

**Statement of
Congressman Joseph R. Pitts
Hearing: Taming the Dragon: Can Legal Reform Foster Respect for Human Rights
in China?
April 11, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing on whether or not legal reform can foster respect for human rights in China. I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses.

History, in fact very recent history, shows that the development of rule by law in nations emerging from oppressive rule is vital to establishing long-term stability and development. Eastern European nations are excellent examples of this growth, some more positive examples than others. Reports clearly reveal that the Chinese people desire laws that protect their freedom, whether it be the freedom to move around the country, freedom to think and verbalize views differing from those of the Central Party, freedom to practice their religion without interference or freedom to creatively explore economic opportunities.

There is change in China, but it appears that in the midst of progress, there are drastic steps backwards - the primary case being that of the government crackdown against religious groups, particularly Falun Gong, unregistered house churches, and unregistered Catholic groups loyal to the Vatican. It is vital that our government, the academic community and the business community not ignore or downplay these developments. I wholeheartedly concur with those who believe that our government should continue to increase its involvement in individual prisoner cases and thus help change individual prisoners lives for the better. We must continue to press the Chinese government to respond to widespread human rights violations, particularly since China is now a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO). As a member of the WTO, Chinese officials have opened themselves up to international scrutiny and criticism for failing to respect and protect the basic rights of the Chinese people.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.