

Congressman urges Obama to raise issue of forced abortions in China

WASHINGTON – A U.S. congressman urged President Barack Obama to raise the issue of forced abortions with Chinese leaders and not allow human rights to take a backseat to economic issues when the president traveled to Beijing.

Obama was scheduled to be in China Nov. 15-18, after stopping in Tokyo Nov. 13 and Singapore Nov. 14. He was to return to the United States Nov. 19 after a stop in Seoul, South Korea.

“Few people outside China understand what a massive and cruel system of social control the one-child policy entails. ... The system is ‘marked by pervasive propaganda, mandatory birth permits, coercive fines for failure to comply, and, in some cases, forced sterilization and abortion,’” said Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., quoting the U.S. China Commission.

Smith, a ranking member of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, spoke at a hearing on the issue Nov. 10.

“I believe the Chinese government would respond to the president if he were to take the lead in speaking up in defense of human rights in China,” Smith said in an opening statement. “The Chinese government is sensitive to how it is viewed by the rest of the world.”

“The result of this policy is ... nightmarish ... with no precedent in human history, where women are psychologically wounded, girls fall victim to sex-selective abortion ... and most children grow up without brothers or sisters, aunts or uncles or cousins,” said Smith, a Catholic.

The price for parents’ failing to conform to the one-child policy means “illegal children are denied education, health care and marriage, ... and fines for bearing a child without a birth permit (which) can be 10 times the average annual income of two parents; those families that can’t or won’t pay are jailed, or their homes smashed in, or their young child is killed,” Smith said.

If the woman still refuses to give up her child, “she may be held in a punishment cell, ... her relatives may be held and, very often, beaten ... (and) she may be physically dragged to the operating table and forced to undergo an abortion,” the congressman said.

“China’s one-child policy causes more violence against women and girls than any other official policy on earth,” said Reggie Littlejohn, president of Women’s Rights Without Frontiers, at the hearing.

During forced abortions, women are “kidnapped, (taken) screaming and crying out of their homes, strapped down to tables and forced to have abortions, even up to the ninth month of pregnancy. The violence of these late-term procedures sometimes kills not only the fetuses, but also the women themselves,” Littlejohn said.

Also testifying was Wujuan, a victim of a forced abortion whose full name was withheld to protect her identity from Chinese authorities. She said she was forcibly taken to a hospital for an abortion because she did not have a permit for pregnancy issued by the Chinese government.

Before she was taken by government officials, Wujuan tried to save her child by hiding in an old house in a remote area, but the authorities found out about her pregnancy and searched for her, she said. When they could not find her, they put her father in a detention facility and beat him daily to coerce her into giving herself up.

A neighbor told her what was happening with her father but before she could act, she said, the authorities found her hiding place, and she was sent to a hospital for an abortion. The nurse “put the big, long needle into the head of my baby in my womb,” Wujuan said. “At that moment, it was the end of the world for me, and I felt even time stopped.”

The next evening, she was taken to a surgical room. “One doctor told me that I brought too much trouble to them already because my baby was supposed to flow out by itself after the injection. Since it did not come out as expected, they decided to cut my baby into pieces in my womb with scissors, and then suck it out with a special machine,” Wujuan said.

This is “the story of millions of Chinese women,” Smith said. “The World Health Organization reports over 500 female suicides per day in China ... in China the suicide rate for females is three times higher than for males,” the congressman said.

An April investigative report by an organization called Women’s Rights in China said that “in rural villages, the Chinese government’s one-child policy is enforced with the ‘three examinations,’ which check women for use of contraceptive rings, pregnancy and illness – a practice that is hostile and abhorrent to women.”

“Not only do the enforcers of the policy disrespect women – they have no regard for the ethic of preserving personal privacy,” the report said.

The organization labeled as “a complete lie” a statement by the Communist Party that people voluntarily follow the policy and that abortions are voluntary. The head of the Chinese One-Child Policy Commission has said that birth control is currently used by 83 percent of the country’s 240 million women of childbearing age.

“In effect since 1979, the coercive one-child policy is, in scope and seriousness, the worst human rights abuse in the world today,” Smith said.