

LEAGUE SIGNS OPEN LETTER TO AL GORE

The Catholic League, along with several other organizations and distinguished individuals, signed an open letter to Vice President Al Gore regarding a trip he made to China during Holy Week. Published in the Washington Times on Easter Sunday, the letter implored the vice president to make an issue of human rights and religious persecution when visiting with Chinese leaders. Christians, and Catholics in particular, have been brutalized in recent years by the Chinese government. Here is the text of the letter:

March 27, 1997

Dear Vice President Gore:

On March 4, as you were preparing for your trip to China, agents from the Shanghai Public Security Bureau invaded and ransacked the apartment of Bishop Fan Zhengliang, S.J., the Coadjutor Roman Catholic Bishop of Shanghai. Bishop Fan was targeted because the Chinese government has banned all religious activity and expression outside the system of state controlled "churches" it has established as part of its campaign against religion. According to the Cardinal Kung Foundation in Stamford, Connecticut, the police seized Bishop Fan's bibles, missals, catechism, the Code of Canon law, and other religious items and writings. The agents also confiscated all of the church's cash assets in Bishop Fan's possession.

This act of terrorism was plainly timed to intimidate Catholics and other Christians in the period leading up to Holy Week and Easter. Chinese authorities engaged in a similar crackdown last December, targeting Catholics and Protestants in a campaign designed to prevent any observance of Christmas.

If history is any guide, the raid on Bishop Fan will be revealed to be part of a larger campaign of terror and religious oppression throughout China.

The contempt of the Chinese government for basic human rights has been on display for years. Sadly, the campaign against men and women of faith has been intensifying rather than diminishing, even as our government has promoted increasing economic engagement with China. Our own State Department and human rights groups like the Puebla Institute, have documented the chilling details of this campaign. Priests have been arrested for saying mass. Evangelical "house church" services have been disrupted and buildings holding such services have been bulldozed. Arrests, interrogations, and internment of Christians in "re-education" programs have been common. Anti-religious slogans have been painted by police officials in China's town squares. In January 1996, as reported by the State Department, an annual government religious affairs conference invoked a "harder line" against any religious activity that is not organized and directed by communist "party loyalists."

Repression of religious belief and practice has extended to China's 17 million Muslims and to Buddhists in Zhejiang Hubei provinces and in Tibet. In Zhejiang alone, some 17,900 shrines and churches were "rectified," a government euphemism which connotes, destruction, registration with the government as a controlled church, or transfer to another group. Only last September, Premier Li Peng, who you toasted on your visit to China in commemoration of the new commercial arrangements between our nations, said that Chinese government departments must "step up the control of religious affairs" and that religion "should serve the aims of socialism."

It is in this atmosphere that the Easter Week crackdown has proceeded. It is in this atmosphere that you are visiting China. Your trip has been hailed by powerful U.S. business interests who lustfully eye the potentially vast Chinese

market. Your presence in China was exploited for good publicity by the cruel communist tyrants who are responsible for the regimes war against religion. Yet you apparently did and said little in the cause of it's victims. So we must respectfully ask:

- Has the Clinton-Gore administration directed our U.S. Embassy in Beijing to put human rights issues at the top of our concerns in relations between our two countries?
- Did you seriously raise these issues of religious persecution at any time during your meetings with Premier Li Peng or other hosts for your trip? If so, what was their response? What, if any, commitments did you receive?
- In view of your role as the administration's "point man" on China issues, have you taken any other steps to fulfill the pledge made in the 1992 Clinton-Gore campaign to hold China to account for it's abysmal human rights record?
- During your visit to China, did you meet with any Chinese dissidents? We call to mind the fact that such meetings were a key component of U.S. policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and that they served invaluable purposes in advancing the cause of human rights behind the Iron Curtain.
- Ambassador James Sasser said, in January 1996, that he was unaware of the Evangelical "house church" movement in its persecution in China. Has he now been thoroughly briefed and is he prepared to assert the strong protest of the United States in the event that those involved in this movement continue to be harassed and punished?
- Will the Clinton-Gore administration publish interim reports regarding China's progress on human rights in advance of the upcoming exchange of visits between Chairman Jiang Zemin and President Clinton?

Mr. Vice President there is no question that U.S.- China

policy stands at a critical crossroads. Our nation is being tested on its commitment to basic principles in the pursuit of justice and human rights in the face of temptation to sacrifice these principles in pursuit of profits. History has chosen President Clinton and you to represent this nation at that crossroads.

We pray that you will have the courage to stand with the victims of oppression in China and show the world that America still believes in "liberty and justice for all."