



**Statement of U.S. Representative Christopher Smith,  
Cochairman of the Congressional-Executive  
Commission on China (CECC)**

**CECC Hearing on “Food and Drug Safety, Public  
Health, and the Environment in China”**

**May 22, 2013, Washington, DC**

Welcome to our distinguished witness to this hearing on the important issues of food and drug safety, public health, and the environment in China. I also want to thank the staff of this commission for their work to raise awareness about these three issues, as well as other human rights, rule of law, and governance issues.

Problems in the areas of food and drug safety, public health, and the environment deserve greater attention, research, and action; they affect countless people inside and outside of China. We hope to raise the visibility of these issues and that the Chinese government will respond in action, as well as words, to address the concerns of Chinese citizens and of all peoples who may be affected by imports of unsafe Chinese foods and drugs, by harmful pollution originating in China, or by public health crisis that take root in China.

While China has had impressive economic growth for decades, it lags behind in ensuring the rights of its citizens, and in developing transparency, official accountability, the rule of law, things it sorely needs to tackle these three issues.

Transparency is absolutely necessary for any government to protect the health of its citizens and to effectively manage problems related to food and drug safety, and public and environmental health. Therefore, it is unfortunate that it took about three weeks for Chinese health officials to make public information about the recent outbreak of bird flu.

It is also unfortunate that authorities continue to deny citizens information on the levels of soil contamination across the country, despite media and citizen requests for that information. Soil contamination has led to high levels of cadmium in at least 44 percent of the rice in at least one southern province. Authorities revealed the names of 8 brands which had been affected only after widespread criticism in the media and online regarding officials’ original statement that it was “not convenient to reveal” the names of the brands. It is unconscionable for authorities to put the health of Chinese citizens at risk by withholding this information to protect the images of the government and specific companies.

In the past few months, over 20,000 pig carcasses have floated down rivers near Shanghai, but the Chinese government claims that there is no harm done to food or water quality. It is hard to get to the truth because central authorities are trying to control media coverage of these

developments, telling journalists not to travel to locations to investigate. Keeping the media, citizens, and groups in the dark exacerbates food safety, health, and pollution problems.

The list of food and drug safety problems in China is long and continues to grow. Some of the glaring problems over the last few years include toxic preserved fruit, baby formula and milk tainted with melamine, and produce contaminated by pesticides, just to name a few. 94 million people in China become ill annually from food-borne diseases, and over 8,000 of these people die.

These safety problems affect Americans. Between 2006 and 2010, US officials prevented some 9,000 unsafe Chinese products from entering the US. Chinese authorities' attempts to reign in the problems have not worked. Major corruption scandals in the food and drug agencies over the last few years indicate the top-down accountability systems are not working.

The health of women due to the tragic forced abortions conducted under the coercive one-child policy which has been covered under previous hearings continues to cause tremendous pain and suffering both physical and emotional for millions.

Chinese leaders continue to make commitments to improve food and drug safety at some future date, but when people are getting sick and dying, patience is no longer possible.

Authorities in China need to be held accountable for implementing and enforcing laws the food and drug safety, public health, and environmental sectors. One of the ways to do that is to have authentic public oversight. Unfortunately, Chinese authorities continue to limit the growth of authentic civil society and citizen and group participation in policymaking and oversight processes is still very low.