

## DOCUMENT

# Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China

**Editor's Note:** *The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China published on Sunday a white paper titled Seeking Happiness for People: 70 Years of Progress on Human Rights in China. Following is the full text:*

## Contents

### Preamble

- I.** A Splendid History of China's Human Rights Protection
  - II.** People-centered Approach in Human Rights Protection
  - III.** Continuing to Improve People's Living Standards
  - IV.** Effectively Ensuring That People Enjoy Their Rights
  - V.** Protecting the Rights of Special Groups
  - VI.** Strengthening the Rule of Law for Human Rights
  - VII.** Full Participation in Global Governance of Human Rights
  - VIII.** Advancing the International Cause of Human Rights
- ### Conclusion

## Preamble

October 1, 2019 is the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), a day of special significance not only for China but for the entire world. As a result of the developments that have taken place in the PRC over the 70 years, the people of China are living a happier life, the world is more prosperous, and human society is more diverse and colorful.

Seventy years ago, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) the people of China were emancipated and became masters of their country. Over the subsequent seven decades, the Chinese nation has stood up and grown prosperous and is becoming strong; all basic rights of the people are better respected and protected; and China has made regular contribution to the international cause of human rights.

Living a happy life is the primary human right. Since the day of its foundation, the CPC has set its goal to work for the wellbeing of the people of China, for national rejuvenation and for human progress. Since the founding of the PRC, and especially since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China has been guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The nation has constantly reviewed the experience gained in human social development, integrated the principle of universality of human rights with national conditions in practicing socialism with Chinese characteristics, and espoused a people-centered view of human rights. China regards the rights to subsistence and development as its primary and basic human rights. It endeavors to improve the rights of all its people in a coordinated manner and works for their rounded development. Both history and present circumstances attest that China has opened a new path of human rights protection based on its national conditions, and increased the diversity of human civilizations.

As a key member of the international community, China raises high the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefits, staunchly safeguarding world peace, promoting common development, and advancing development through cooperation while promoting human rights through development. It fully participates in global human rights governance, and works strenuously to advance the international cause of human rights.

## I. A Splendid History of China's Human Rights Protection

The PRC is a socialist country led by the CPC. The original aspiration and the mission of the Party is to seek happiness for the people of China and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation, and putting the people at the

center of all its work is the supreme pursuit of the Party in its governance. The Party's leadership is the fundamental guarantee for the people of China to have access to human rights, and to fully enjoy more human rights. This leadership is therefore in the interests of all people of China, critical for their pursuit of a happy life, and provides the foundations for the cause of human rights in China.

The progress in human rights in China parallels the country's overall progress in recent times, and results from the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The cause of human rights in China has gone through three phases since 1949:

**The first phase: Founded in 1949, the PRC established a basic socialist system and achieved the most extensive and profound social transformation in China's history, laying down the basic political prerequisite and establishing the institutions for developing human rights in China.**

Between 1840 and 1949, due to repeated invasions by foreign powers, a corrupt ruling class, and a backward social system, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Frequent wars, instability, a shattered economy, and a destitute populace – this is an accurate portrayal of China at that time. The people suffered under the oppression of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat-capitalism, and had no access to human rights at all.

With the founding of the PRC, China achieved and then defended true, complete national liberation and independence, which provided the fundamental guarantee for the subsistence, freedom, and personal security of the people, and created fundamental conditions to effectively protect and continuously improve all of their rights.

The PRC established and consolidated the political system of people's democracy, which guarantees the people's rights to be masters of their country. The Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which was adopted on the eve of the founding of the PRC and served as the provisional Constitution of China, stipulates: people have the right to vote and to stand in election in addition to a wide range of political rights and freedoms; and women have the same rights as men in all respects, including politics, economy, culture, education and social life. The 1954 Constitution of the PRC, which was adopted at the First Session of the First National People's Congress (NPC), set up the principles of people's democracy and socialism, established the system of people's congresses, and provided institutional guarantees for ensuring all power in the PRC belongs to the people. It included a chapter specifying the basic rights and obligations of citizens.

The various democratic reforms and social programs carried out by the PRC during this period created conditions for economic and social development and protection of human rights. The land reform in the early 1950s abolished the feudal system of land ownership that allowed for exploitation by the landlord class. As a result, Chinese peasants were economically liberated and became masters of their country. Suppressed rural productive forces were unleashed and peasants' economic status and living standards were greatly improved. The democratic reform of the production and management of state-owned factories, mines, and transportation operators that started in 1950 set up factory management committees and workers' congresses in these entities, and hence made workers true masters of

their enterprises. The Marriage Law promulgated in 1950 abolished the feudal marriage system that sanctioned arranged or forced marriages, enabled men's superiority over women, and neglected children's interests. It established a new marriage system featuring monogamy, freedom of marriage, gender equality, and protection of the legitimate interests of women and children. In addition, China promoted education and healthcare, established labor insurance and social relief systems, and created a nascent social security system with public employers being the building blocks.

The PRC established a complete, comprehensive economic system to boost economic growth, which laid the economic foundations for human rights protection. The newborn People's Republic quickly recovered from the devastation of past wars. In only three years its economy and the people's standard of living rose to the highest level in history. On this basis China started socialist transformation of agriculture, handicrafts and capitalist industry and commerce, and established a basic economic system of socialism. This provided the basic institutional guarantee for the people to participate in economic development and share the fruits of their work on an equal footing.

The PRC soundly rejects ethnic oppression and discrimination, and forges an interethnic relationship characterized by equality, mutual help and unity. The success of the system of regional ethnic autonomy effectively guarantees the equal rights of all ethnic minority groups in China as well as their right of autonomy in handling affairs of their own groups and regions.

**The second phase: The reform and opening up launched in 1978 opened the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and has emancipated and developed the productive forces to a great extent. As a result the people's rights to subsistence and development and other basic rights are better protected, and the cause of human rights in China has made huge progress.**

Reform and opening up was a great new revolution undertaken by the people of China and led by the CPC under the new conditions of that era. Under the leadership of the CPC, the people review experiences and lessons drawn from socialist construction, adhere to the path of socialism, keep economic development as our central task, uphold the Four Cardinal Principles and reform and opening up, and build socialism with Chinese characteristics. The CPC pursues development as its top priority in governance and rejuvenation of the nation and the key to solving all China's problems. It vigorously builds up productive forces and strives to better protect human rights through development, and has thereby aroused great enthusiasm among the people.

In the course of reform and opening up, the CPC has made respecting and protecting human rights a goal of its governance, and added new elements to advancing the cause. In 1997, the 15th CPC National Congress committed to: "...ensuring that the people enjoy extensive rights and freedom endowed by law, and respecting and guaranteeing human rights." In 2002, "Human rights are respected and guaranteed" was written into the report to the 16th CPC National Congress as an important goal of socialist political progress. In 2007, the report to the 17th CPC National Congress further pointed out: "We must respect and guarantee human rights, and ensure the equal right to participation and development for all members of society in accordance with the law." And in the same year, this principle was written for the first time into the CPC Constitution.

In the course of reform and opening up, China adheres to governance based on the Constitution, which provides the fundamental legal guarantee for comprehensive progress in human rights. In 1982, the Fifth Session of the Fifth NPC adopted the current Constitution of the PRC, which clearly defines the substance and basic form of socialist democracy. It provides that all citizens are entitled to civil rights, political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights. In the following years, the NPC adopted five amendments to the Constitution to better protect human rights. These covered the basic economic system, distribution system, protection of citizens' private property, and social security system. In particular, the amendment adopted at the Second Session of the 10th NPC added the line "The State respects and preserves human rights" into the Constitution, a move that has strongly guaranteed and advanced human rights in China.

In the course of reform and opening up, China has incorporated the protection of human rights into national development strategies and plans. In 1991, the Chinese government published its first white paper on human rights – Human Rights in China. It formulated and implemented the National Human Rights Action Plan, which set phased goals and tasks for respecting and safeguarding human rights. China has also made targeted action plans relating to the economy, culture, society, the environment and other fields, as well as plans to protect the rights of specific groups, such as ethnic minorities, women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, to ensure that all the people of China can fully enjoy their rights.

In the course of reform and opening up, China has established and improved institutions for protecting human rights that are suited to its national conditions. A human rights protection system with Chinese characteristics has taken shape. The Chinese government has put into place a number of systems and mechanisms, including those dealing with subsistence allowances, the minimum wage, labor security supervision, labor dispute settlement, employment assistance, and compulsory education (primary and middle schools). With the promulgation of the General Principles of the Civil Law and Tort Liability Law, China has established a system of protection for the right to dignity. In addition, it has advanced household registration reform, and made consistent improvements to the election system, the community-level self-governance system, the system for transparency of government affairs, the litigation system and the system for intellectual property protection.

**The third phase: The 18th CPC National Congress in 2012 marks the advent of a new era for socialism with Chinese characteristics. Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, China espouses the people-centered development philosophy, works hard to ensure and improve people's wellbeing, and continues to strengthen legal protection for human rights. As a result, the cause of human rights in China has made headway on all fronts.**

In building socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, full respect for and protection of human rights is an important goal of China's endeavors to build a moderately prosperous society in all respects. This establishes the importance of human rights from a strategic perspective. The CPC Constitution amended and adopted at the 18th National Congress reaffirms the principle of respecting and protecting human rights. In 2014, the Fourth Plenary Session of the

18th CPC Central Committee adopted the "Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Advancing the Rule of Law", which emphasizes the need to "provide stronger judicial protection of human rights" and to "strengthen awareness throughout the whole of society about the need to respect and safeguard human rights." In 2017, the 19th CPC National Congress established Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as the guiding ideology of the CPC, and categorically stated that we should "strengthen legal protection for human rights to ensure that the people enjoy extensive rights and freedoms as prescribed by law." This provides fundamental basis for us to advance the cause of human rights in China.

In building socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, the people's aspiration to live a better life is the focus of all the country's work, and China strives to give the people a stronger sense of gain, happiness and security. It bases the cause of human rights on the endeavors to solve the principal contradiction in Chinese society, focuses on people's ever-growing needs for a better life, and promotes full and balanced progress in all human rights. China promotes well-rounded development of the people as a principle of human rights, applies the new development philosophy, presses ahead toward common prosperity for all, and strives to build a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful.

In building socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, China focuses on achieving the Two Centenary Goals and realizing the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation. For this purpose it put forward the Five-point Strategy (promoting economic, political, cultural, social, and environmental progress in a coordinated way), so every citizen's rights can be fully protected in each of these spheres. For this new era it has also introduced the Four-pronged Strategy: to complete a moderately prosperous society in all respects, further reform, advance the rule of law, and strengthen Party discipline, which provides a strong guarantee for advancing the cause of human rights in China on all fronts. China respects and guarantees human rights throughout the process of modernizing its national governance system and capacity. It has strengthened legal protection for human rights and reformed and refined the systems to protect human rights, and it safeguards citizens' rights through the combination of modern institutions and the rule of law.

## II. People-centered Approach in Human Rights Protection

In developing human rights over the past 70 years, China has combined universal principles with the prevailing realities of the country, forming a system of human rights with a people-centered approach. The basic elements are:

**Human rights are a historical and developmental concept.** Born under certain historical circumstances, the concept evolves as times change. Different nations have different tasks and take different approaches to ensure human rights, because they differ in terms of stage of development, economy, culture and society. Diversity in developing human rights should be respected. They can only be effectively ensured by combining universal principles with the prevailing realities of different countries. Every country has room for improvement in protecting human rights. There is no universally applicable model,

and human rights can only advance in the context of national conditions and people's needs.

**The rights to subsistence and development are the primary rights.** Poverty is the greatest obstacle to providing human rights. It would be well-nigh impossible for humanity to ensure any right without the production and supply of goods and materials. The effective guarantee of the right to subsistence and the steady improvement of living standards are the preconditions and foundations for fulfilling and developing all other human rights. From the mid-19th century, China suffered repeated foreign aggressions and fell into poverty and backwardness. Living in misery, the people enjoyed utterly no right of any kind. The Chinese know very well what survival requires – no poverty and no hunger. Prioritizing people's rights to subsistence and development, China has committed to liberating and developing productive forces, eliminating poverty, and enhancing its level of development. All this has laid the foundation for fulfilling the various rights of the people.

**Human rights mean the integration of individual and collective rights.** There is no collective development without individual development; individuals can only enjoy well-rounded development in a collective environment. In China, equal attention has been paid to developing collective rights and ensuring individual rights, so that the two are integrated, coordinated, and mutually-enhancing. Individual rights can only be maximized in the context of collective rights. The Chinese government strives to ensure the rights of every individual and all its citizens by seeking prosperity for the country, rejuvenation for the nation, and wellbeing for the people.

**Overall progress in all rights is a major principle of realization of human rights.** All human rights are interdependent and inalienable. China coordinates the planning and promotion of all rights and endeavors to achieve a balanced development of economic, social, and cultural rights and civil and political rights. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC and the Chinese government has sought to make overall economic, political, cultural, social, and environmental progress, known as the Five-point Strategy, and made comprehensive moves to complete a moderately prosperous society in all respects, further reform, advance the rule of law, and strengthen Party discipline. Known as the Four-pronged Strategy. In this way, China has made comprehensive progress in human rights through an integrated approach.

**People's sense of gain, happiness and security is an important criterion for evaluating human rights.** The core spirit of CPC governance lies in fulfilling the people's aspiration for a better life by realizing, safeguarding and developing their fundamental interests, and in enhancing their sense of gain, happiness and security. For everyone to fully enjoy human rights, we must uphold the people-centered approach, prioritize the people's interests before anything else, and ensure a good life for the people. We must ensure that the fruits of development offer greater benefits to all the people in a fair way, enable every person to enjoy opportunities for self-development and a good life, and prevent them from fear and threat.

**Fairness, being reasonable and inclusiveness are the basic principles of international human rights governance.** The international community should uphold the shared values of humanity – peace, development, fairness, justice, democracy and freedom.