

Chairman Gallagher Opening Remarks
Remarks at Breakfast Honoring Jimmy Lai
5.10.23
as prepared for delivery

I have a controversial statement to make this morning: Jimmy Lai is not in prison.

Yes, he might be confined in a cell, surrounded by guards, unable to come and go as he pleases, but Jimmy Lai is not in prison.

Jimmy Lai is free, probably freer than anyone in this room.

Jimmy's example demonstrates that true prison is whenever we go along with a totalitarian absurdity because it's convenient, or because we're afraid to rock the boat.

He realized that he couldn't stay true to his principles around freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the practice of his Catholic faith by absconding to some comfortable penthouse in New York or London. It would have been a more claustrophobic prison than anything Xi Jinping could have devised because he would not have lived as he believed.

That is true courage.

Jimmy's example has inspired me for a long time. The first artwork that we got for the offices of the Select Committee on the CCP was a framed copy of the last issue of Apple Daily.

I've watched videos of Hong Kongers weeping in the rain as they kept vigil outside Apple Daily's offices on the night of its last printing. How they shone their smartphone lights as makeshift candles, captured in the image on Apple Daily's final cover. How they cued up for hours and hours to wait to buy the last copy.

They realized that the last paper that spoke truth to communist power was dying. And with it, a part of Hong Kong. A part of the free world.

What is Hong Kong becoming? A bay of broken promises. A safe harbor for sanctions evaders. The finest laundromat for cleaning money in the East. The only international financial capital to hold hundreds of political prisoners. The bankers wear golden blindfolds as they stare out the windows of their glass offices onto Victoria Harbor.

But, I believe Jimmy would tell us not give in to despair. Before she herself was arrested, the associate publisher Chan Pui-Man wrote a farewell letter in Apple Daily's last issue that ended like this:

"I am particularly touched by a recent cartoon I saw: an apple is buried in the ground, but from its seeds comes a tall tree full of even bigger and more beautiful apples.

Love you forever. Love Hong Kong forever."

I want to thank Sebastian Lai for his tireless work advocating for his father, advocating for Hong Kong, and advocating for freedom of press around the world.

In some ways, Sebastian has the hardest job. His father grew the first apple, which the CCP tried to bury, not realizing the seeds were still inside. But now Sebastian needs to make sure that the seeds spread and grow into apple trees around the world.

And we need to help him. I'm excited to hear his ideas of how we can help. What we can do to get his father released.

Back in 2010, Apple Daily published an interview with Liu Xia [Lee-oh Shah], the wife of Chinese dissident Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo [Lee-oh Shao-bow]. She talked about a line from his Nobel Prize statement where he told her, "I am serving my sentence in a tangible prison, while you wait in the intangible prison of the heart."

Sebastian, I know you and your family are also serving a sentence in that same intangible prison of the heart.

I've read reports that Catholic schools around the country have been sending Jimmy postcards in prison and that he often sends back drawings he's done of Jesus. He told the Catholic News Agency "If you believe in the Lord, if you believe that all suffering has a reason, and the Lord is suffering with me...I'm at peace with it."

Jimmy Lai may be at peace with his suffering, but that doesn't mean that we should be. The silence from the Vatican on China's human rights abuses and Jimmy's case in particular is deafening. Jimmy Lai's example shows that the true prison is one built from fear of speaking the truth to the powerful.