

The United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) has called on China to cease its policy of harassing foreign journalists.

The CECC said that: "Critical to understanding developments in China has been the ability of journalists to cover that country. Domestic journalists operate under heavy censorship while foreign journalists now report a worsening environment under President Xi Jinping. In November, Chinese officials denied a visa to Paul Mooney, an American journalist who had spent the past 18 years in China and had reported on environmental problems, Tibet, Xinjiang, the plight of human rights activists, and kidnapped children, among other stories. Currently some two dozen journalists from the New York Times and Bloomberg have yet to receive their visas as a year-end deadline approaches, and the Web sites of both news organizations have been blocked in China after publishing articles detailing the wealth of the relatives of China's top leaders. Foreign journalists report concern over government retaliation, harassment of sources, and physical threats, and allegations of self-censorship in the face of pressure from Chinese authorities have also surfaced."

On the 11th December 2013, US Senator Sherrod Brown, Chairman of the CECC, issued the following statement:

"Today I am calling on China to immediately cease its policy of harassing foreign journalists, denying and delaying their visas, and blocking the websites of foreign media in China. If the situation does not improve, we must consider other steps that Congress may take to address the issue.

Our approach is critical. China is the world's most populous country and our second-largest trading partner. It faces daunting challenges, from crippling pollution and widespread corruption, to suppression of the basic freedoms we take for granted. And as we have seen recently, China is increasing its military posture in the region.

What happens in China affects us all. It is therefore imperative that we have a complete and accurate picture of what is going on there.

But we can't do that without foreign journalists.

If foreign journalists cannot report the news in China, who will investigate the financial dealings of China's top leaders and their families?

Who will report on Tibet and Xinjiang and the plight of human rights activists?

Who will investigate labor conditions at factories that make products sold in America?

It has to be the foreign press because China's own journalists are hamstrung by severe censorship.

That's why China's recent actions to shut down foreign journalists are so troubling.

What's happening now has few precedents.

If 23 reporters don't get their visas by the end of the year, *The New York Times* and Bloomberg may not be able to cover China at all.

China has now made this a fair trade issue by blocking access to the web sites of *The New York Times*, *Bloomberg*, *Reuters*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

And in November, Chinese officials denied a visa to American journalist Paul Mooney after he had been reporting in China for the past 18 years.

For years foreign journalists in China have had to endure periodic beatings, interrogations, and harassment just to do their job.

But what is new is that China is now threatening to use its weapon of last resort—closing the country off to the rest of the world.

We must do all we can to prevent that from happening."

Paul Mooney statement to CECC

I'm very happy to have the opportunity to speak at this roundtable and I would like to thank Senator Sherrod Brown and Representative Christopher Smith for providing this platform to discuss the serious deterioration of the treatment of foreign journalists in China.

On November 8, the Chinese government informed Reuters that my application for a journalist visa had been denied, ending an eight month wait for my visa, and my 18-year career as a foreign correspondent in China. No reason was given for the refusal, but a 90-minute visa interview at the Chinese Consulate in San Francisco last April focused on my views on human rights, rule of law, the Dalai Lama, and Tibet. At the end of the interview, the consular official said to me: "If we allow you to return to China, we hope you're reporting will be more objective."

Although Beijing made some concessions to the media to win the right to host the 2008 Olympics, as soon as the Games were over, the government began to tighten controls again. In 2009, we began to see an increasing number of foreign journalists who faced extended delays in getting their visas approved. In these cases, the journalists had in the previous 12 months

reported on sensitive issues, and while reasons were not usually given by the government, it was clear to the people involved why they were being targeted. Beijing has long used the threat of expulsion as a means of influencing international journalists in China.

In 2012, Melissa Chan, an American journalist working for Al Jazeera, was refused a visa renewal and was forced to leave the country. She was the first foreign journalist to be kicked out of China in 13 years. Such decisions are extremely rare, and it signaled a worrisome shift in China's handling of the foreign media. In addition, Phil Pan and Chris Buckley of the New York Times, and a handful of reporters from Bloomberg, have been waiting for more than a year to get visas to move to China to do reporting.

Situation worse

The situation has dramatically worsened in recent months, with some two dozen journalists from the New York Times and Bloomberg today facing the possibility of not getting their visas renewed, which would have a serious impact on the ability of these news organizations to report about China.

China has given no reason for failing to approve these visa applications, only saying that this was done in accordance with Chinese laws and regulations. However, Beijing has not provided any examples of wrongdoing, leading to speculation that this is in retaliation for reporting that displeased senior Chinese officials.

These drastic actions may have a strong impact on other journalists in China, who will now worry that their reporting on sensitive issues will result in expulsion from the country.

I'd like to first state that my reporting, and that of my colleagues, is not anti-China. Many of us have spent years learning about China and studying the language, and we have a deep affection for China and the Chinese people.

I reported accurately what I saw and heard from Chinese people: the parents of kidnapped children, AIDS victims, people in cancer villages, migrant workers, poor farmers, the handicapped and others who have been left behind by the so-called Chinese economic miracle. The Chinese government may not like what I reported, but during my close to two decades in

China, it never once challenged the accuracy of my reporting.

Self-censorship

During my last two years working in Beijing, from 2010 to 2012, I was not given the normal one-year visa, but instead three and six-month visas. Few journalists get such limited visas and the purpose is to make reporters self-censor in order to be allowed to remain in China.

Foreign journalists in China often work under psychological pressure. The government strives to conceal the truth about China, and this makes the job of journalists very difficult. I got a taste of this the first week I arrived in China to work in 1994, when police at the Bureau of Entry and Exit responsible for issuing journalist visas took me into a back room and sternly warned me not to violate any laws. What they really meant was I shouldn't write about things the government didn't want me to cover. Weeks later, the police officer in charge of monitoring me, stopped me from entering a Protestant church on a Sunday morning, where Chinese Christians had been outspoken in defense of the right to freely practice their faith, a right that's guaranteed in the Chinese Constitution.

Foreign journalists in China play a daily game of cat and mouse with the Chinese police and security agencies. Our movements are closely monitored, a task made easy by the J (for journalist) visas in our passports that are like a scarlet letter. They know whenever we purchase an airline ticket and they're notified as soon as we check into a hotel anywhere in China. They also use our mobile phones to monitor our movements and even listen in to our conversations. It's a common practice among foreign correspondents in China not to take their mobile phones with them when they do sensitive interviews because it's believed the police have the ability to use them as a listening device, even if the mobile phone is turned off and the battery is removed. When traveling, journalists sometimes turn off their phones or frequently change their phone cards to limit the ability of the police to monitor them. In some cases, Chinese news assistants are invited to "have tea" with security agents or police, who pressure them to report on their bosses, such as which stories they plan to report on, people they interview and travel plans.

During a brief flirtation with the Jasmine Revolution in Beijing in 2011, foreign journalists in Beijing were jostled by plainclothes police when they tried to visit the area where Chinese were expected to carry out silent protests. Stephen Engle, a reporter for Bloomberg Television, was beaten in public view on the streets of Beijing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied this a few days later, despite the fact that a video proved the beating's occurrence. Colleagues were warned not to go to the protest site over the following weeks, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

openly warning journalists that their visas might not be renewed if they disobeyed this request. Police called the homes of journalists to warn them not to cover this event, and in a few cases, police actually turned up at the homes of foreign journalist to issue stern warnings.

Traveling can also be dangerous. It's common for local officials or police to detain foreign journalists while they're working. I almost always traveled alone to do reporting, and when covering sensitive stories I often worried about being detained and having my notes and photographs confiscated. My wife and two daughters also worried about me as they knew there were risks involved in the reporting I did.

While it's difficult to ascertain the source of some things, our computers are frequently attacked with malware, and in some cases, journalists and their families are threatened physically via phone calls and emails. One colleague told me recently of being called into police stations on two occasions, where she was shouted at, threatened and filmed during the process.

Intimidation

More troubling for me, was the intimidation of the people I came into contact with during my reporting. An important Chinese rule governing foreign journalists, the result of the Olympics concessions, says that foreign journalists only need to obtain the permission of interviewees for an interview to be legal. In reality, this often is not the case. Journalists are frequently physically prevented from speaking to Chinese and sources are often threatened or punished for speaking to us. In one recent incident, Ilham Tohti, a prominent university economist, was harassed by police, who rammed into his car while his family was sitting in it. The police allegedly told him it was because he had spoken to foreign journalists.

I often worried that people would get into trouble for speaking to me. In several cases, I later received phone calls from people I'd interviewed, telling me they'd been visited by police, and in at least two cases, people told me that they were briefly detained by the police, including a taxi driver who had no idea who I was and who had not helped me in any way.

Tibet is completely off limits to foreign journalists, who can only travel there with a special permit that's quite difficult to obtain. I've applied several times for permission to travel to Tibet, but I've never gotten permission. Even when reporting on Tibetan areas outside of the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region, journalists are often restricted. For example, I have been prevented by police from entering Tibetan areas in Gansu province. And although Xinjiang is theoretically

open to the media, in some cases the provincial government requires that journalists get special permission before reporting there, which is a violation of China's own regulations governing journalists. This seriously impedes the ability of the foreign media to report freely in these areas.

During a trip to Kashgar, in Muslim-dominated Xinjiang province, police arrived at my hotel within 15 minutes of my arrival, and I was followed the entire time I was there. During another visit, Xinjiang police forced me to check out of my hotel shortly after I arrived, and they forced me move into a hotel designated for foreign journalists.

Over the next three days, I was not allowed to leave the hotel without a police escort. The officers who stayed with me from morning to night made sure I didn't speak to any Uyghur people and they didn't allow me to take any photographs. At the time, tensions were high in the area; armed police marched through the streets, and truckloads of soldiers crisscrossed the city. The government obviously didn't want anyone to report on this. On the fourth day, police officials put me on a train and sent me out of Kashgar.

When I was reporting last year in an AIDS village, local officials entered the farm house where I was conducting an interview just minutes after my arrival. Five of the six people in that family had contracted AIDS as a result of selling their blood to illegal blood collection centers set up by local governments. As I didn't want to get the family into trouble—although they agreed to speak with me, and realized the risk—I left the village immediately. Shortly after getting into our car and driving off, the AIDS victim who had been accompanying me, received a phone call from officials in her village insisting that she return home immediately. I completely avoided other AIDS villages because I was told that swarms of police were on the lookout for both Chinese and foreign journalists attempting to enter these areas. As a result, AIDS victims who were keen to speak with me, traveled to nearby towns to meet with me. I also made secret visits to seriously ill AIDS victims in rural hospitals, but I was kicked out of one hospital after hospital officials realized I was there. On my final day in one town, I barely left the hotel after someone tipped me off that police were coming to my hotel to question me. I wanted to leave before they arrived so that my notes and photographs would not be destroyed or confiscated, which would have been a serious setback in my reporting on this issue.

Important information

Foreign journalists who work in China all have had similar experiences. It's important that the world be well-informed about what's going on in China, not just in terms of economic and business news, but also about many other issues that have an impact outside of China's borders, and which affect people around the world. In recent years, China has tried to minimize

or cover up issues such as AIDS, milk contamination, tainted animal foods, toxic toothpaste, dangerous pirated products, and heavy metals pollution of rice, vegetables and fruits. These are issues that can directly affect the well-being of consumers and citizens around the world and journalists should have the right to write about these issues.

It's important to note that China's attempt to control the message is not limited to just the foreign media. Its own journalists and citizens lack freedom of expression, many prominent international scholars are refused visas to travel to China, and those who are given access often worry about crossing some invisible line. International companies, organizations and NGOs are intimidated and thus often reluctant to speak honestly for fear of being criticized.

As a result, the international media is often the only source of objective reporting about China, for both the world and China itself. In many cases, reports by the international media filter back into China, providing Chinese citizens with news they may not otherwise have had access to. In fact, Chinese officials themselves would not be aware of some serious issues if they were not reported by the international media. If this voice is silenced, the world will be seriously limited in its ability to understand China.

In the past, governments and organizations have tried to use polite persuasion to convince China to stop its intimidation of the international media. Unfortunately, this has not worked. In fact, the situation has seriously deteriorated in recent years. I don't think that China will change its attitude unless some stronger steps are taken to stop its unfair treatment of the media.

Strong measures

Many people are opposed to a tit-for-tat visa policy against Chinese journalists, arguing that this would go against the traditional American respect for freedom of the media. I don't want to see my Chinese colleagues prevented from reporting in the United States. However, delaying visas for Chinese journalists or for media and propaganda officials who are not involved in the daily work of journalism would send a clear signal to Beijing.

Despite arguments that reciprocal policies can't have any impact on China, there are precedents for this. I've heard of several cases in which foreign governments have delayed issuing visas to Chinese journalists and officials in retaliation for such policies, and in these cases, China immediately backed down.

I'm concerned that Beijing has been emboldened by the failure of governments and news organizations to challenge it's unfair treatment of the media, and that the situation will worsen unless some concrete actions are taken.

The Chinese government is able to act the way it does because media organizations and foreign governments have been reluctant to go public with such abuses, instead relying on polite diplomacy behind closed doors. Something can be done to improve this situation, but it's going to take more than just quietly expressing displeasure.

Some two dozen American journalists at the New York Times and Bloomberg News are now facing imminent expulsion over the coming days and weeks, a move that would cripple the ability of these two US news organizations to continue to function in China and provide the world with accurate news that people need.

It's urgent that the US government immediately adopt measures to deal with this rapidly worsening situation.

Thank you.