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International Women's Day: An Appeal to the UN to Defend Women from the Violence of the One-Child Policy

Statement at House Press Conference on 100th Anniversary of International Women's Day
Remarks to the Press, March 7, 2011
Chairman of the Africa, Global Health and Human Rights Subcommittee
Rep. Chris Smith, (NJ-04)

As we mark the 100th International Women's Day tomorrow, we appeal to the United Nations to end its complicity in coercive population control and defend women and children from forced abortion and forced sterilization in China – the worst gender crime in the world today, and, in scale, certainly the most massive. We direct our appeal to the United Nations itself, to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, to all UN agencies – especially the UNFPA: pay attention to the UN treaty bodies, which have recognized the Chinese government's barbaric violence and coercion against women – and stop supporting, or protecting by your silence, or passing over lightly, these terrible crimes.

As the world celebrates International Women's Day, too few people outside China understand the massive and cruel repression and violence perpetrated, intentionally and systematically, on hundreds of millions of women by the Chinese government, with the complicity and, at certain levels, the cooperation of the United Nations. As the U.S. China Commission summarized, the one-child policy is "marked by pervasive propaganda, mandatory monitoring of women's reproductive cycles, mandatory contraception, mandatory birth permits, coercive fines for failure to comply, and... forced sterilization and abortion."

Today is the day to remember the staggering price Chinese women pay when they fail to conform to this policy. A Chinese woman who becomes pregnant without a permit will be put under mind-bending pressure to abort. She knows that "out-of-plan" illegal children are denied education, health-care, and marriage, and that fines for bearing a child without a birth permit can be 10 times the average annual income of two parents, and those families that can't or won't pay are jailed, or their homes smashed in, or their young child is killed. If the brave woman still refuses to submit, she may be held in a punishment cell, or, if she flees, her relatives may be held and, very often, beaten. Group punishments will be used to

socially ostracize her--her colleagues and neighbors will be denied birth permits. If the woman is by some miracle still able to resist this pressure, she will be physically dragged to the operating table and forced to undergo an abortion.

Her trauma is incomprehensible. It is a trauma she shares, in some degree, with every woman in China, hundreds of millions of women, whose experience of intimacy and motherhood is colored by the atmosphere of fear created by the government, by government threats and determination to intrude itself, in deadly fashion, into the most personal aspects of her life, as a woman, a mother, a wife.

What has the UN, which boasts of so many programs to promote and protect women, done to defend women from all this? Very little – and, sadly, for thirty years one of its agencies, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), has vigorously supported, funded, defended, promoted, even celebrated these massive crimes against women.

The UNFPA not only plays an essential role in training the Chinese cadres who run this anti-woman program, but the UNFPA assists in the implementation of the one-child policy in several Chinese counties – where the implementation is no less harsh than elsewhere in China.

The UNFPA has done all this quite openly and unashamedly. UNFPA representative Sven Burmester said in 1999: “China has had the most successful family planning policy in the history of mankind...” The UNFPA has stood not with oppressed women but with the oppressors of women – it is a UN body that has made the Chinese government’s killing machine more efficacious and lethal, a UN body that has systematically whitewashed and defended its crimes against humanity.

In denying U.S. funds to the UNFPA in 2008, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte wrote: “China’s birth limitation program retains harshly coercive elements in law and practice, including coercive abortion and involuntary sterilization... it is illegal in almost all provinces for a single woman to bear a child...” The State Department noted that Chinese law is “the foundation of its coercive policies and practices” and that the UNFPA comports with and adheres to “Chinese law.” To date, President Obama has provided over \$100 million to the UNFPA.

The societal implications of the UN-supported one-child policy are staggering. According to the WHO, about 500 Chinese women commit suicide every day – China is the only country in the world where the female suicide rate is higher than the male. The policy has led to the worst gender disparity in any country in history. Today, there are tens of millions of missing girls and women in China – gendercide, the evil twin of genocide – and tens of millions of men can’t find wives – because for 30 years and counting, the restriction to one child has led to the targeting of girls in sex-selective abortion, the ultimate gender discrimination. China has become a magnet for sex trafficking in large measure due to the ‘missing girls.’

What about the other UN agencies and human rights treaty bodies? The treaty bodies have shown that they know about the gross human rights violations perpetrated against women and girls by Chinese officials. And yet the UN handles China with kid gloves, and whispers when it should be crying out much more loudly. Sadly, in the Universal Periodic Review, in 2009, the Chinese government was given a complete pass on the one-child policy and forced abortion.

At this point, I’d like to call on:

- UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to speak out against the Chinese government’s systematic violation of hundreds of millions of Chinese women – to fail to speak out against what is by far

the worst gender-based violence in history would make a mockery of the UN's claim to promote women;

- the Obama Administration and other members of the UN Human Rights Council to call a Special Session in the Human Rights Council and to address the ongoing crisis of gendercide in China and China's missing girls;
- Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director and Under-Secretary General for UN Women, to make the crimes against women in China a top priority for UN Women to assist China in addressing population challenges in ways that respect the rights of women and girls and do not result in a massive and gross violation of women's human rights;
- the Committee overseeing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability to raise with China the practice of eugenic forced abortion and eugenic infanticide when China is reviewed by the Committee later this year;
- the UN's Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, Its Causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, to make a fact-finding visit to China regarding violence and abuses connected to the enforcement of the one-child policy and to issue a full report;
- the UN's Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children (Ms. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Mr. Juan Méndez) to also make fact-finding trips to China in order to fully document the effects of China's one child policy and forced abortions which have created a gross gender imbalance in the region;
- the UNFPA to cease and desist from all collaboration or support for China's population control policy – the most massive human rights violation in the world today.

I and other members of Congress will be sending these officials letters formally requesting them to undertake these actions – all of which are simply duties of their offices – in defense of Chinese women brutalized by the one-child policy.