those of us concerned over China's atrocious and repeated violations of international standards of human rights, the administration delinked granting of most-favored-nation trade status to China to improvements in its human rights record. The administration argued then that through constructive engagement on economic matters, and dialog on other issues, including human rights, the United States could better influence Chinese behavior. That was a mistake.

Let those who support constructive engagement visit the terribly ill Wei Jingsheng in his prison cell, and ask him if developing markets for toothpaste or breakfast cereal will help him win his freedom or save his life. I do not see how closer economic ties alone will somehow transform China's authoritarian system into a more demo-

cratic one. Unless we press the case for improvement in China's human rights record, using the leverage afforded us by the Chinese Government's desire to expand its economy and increase trade with us, I do not see how conditions will get much better.

In fact, the harsh prison conditions and lack of medical attention provided to Mr. Wei demonstrate that, after nearly 4 years, dialog and constructive engagement have made no impact on Chinese behavior. We should make it clear that human rights are of real—as opposed to rhetorical—concern to this country. Until Wei Jingsheng and others committed to reform in China are allowed to speak their voices freely and work for change, American-Chinese relations should not be based on a business-as-usual basis. I hope the administration will do everything possible to demand the immediate release of Wei Jingsheng and urge Chinese authorities to provide him with access to medical care that he urgently requires.

CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, I rise today to call for the release of Wei Jingsheng who has been imprisoned for almost 18 years under the harshest of circumstances in China. Mr. Wei was first jailed in 1979 for advocating democratic reform in China. Can you imagine? The free exchange of such ideas which we take for granted every day in the United States cost Mr. Wei his freedom.

Mr. Wei was released in 1993 in an act which curiously coincided with an upcoming vote by the International Olympic Committee on China's application to host the Olympic games in the year 2000. China's bid for the Olympic games was unsuccessful and shortly thereafter Mr. Wei was imprisoned again. He is not scheduled for release until 2009. This overtly politically motivated move is unconscionable.

Through these years of personal terror Mr. Wei has frequently been held in solitary confinement. He was been the victim of cruelty and mistreatment which had a serious effect on Mr. Wei's health. I am told that Mr. Wei is suffering from heart disease but does not have access to proper medical care. This treatment is simply wrong.

The People's Republic of China wants to assume the status of a responsible nation in the world community. And yet they continue to subjugate the people of Tibet. As a case in point, I spoke earlier this year on the floor about Ngawang Choephel, a former Fulbright scholar at Middlebury College and a friend of the United States, who is serving an 18-year prison term for supposed espionage activities.

The People's Republic of China wants to assume the status of a responsible nation in the world community. And yet they continue to subjugate their own people as well. Mr. Wei is a case in point. The State Department in its an-

nual human rights record for 1996 hit the nail on the head. It said that China "continued to commit widespread and well-documented human rights abuses, in violation of internationally accepted norms, stemming from the authorities' intolerance of dissent, fear of unrest, and the absence or inadequacy of laws protecting basic freedoms."

Mr. President, Mr. Wei has suffered enough. The people of Tibet have suffered enough. The people of China have suffered enough. It is time for a change. We must work for that change in areas we can influence. And let's start by calling for the release of Mr. Wei.

THE UNJUST IMPRISONMENT OF WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, today it is my unhappy duty to note the continued imprisonment of Wei Jingsheng by the Government of China. In an attempt to silence his bold voice for democracy, Mr. Wei has been jailed in solitary confinement or forced to work in a labor camp for all but 6 months of the past 18 years. As a result of his mistreatment, he suffers from a life-threatening heart condition and cannot lift his head due to a neck injury. Today I join my colleagues to call for his immediate and unconditional release, and urge the Government of China to provide him with medical attention.

Mr. Wei's commitment to democracy and freedom despite such mistreatment is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power that words hold over the human soul. He was first jailed in 1978 after founding an independent magazine and daring to call for democracy. Despite the hard conditions of prison life, Mr. Wei refused to abandon his beliefs. Over the next decade, he wrote many letters—some to his family telling of his daily life, others to the leaders of his nation urging them to take immediate steps toward democracy. Virtually all were confiscated by prison authorities and never sent. Released as a result of international pressure in 1993, Mr. Wei immediately resumed his advocacy of democracy despite all that he had suffered. Within 6 months he was sentenced to another 14 years in prison. Today Chinese officials consider his writings so threatening that he is constantly monitored by criminal inmates whose job it is to ensure that he puts no words down on paper.

Despite these measures, Mr. Wei's words have echoed throughout China and the world. In 1989, demands for his release helped to stir the demonstration in Tiananmen Square. He also has been honored with the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom, and been nominated many times for the Nobel Prize for Peace.

I am confident that the Chinese Government's attempts to silence Mr. Wei will not succeed. Mr. Wei's letters,

which he reclaimed as a condition of his release in 1993, are published in "The Courage To Stand Alone: Letters From Prison and Other Writings," to be released today. It is my hope that these words will continue to echo throughout the world, and help to bring freedom and democracy to the people of China.

Thinking of Mr. Wei, I am reminded of the words of another man imprisoned for his uncompromising beliefs. As he wrote from his cell:

Only one thing has remained: the chance to prove—to myself, to those around me and to God—that . . . I stand behind what I do, that I mean it seriously and that I can take the consequences.

Today I will meet the writer of those words, President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic. I am filled with hope as I think of President Havel's extraordinary life and his path from political prisoner to president. I know that Mr. Wei shares President Havel's determination to stand behind his beliefs. It is my hope that one day he also will be free to travel to Washington and that this day will come soon. Mr. Wei's unjust imprisonment must end, and I appeal to the Government of China to release him immediately.

CALLING FOR RELEASE OF CHINESE DISSIDENT WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, today marks the publication date of a remarkable compilation of letters from a remarkable man, imprisoned Chinese political dissident Wei Jingsheng. His book, "The Courage To Stand Alone: Letters From Prison and Other Writings," should be required reading for anyone who takes for granted the freedoms enshrined in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Wei is currently serving 14 years for the crime of advocating democracy in a country where freedom of speech does not extend to criticism of government authorities.

An electrician by training, Wei lacks the formal education of some other famous 20th century champions of democracy and civil rights—Vaclav Havel, Andrei Sakharov, or Martin Luther King—but whatever he may lack in sophistication, he more than makes up for with his blunt eloquence.

Just days before the Chinese crack-down against pro-democracy protesters in Tiananmen Square, Wei offered some candid advice for China's top leaders from his prison cell, urging them to "take great strides to implement a democratic government as quickly as possible." A great tragedy might have been avoided if Beijing's gerontocracy had heeded Wei's call.

Wei was first imprisoned from 1979 to 1993 on charges of "counter-revolutionary propaganda and incitement," the result of his participation in the Democracy Wall Movement. During this brief flowering of officially authorized political dissent in China, Wei had the nerve to argue that China's moderniza-

tion goals could not be met without democratic reform. For this affront, he was severely punished.

In 1993, on the eve of the International Olympic Committee's decision about whether to award the 2000 Olympics to Beijing, China briefly released Wei in an effort to strengthen its Olympic bid. On April 1, 1994, just days after meeting with U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, John Shattuck, Wei was detained once more.

He was subsequently sentenced to 14 years for trying to "overthrow the Chinese Government." The actions cited as proof of Wei's "counter-revolutionary" intent included publishing articles critical of the government and raising funds for the victims of political persecution in China.

Wei has spent most of his last 18 years in solitary confinement, enduring a variety of physical and psychological hardships. He is now widely reported to be in very poor health, suffering from heart and back ailments that require urgent medical attention. Attention he is currently denied.

Today, I join with my colleagues to urge the Chinese Government to take all necessary steps to release Wei Jingsheng from prison on humanitarian grounds. Chinese authorities should ensure that Wei immediately receives the medical care he requires. Wei's imprisonment comes as a result of his peaceful advocacy of democracy and basic human rights. His words warrant our admiration, not a death sentence.

WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, today is the publication date of a book of prison letters by Wei Jingsheng, "The Courage to Stand Alone: Letters From Prison and Other Writings." Wei's book is the subject of a May 5 editorial in the New York Times; I ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

(See exhibit 1.)

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, Wei is China's most prominent dissident. Perhaps I should say that he is China's most prominent dissident in jail. In any event, there are no active dissidents in China, according to this year's State Department human rights report—they are all in jail, or silent.

Wei became famous for his powerful, articulate statements during the Democracy Wall movement. After his release in 1993, he returned his advocacy of democratic reform. After 6 months, he was rearrested and held incommunicado for almost 2 years before being sentenced to another 14-year prison term in 1996.

Wei shows no concern for himself. His health is poor, threatened by heart problems. Yet he continues to stand up to the Chinese Government, demanding freedom and democracy for the people of China.

Wei's letters reveal courage in the face of a brutal and immoral regime. His example is bound to humble any one who dares take for granted the freedoms enjoyed by the American people.

I hope that, somehow, Wei will learn of the enormous respect and support he has from the American people. I urge Senators to join in calling upon the Chinese Government to release Wei and immediately provide him with the medical treatment he so badly needs.

EXHIBIT 1

[From the New York Times, Monday, May 5, 1997]

LETTERS FROM A CHINESE JAIL—THE BLUNT DEMANDS OF WEI JINGSHENG

(By Tina Rosenberg)

For nearly 20 years, the Chinese government has sought to silence one of the world's most important political prisoners, Wei Jingsheng. Once an electrician in the Beijing Zoo, Mr. Wei is the strongest voice of China's democracy movement. He has spent all but six months of the last 18 years in prisons and labor camps, most in solitary confinement in conditions that would have killed a less stubborn man long ago and may soon kill Mr. Wei, who is 46 and very ill.

Now serving a second long sentence, he is watched around the clock by non-political criminal prisoners who insure he does not put pen to paper. But during his first imprisonment he was permitted to write letters on certain topics to his family, prison authorities and China's leaders. Most were never sent. But they have now been translated and published. They form a remarkable body of Chinese political writing.

The book, "The Courage to Stand Alone," is published by Viking. It shows why the Chinese Government is so afraid of Mr. Wei. His weapon is simplicity. Unlike other Chinese activists, Mr. Wei does not worry about tailoring his argument to his audience and does not indulge in the Chinese intellectual tradition of flattering the powerful. He does not worry about being seen as pro-Western, or a traitor to China. He writes as if what is obvious to him—that China needs democratic freedoms—should be clear to anyone.

"Dear Li Peng: When you've finished reading this letter, please pass it on to Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping," begins one typical letter to three top Chinese leaders. "I would like to offer several concrete suggestions." The first suggestion: "take great strides to implement a democratic government as quickly as possible."

He wrote this letter on May 4, 1989, one month before the massacre in Tiananmen Square, ordered by Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping.

Although he was not allowed to write of his worst mistreatment, his letters describe his health and request books, a heater, medicine or a hutch to breed rabbits when he is in a labor camp. The Government expected Mr. Wei to show he was being "re-educated." Instead, he wrote essays on democratic restructuring of the Government.

Mr. Wei has always been uncompromising. In 1978, Mr. Deng was fighting for control of the leadership and encouraged reformist thinking. The activists created a Democracy Wall along a highway outside Beijing, where writers put up posters with their thoughts. Mr. Wei wrote the boldest poster, a tract arguing for real democracy and criticizing Mr. Deng, who was then revered by the activists. Mr. Wei then founded an independent magazine. He was arrested in March 1979, given a show trial and sentenced to 15 years.

He was released six months before completing his sentence, as part of China's bid to