

COMMENTS TO HOUSE CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HEALTH, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS, AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

By David Aikman, June 3 2013

Mr. Chairman and honorable members, twenty-four years ago today one of the most brutal assaults by any government in modern history on peacefully protesting protesters began around 10.00 p.m. in the evening, Beijing time. By the time the assault was over several hours later, hundreds, perhaps thousands of innocent civilians, including students, had been murdered by bullets of the Chinese People's Liberation Army or crushed under the tracks of tanks and armored personnel carriers. How do we know? Because scores of Chinese and foreign eyewitnesses photographed the event and reported on it. I was one of them.

The killing of innocent civilians is always a tragedy, and sometimes it is a crime. Most countries in the world have been guilty of this at different times in their history, including my own country, the United States. Over a few centuries we treated with great cruelty Africans brought over to this country as slaves and native Americans. But we came to recognize these faults and to express contrition and an apology for them, and even ask forgiveness for them.

China is a great civilization and culture and has contributed innumerable blessings to the human community. China has also suffered much in recent centuries from foreign invasion and aggression. The result is that Chinese feel a deep sense of grievance when information about past and present injustices is suppressed.

That sense of grievance is alive in China today about the events of June 3 and 4 1989. What does it say about a great nation that it has to forbid Internet searches of the words "Tiananmen Incident" or "June 4," or even "candle", or, most incredibly, even the numerals 535, which point not to May having 35 days but to the date June 4? How can the authorities in power in China hope to have the respect of the world when they go through these medieval contortions to suppress information about China's own history?

All that truth-respecting people all over the world are asking for is for China to start being honest about its own past and present and to investigate in a transparent manner what happened 24 years ago. China claims that hooligans were responsible for June 4. That is nonsense. Some hooligans no doubt were present, just as some hooligans perhaps were present when Martin Luther King Jr. set in motion the Civil Rights March on Washington in 1963. But only a complete idiot today would assert that the Civil Rights March on Washington was an event organized by hooligans.

China today is experiencing a multitude of protests by citizens experiencing injustice. That multitude is growing annually at a rate that even alarms the Chinese government. Sooner or later, if not addressed honestly, those grievances will coalesce into a social and political movement which could cause a national turmoil in not just China, but in some of China's neighbors. For the sake of honesty, of sanity, and even regional peace, the Chinese authorities need to tell the world the truth. China claims to respect truth because it respects science, which requires truth to be respected. It will be a tragedy if China continues to hobble along dragging its civilization and its recent history behind it like an injured war veteran. Greatness of civilization requires truth, honesty and modesty, not continued countenancing of lies like the Soviet regime of Josep Stalin. Every Chinese and everyone in te world will feel a sigh of relief if China begins to be honest about its internal grievances, especially those stemming from June 3-4 1989.

A wise man said two thousand years ago, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."