

Dr. Katrina Lantos Swett Remarks

Citizen Power Award, Initiatives for China – 12/10/18

Thank you for this award. I am deeply honored not only to be receiving this award, but also to be receiving it from someone I so greatly admire – Yang Jianli.

I have had the privilege of knowing and working with Jianli for many years now and to me, he embodies the virtues that all human rights leaders should seek to emulate.

He is unyielding and undaunted in his determination to stand up for democracy and human rights in China and he is equally unyielding in his determination to do this in a way that is not only non-violent and inclusive of all communities, religious and otherwise, that are impacted by China's repressive policies - but also in a way that calls forth what Abraham Lincoln used to call "the better angels of our nature."

So thank you Jianli – not only for this award but also for the inspiration you are to me and so many others.

We need to keep the spirit you embody alive as we work to hold China accountable for its massive and spreading abuses of human rights. Not only within China proper, but also through its insidious tentacles internationally in business, academics, and the media.

Because of its vast size and throw weight, China again and again succeeds in distracting, denying, and downplaying the outrageous abuses taking place from Tibet to Hong Kong, to Xinxiang to the daily lives of millions of ordinary Chinese citizens who simply want to claim their inherent birthright to freedom, democracy, conscience rights, the rule of law, free expression and freedom of movement.

The challenge is great indeed, but China is not invincible as it sometimes appears to outsiders. Any government that does not derive "its just powers from the consent of the governed" has an underlying fragility and vulnerability that no boasting or blustering can conceal forever. Particularly not if brave activists like all of you continue your unrelenting efforts, using every legal, peaceful tool at your disposal, to shine the light on China's abuses and to hold our leaders accountable for the way they do or don't speak out and act to defend human rights in China.

Whether that means applying the Global Magnitsky Act to sanction Chinese officials implicated in severe human rights abuses.

Whether it means adequately funding and supporting internet technologies that allow the Chinese people to circumvent the great firewalls that seek to keep them locked in an information prison.

Whether that means robustly applying the IRFA to more forcefully advocate for persecuted faith communities in China including the Uighurs, the Falun Gong, Tibetan Buddhists, the Christian community, and others.

Finally, China can no longer be allowed to flout the rule of law with impunity in business matters including the theft of intellectual property, industrial espionage, forced technology transfers, and violation of sanctions. I have read much in the past few days about how the detention of the Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou in Canada has stoked fear and anger in China. I don't know enough about the case to comment on the merits, but I do know that it is high time China realizes it cannot act with impunity to violate international laws and expect to get away with it – and if the case of the Huawei CFO makes them a little afraid that their unlawful behavior will have consequences, that is probably a good thing.

I pledge the Lantos Foundation will continue to fight for democracy and human rights in China and we are proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with all of you in this battle.

My late father, Tom Lantos, used to love to quote the famous New Hampshire poet, Robert Frost, who wrote;

“The woods are lovely dark and deep

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep”

We must each resist the temptation to be focused only on our personal goals and lives and strive instead to remember the promises we must keep to those who are striving for lives of dignity and freedom under tyrannical regimes. We indeed have miles to go before we sleep but it is a noble journey and well worth the effort.

Thank you.