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## THE SENATE

**Motion to Call Upon Chinese Government  
to Release Liu Xiaobo from Prison—  
Debate Continued**

**Speech by:**

**The Honourable Vivienne Poy**

**Thursday, December 9, 2010**

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#### MOTION TO CALL UPON CHINESE GOVERNMENT TO RELEASE LIU XIAOBO FROM PRISON— DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Di Nino, seconded by the Honourable Senator Stewart Olsen:

That the Senate of Canada call upon the Chinese Government to release from prison, Liu Xiaobo, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize Winner.

**Hon. Vivienne Poy:** Honourable senators, I want to thank Senator Day for yielding the floor to me. When I complete my remarks, the floor will fall back to him.

Yesterday, I listened carefully to what Senator Di Nino and Senator Munson said in the chamber regarding the Senate of Canada passing a motion asking the Chinese government to release Nobel Prize winner Liu Xiaobo. Senator Day will speak on this motion in relation to international law.

Today, I speak from the perspective of someone who grew up within the Chinese culture and as someone who understands its history. As a person who has always been able to say what I think publicly, I understand how devastating it must be to have one's voice silenced.

I want to state from the outset the importance of freedom of speech, which is central to human rights. I do not claim to have met Liu Xiaobo, as Senator Munson did, but I have the greatest respect for him, and I have an immense appreciation for his teaching and writing. Ever since he was a lecturer at the Beijing Normal University, he has been an outspoken human rights activist.

Honourable senators, I do not believe the motion before us will do anything to help Liu Xiaobo to be freed from prison. In fact, if this motion is passed, it could make it worse for him, his family and supporters, especially if this motion is publicized and receives attention from the Chinese government.

The unintended consequences could be worse treatment for Liu Xiaobo and his family. Understanding Chinese culture as I do, this motion may inadvertently cause the resentment of the Chinese population because it will be viewed as foreign interference in internal Chinese affairs. While the Chinese can criticize their own family, they are sensitive to criticism from outside.

I ask honourable senators to think what would happen if the National People's Congress passed a motion to tell the Canadian government what to do with our internal policy. I can cite a good example when Charles de Gaulle weighed into our internal Canadian politics when he made his infamous statement, "Vive le Québec libre," in 1967.

I believe the content of this motion should be dealt with through our Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in ongoing diplomacy between the two governments.

Despite the fact that Western democracies value freedom of speech, we sometimes censor or attempt to silence those with whom our government does not agree. The most recent example happened last year when Canada effectively barred long-time former British member of Parliament George Galloway from entering Canada, citing security concerns, a decision later overturned by a federal court judge who declared the move as politically motivated.

This year, we had the cancellation of a speech by Zijad Delic, National Executive Director of the Canadian Islamic Congress, who was scheduled to speak to the Department of National Defence as part of Islamic History Month. Whatever we may think of these individuals, the point is that we do not accept all forms of free speech in Canada, either.

I noted that Senator Downe suggested that Senator Di Nino be sent to Norway to represent the Senate of Canada to press this issue. I want to inform honourable senators that several legislators from the Democratic Party of the Hong Kong government left for Norway yesterday to demonstrate against the incarceration of Liu Xiaobo, and to ask for his release by Beijing. They took Liu Xiaobo's books, pamphlets, photographs and postcards with them in suitcases to be distributed at Oslo City Hall during the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony.

When asked what they will do with the empty suitcases upon their return, they said they would fill them with Norwegian smoked salmon.

As legislators from Hong Kong, which is part of China, surely these individuals are better placed to have an impact on Chinese authorities in Beijing.

I believe any improvement in the internal policy of a country must come from within, and Western democracies are often misguided in thinking that they can transplant their ideal government to another part of the world that has a completely different culture and history. To me, the most effective way of influencing democratization of China is through the education of this generation of Chinese youth, many of whom are being educated in Western democratic countries such as Canada. They have brought back, and will continue to bring back, what they have learned to China, and change will come, even though it will not be tomorrow.

Honourable senators may know that Taiwan changed from a dictatorship under martial law to a democratic government, without bloodshed, in 1987. With the influence of Hong Kong, Taiwan and that of Western education for its youth, change will come to China. It may not happen in my lifetime, but it will happen. Considering the Chinese sense of time and history, when we compare 5,000 years of civilization to 143 years since Canada became a nation, it is understandable that Westerners are impatient with this evolution.

I remind honourable senators of the typical government response when Canadians are incarcerated abroad. Generally, Canada cites the sovereignty of other nations and the independence of their judicial processes. When Canada does have concerns, it expresses them through the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade because to do otherwise might result in the loss of face and in negative consequences. Diplomacy is the best option.

• (1820)

Honourable senators, in closing, I would like to reiterate that I do not believe this motion to be an effective way of influencing the Chinese government. In fact, I believe it may have an adverse effect of making conditions worse for Liu Xiaobo in China. In the end, if China is to evolve toward a more democratic state, action must be taken by the Chinese people alone, not by censorious foreigners, however well meaning they may be.

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