

Appendix 114 -- PRC - 50 Years of Progress in China's Human Rights (2000)

Source: Available at: http://www.gov.cn/english/official/2005-07/27/content_17730.htm

Date: 2000 February 17

Following is the full text of the white paper China issued on February 17, 2000 on its human rights progress in the past 50 years, entitled "50 Years of Progress in China's Human Rights":

The year 1999 witnessed the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. For the previous half century, the Chinese people, led by the Chinese government, had unswervingly probed into and fought for the elimination of poverty and backwardness, the building of a rich, strong, democratic and civilized country, and the achievement of the lofty ideal of complete human rights. As a result, the situation of human rights in China has seen tremendous changes.

I. A historical turning point in the progress of human rights in China

In the old semi-colonial, semi-feudal China, the broad masses were oppressed by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism, and had no human rights at all. But after New China was founded in 1949, the Chinese government and people waged a series of large-scale campaigns, rapidly sweeping away the dregs left over from the old society, and established a basic political system which could promote and protect human rights, so that the nation and society took on an entirely new look and a new epoch was started for the progress of human rights in China.

-- Realizing and upholding genuine and complete national independence, and creating the requisite premise for the progress of human rights. Invaded and enslaved by various foreign powers, old China lost its state sovereignty, and its people's human rights lost their minimum guarantee. The first important achievement of the Chinese Communist Party, which led the Chinese people to victory in the people's democratic revolution, was to drive the imperialist invaders out of China, paving the way for China to realize real independence.

New China, after its founding, promptly abolished all unequal treaties which had been imposed on China by various imperialist countries and all the privileges they had grabbed from China, resolutely confiscated the property of fascist countries in China, completely uprooted the political and economic privileges of the imperialists' colonial rule in China and realized complete state independence.

In the early period after the founding of New China, the Western countries, headed by the United States, carried out a total-containment policy of political non-recognition, economic blockade and military encirclement against China. They brazenly waged the Korean War in 1950, which was extended to the Yalu River, the border of China, in an attempt to strangle the newly founded People's Republic of China (PRC) in the cradle.

In spite of great difficulties, New China defying brute force, was compelled to wage a just war to defend the homeland and achieved a great victory, firmly maintaining state independence and the people's security.

Meanwhile, New China firmly followed an independent and peaceful foreign policy, actively advocated and earnestly adhered to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, developed relations with foreign countries based on equality, mutual benefit, peace and friendship, successfully frustrated the isolation, blockade, interference and aggression by international antagonistic forces, and won wide respect from international society.

The genuine and complete independence of China has created the fundamental premise for the Chinese people's selection of their own social and political systems and a path for development with the initiative in their own hands, for China's opening to the outside world, for steady and healthy development, and for the uninterrupted improvement of human rights in China.

--Establishing and perfecting the people's democratic political system, and guaranteeing their democratic rights to be masters of their own affairs.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), which was inaugurated in 1949, witnessed the adoption of the Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, served as the country's provisional constitution, the election of the Central People's Government, and the declaration of the birth of the People's Republic of China.

The Common Program clearly stipulated that state power belonged to the people, who, according to the law, had the right to vote and stand for election, and had the freedoms of ideology, speech, publication, gathering, forming associations, communication, personal affairs, residence, change of residence, religious belief and demonstration.

It also stipulated that all the laws, decrees and judicial systems enacted by the reactionary Kuomintang government to oppress the people had been abolished, that laws and decrees were to be formulated to protect the people, and that the people's judicial system was to be established.

In February 1953, China promulgated the Electoral Law of the People's Republic of China. In December 1953, a general election was held nationwide. The registered electors accounted for 97 per cent of the citizens of and above the age of 18, of whom 85.88 per cent participated in the election. They elected 5.669 million grass-roots deputies, and 1,226 deputies to the National People's Congress. These deputies featured wide representativeness.

This was the first nationwide general election in Chinese history; it helped to realize the people's democratic right to participate in the management of state affairs.

In September 1954, the First Session of the First National People's Congress was held in Beijing. Based on the people's democracy, the session adopted the Constitution of the People's Republic of China. Before being submitted to the National People's Congress for examination, the draft Constitution was made public for the whole country to hold a two-month discussion. About 150 million people took part in the discussion, and put forward more than 1.16 million

questions and suggestions for amendments and supplements.

The enacting of the national constitution on the basis of such a broad discussion by the whole country was not only unprecedented in Chinese history, but also rare in the history of the world. The Constitution stated the nature of the state, the functions of state organs, and the rights and duties of citizens, laying a foundation for China's democracy and legal construction.

The construction and improvement of the basic political system on the basis of people's democracy provided a fundamental political guarantee for the realization of the right of the people to be the masters of their own affairs.

They also enjoy the right to control their economies and local finances, the right to develop educational, scientific, technological and cultural undertakings, and the right to use and develop the local spoken and written languages.

"Fifty years is but a moment in human history," the paper noted. Nevertheless, in the past 50 years the Chinese people have made a great historic leap in the development of human rights.

"We can say that the human rights situation in present-day China is totally different from that of the old China, even compared with the years before the initiation of the reform and opening-up policy, the great progress that has been made in this respect is universally acknowledged," it said.

The paper noted that since China introduced the policy of reform and opening-up, it has found a road for the promotion and development of human rights that suits its reality.

"This means putting the rights to subsistence and development in the first place, under the conditions of reform, development and stability, and thus promoting human rights development in an all-round way," it said.

"Practice has proved that building socialism with Chinese characteristics is a road of development that is in accordance with the fundamental interests of the Chinese people, and also the only road which can effectively promote human rights in China," the paper stressed.

It expressed the belief that as long as China follows the plans laid down at the Party's 15th National Congress, while continuing to carry out the three-stage economic development strategy, earnestly implement the general plan of governing the country according to law, and strive to build a socialist country ruled by law, its human rights situation will continue to see marked improvement.

Various old systems which had oppressed and enslaved workers, such as the feudal boss system practised by bureaucrat-capitalist enterprises, were annulled. The divisive feudal trade associations and regionalism were abolished. Factory management commissions and congresses of workers and staff members were established, which absorbed workers into factory management so as to realize democracy in enterprise management and make workers the real masters of their enterprises.

Simultaneously, the old wage system was adjusted, a labor insurance system was introduced, and workplace welfare and employees' living standards were improved.

To liberate women and abolish the feudal marriage system which discriminated against and oppressed women, in 1950 New China promulgated the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China, which was the first such law ever enacted in China.

The law completely abolished the feudal marriage system of arranged and coerced marriages, men's superiority to women, and neglect of the interests of offsprings, and cleared the way for a new marriage system of freedom of marriage, monogamy, equality between men and women, and protection of the lawful rights and interests of women and offsprings.

At the same time, large-scale publicity work and a mass movement to put the Marriage Law into effect were carried out nationwide. As a result, the ideas of the equality of men and women and freedom of marriage became deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and women's status was greatly raised.

Prostitution, drug trafficking and addiction, and gambling are social evils left over from old China, as well as chronic social diseases endangering the people's physical and mental health. They were resolutely prohibited right after the founding of New China.

In November 1949, the second people's congress of Beijing took the lead in prohibiting prostitution. The city promptly closed all brothels, and provided education and medical treatment for prostitutes, enabling them to live off their own labor. Following Beijing, all other large, middle-sized and small cities nationwide successively prohibited prostitution.

In a short period of time, this hotbed of crimes, which had seriously ruined women's physical and mental health and their dignity for more than 3,000 years in China, was stamped out. As for drug taking, gambling and other social evils which were closely connected with the reactionary ruling forces and the underworld in old China, the people's government, on one hand mobilized the masses to struggle against and punish drug producers, drug traffickers and gambling rings, and on the other it did extensive publicity work so as to enhance the consciousness of the masses, and reform drug addicts and gamblers.

After two to three years of efforts, these social plagues, which had not vanished despite repeated prohibitions in old China, were basically wiped out, and China's social life took a new and healthy turn for the better.

--Opposing ethnic oppression and discrimination, developing ethnic equality, mutual aid and unity, and carrying out the ethnic regional autonomy system.

In old China, serious ethnic discrimination and oppression existed for quite a long time; many ethnic minorities, which were not recognized, were in adverse circumstances, and some ethnic minority people had to hide themselves deep in the mountains, living in isolation.

After the founding of New China in 1949, the Chinese government completely abolished all

ethnic oppression and discrimination, and liberated ethnic minority people. To eliminate the estrangement produced by ethnic oppression in old China, the Central People's Government sent, between 1950 and 1952, groups to ethnic minority areas to express sympathy and solicitude, and organized groups of all ethnic minorities to visit the capital and other places in China, thus strengthening understanding and friendship among all ethnic groups.

In 1951, the Central People's Government promulgated the Instructions on the Handling of the Titles, Names of Places, Tablets and Signboards Which Are Discriminative and Insulting to Ethnic Minorities.

To carry out the ethnic equality policy, in 1953 the Chinese government started a large-scale program to identify all the country's ethnic peoples. A total of 55 ethnic minorities were identified, thus making each ethnic minority an equal member of China's family of peoples for the first time in history.

At the same time, the Chinese government initiated a movement to universally promote and educate Chinese citizens with ethnic theories and policies, strongly advocated ethnic equality and unity, and opposed nationalism, especially Han chauvinism. Meanwhile, to change the backward economic and social situation in ethnic minority areas, the Chinese government actively and steadily carried out democratic reforms in the areas inhabited by minority peoples.

On the premise of fully respecting the will of ethnic minorities, and respecting and protecting their religious beliefs, customs and habits, the Chinese government helped minority peoples to reform their backward production methods and social systems, and develop economic and cultural undertakings, thus enabling the social development of the ethnic minorities to leap over several historical stages.

To guarantee the special rights and interests of ethnic minorities, the Chinese government established ethnic self- government organs and instituted ethnic regional autonomy in the areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities.

In August 1952, China promulgated the Outline for the Implementation of Ethnic Regional Autonomy in the People's Republic of China, which specifies the details of the policy of ethnic regional autonomy. The successful implementation of ethnic regional autonomy has effectively guaranteed the equal rights of ethnic minorities in the big family of China, and their right to administer their respective ethnic and local affairs in a self- governing manner.

--Establishing the socialist system, and promoting social and economic development and the improvement of the people's enjoyment of human rights.

After the founding of New China, the People's Government carried out land reform and other democratic reforms, and adopted powerful measures to stabilize prices and promote economic development.

It took only three years for China to heal the wounds of war, and build the national economy and the people's livelihood to the highest level in history. On this basis, the Chinese government lost no time in starting the socialist reform of agriculture, handicraft industry and

capitalist industry and commerce, thus fundamentally eliminating the system of exploitation of man by man and establishing basic economic system of socialism.

Since then, the Chinese people have become the masters of their means of production and the owners of the wealth of society, thus calling forth their enthusiasm for building a new country and creating a new life, and promoting the rapid development of society and the economy, and the improvement of the people's livelihood.

According to statistics, the national total industrial output value in 1957 had increased by 128.3 percent over that of 1952, with an average annual growth of 18 percent; the total agricultural output value had risen by 25 percent; and the average consumption level of all the people in the country had grown by more than one third.

The establishment of the socialist system has provided the basic guarantee for the people throughout the country to constantly improve their human rights situation on the basis of equal participation in economic development and sharing labor achievements.

Through these profound social reforms, involving getting rid of the old and creating the new, New China has not only realized a historic turning point in the development of human rights, but also initiated a brand-new starting point for further exploration and the progress and development of the cause of human rights.

ii. Great improvement in the rights to subsistence and development, and economic, social and cultural rights

In the past 50 years since the founding of New China, especially since the initiation of reform and opening to the outside world some 20 year ago, the Chinese government has always put the people's rights to subsistence and development first, focused on economic construction, and made efforts to develop social productivity.

Consequently, China's economy and society have advanced by leaps and bounds, its comprehensive national strength has been raised, and the people's livelihood has improved by a large margin by realizing two historic leaps, bringing them from poverty to having enough to eat and wear, and then to living a better-off life.

In 1952, China's GDP was only 67.9 billion RMB yuan, a figure which rose to 7,939.6 billion RMB yuan in 1998, with an average annual growth rate of 7.7 percent allowing for price rises, or over 2.5 times the average world growth rate in the same period.

From 1952 to 1998, the industrial added value increased by 159 times calculated according to the constant prices, with an average annual growth rate of 11.6 percent; the agricultural added value increased by 4.5 times, with an average annual growth rate of 3.3 percent; and the total foreign trade volume increased from US\$ 1.13 billion in 1950 to US\$ 323.9 billion in 1998, or an increase of 287 times, with an average annual growth rate of 12.5 percent.

According to a United Nations estimate, China ranks seventh in the world in terms of the size of its economy; 11th in total foreign trade volume; second in foreign exchange reserves; and

ninth in comprehensive national strength.

At present, the GNP created by China within 12 days is equivalent to the GNP of the whole year of 1952. Now China leads the world in the output of steel, coal, cement, chemical fertilizer, TV, crops, meat, cotton, peanuts, rapeseed, fruit and other important industrial and agricultural products.

China's total grain output increased from 110 million tons in 1949 to 510 million tons in 1998, or an increase of over 3.5 times, with an average annual growth rate of 3.1 percent, higher than the world growth rate during the same period. Meanwhile, the proportion of China's grain output in the world's total increased from 17 percent to 25 percent.

At present, China ranks first in the world in terms of total grain output, and the average per-capita amount of grain, meat, eggs and aquatic products exceeds the world level. Hence China has thoroughly changed the situation which prevailed in old China in which the majority of the Chinese population lived in a state of hunger or semi-starvation, and has created the miracle of supporting 22 percent of the total population of the world on only 7 percent of the world's total cultivated land.

The livelihoods of both urban and rural people have leaped several stages in succession, and the consumption level has improved remarkably.

In 1949, the average annual income per urban resident was less than 100 RMB yuan, and that per rural resident, less than 50 RMB yuan. In 1978, the average annual income per urban resident came to 343 RMB yuan, and that per rural resident, 134 RMB yuan.

Between 1978 and 1998, the average annual income per urban resident increased to 5,425 RMB yuan, or an increase of 3.3 times allowing for price rises, with an average annual growth rate of 6.1 percent, and that per rural resident, to 2,162 RMB yuan, or an increase of 4.6 times allowing for price rises, with an average annual growth rate of 7.9 percent.

The annual net consumption level of the people increased from 80 RMB yuan per capita in 1952 to 2,972 RMB yuan in 1998, and the savings deposits of both urban and rural residents grew from 860 million RMB yuan to 5,340.8 billion RMB yuan. In the early days of New China, 80 percent of urban residents' income was used to buy food and clothes, and 90 percent in rural areas, which dropped to 55.6 percent and 59.6 percent, respectively, in 1998.

The Engel coefficient (the proportion of food expenditure in consumer expenditure) of urban residents was always over 57 percent before the policy of reform and opening to the outside world was introduced, a figure which dropped to 44.5 percent in 1998, and consumption has reached the well-off level as a whole. In 1954, the Engel coefficient of rural residents was as high as 69 percent.

By 1998, the consumption structure of rural residents had been greatly improved, with the Engel coefficient decreasing to 53.4 percent; their cultural, recreational and service expenditures had risen up to 25.4 percent; and the proportions of accommodation and clothing expenditures were 15.1 percent and 6.2 percent, respectively. This indicates that in

consumption the proportion dedicated to mere means of subsistence has remarkably decreased, and that dedicated to development and enjoyment has greatly risen.

At present, over 95 percent of rural people in China have enough to eat and wear, and about 25 percent of them live well-off lives.

While making great efforts to develop the economy and improve the living standards of the people throughout the country, China has spared no effort to help poverty-stricken people have enough to eat and wear. Especially since the adoption of the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, the Chinese government has regarded it as a most urgent task to help poverty-stricken people have sufficient food and clothing.

According to the government's unified plan and arrangements, a large-scale help-the-poor drive has been started throughout the country in a planned way. Over the past 20 years, the Chinese government has helped more than 200 million rural people get enough food and clothes, and has reduced the number of poverty-stricken rural population from 250 million in 1978 to 4.2 million.

The proportion of poverty-stricken people in the total rural population has decreased from 30.7 percent to 4.6 percent. The average annual net income of poverty-stricken people increased from 206 RMB yuan in 1985 to 1,318 RMB yuan in 1998, and the production and livelihood levels of poverty-stricken areas have greatly improved.

In the past 20 years, the poverty-stricken population worldwide has risen year by year, and the poor have become poorer. In China, however, the number of poverty-stricken people has been decreasing by 10 million every year on average, making China lead the world in the speed of reducing the number of poverty-stricken people.

In 1999, the World Bank and the UNDP issued a report after a comprehensive survey of China's help-the-poor work, which points out: "The number of poverty-stricken people is increasing in many places in the world, but China is an exception." And "China has achieved world-renowned progress in solving the poverty problem."

In old China, whenever serious disasters befell, the exposed bodies of those who had died from starvation could be found everywhere. In 1931, when eastern China was affected by floods, 145,000 people died as a result.

But New China pays great attention to relief work, and makes every effort to protect and save people's lives and property, and ensure the basic needs of life of people in disaster-stricken areas.

According to preliminary statistics, in the past 50 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Central Government has allocated more than 30 billion RMB yuan as relief funds for serious natural disasters, solving the problem of provisions in 2.2 billion cases, helping over 800 million people rebuild their homes, rebuilding more than 100 million collapsed houses, providing billions of items of clothing for 200-odd million people

and curing a billion cases of disease or injury resulting from disasters.

The rights of workers have been realized to the full. In 1949, the number of unemployed workers was 4.742 million, with an unemployment rate of 23.65 percent. In addition, millions upon millions of peasants were bankrupt.

In 1998, the number of employed people nationwide totaled 699.57 million, and the number of registered unemployed persons was 5.71 million, with a registered unemployment rate of 3.1 percent.

Three security systems--the basic living security system for people laid off by state-owned enterprises, unemployment insurance and the basic living security system for residents of cities and towns--have been established, and thus the basic needs of life of laid-off and unemployed people have been effectively guaranteed. Meanwhile, wages have been rising rapidly; the average annual income of employees in cities and towns increased from 445 RMB yuan in 1952 to 7,479 RMB yuan in 1998, or an increase of 3.8 times based on comparable prices.

According to the law, the working time has been shortened from eight hours a day and 48 hours a week in the past to the present eight hours a day and 40 hours a week. Before the founding of the PRC, there were only a few small training schools for technicians in the whole country.

But now, a multi-form and multi-layer vocational education and training system has been established, basically meeting the needs of economic construction. The proportion of new employees in cities and towns receiving various types of training has reached 70 percent.

There was no social security system for employees in old China, but in New China a comprehensive and well-funded social security system has gradually emerged. At present, except for some ex-employees whose pensions are still paid by their old enterprises, the number of people participating in the basic retirement insurance policy is 94.33 million, a coverage rate of 84 percent. Among them, there are more than 28 million retired people.

At the end of 1999, a total of 99.12 million employees were covered by unemployment insurance, more than 15 million unemployed were receiving relief funds and 7.5 million unemployed people had been re-employed.

Since the founding of New China, the state has set up free medical services and a labor-protection medical care system at public expense, and at the end of 1998, 177.81 million persons were benefiting from these services.

Insurance against injury at work is now practiced in more than 1,700 cities and counties throughout the country, covering over 37.8 million employees, and childbirth insurance is available in 1,412 cities and counties, covering 27.77 million women employees. By the end of October 1999, 668 cities and 1,638 counties in the country had established systems for ensuring basic living needs, benefiting two million residents living in poverty.

The people's health has greatly improved. The incidence of acute epidemic diseases has decreased from 20,000 per 100,000 people before the founding of the PRC to 203.4 per 100,000 people; the death rate, from 33 per 1,000 people to 6.49 per 1,000 people in 1994.

The average life expectancy of Chinese people has increased from 35 years in 1949 to 70.8 years at present, 10 years longer than that of the developing countries and the same as that of the medium-developed countries.

Culture and education in old China were extremely backward. Most working people had almost no opportunity to receive education.

However, the right to receive education in New China is guaranteed and realized. In 1998, nine-year compulsory education was practised in areas where 73 percent of the population live. The enrollment rate for primary school-age children has increased from 20 percent before 1949 to 99.3 percent, and for junior middle school-age children, 87.3 percent.

These figures exceed the average figures for developing countries in the corresponding period. Over the past 50 years, 230 million illiterates have been taught to read and write, the illiteracy rate has decreased from 80 percent of the total population to 14.5 percent; adult illiteracy rate has decreased below 5.5 percent.

In 1998, the numbers of students enrolled in institutions of higher learning and middle schools had increased by 22.99 and 41.11 times, respectively, compared to the highest figures before 1949; the educated population was close to 300 million persons, and the number of students enrolled reached 230 million persons.

Between 1949 and 1990, the total number of postgraduates and graduates from universities and colleges was 7.6082 million, nearly 40 times the total for the years 1912 to 1948.

China has made universally acknowledged achievements in realizing its people's rights to subsistence and development, and economic, social and cultural rights over the past 50 years.

Articles published in October 1999 in the New York Times and in September 1999 in the International Herald Tribune, published in the United States, point out: "The great achievement made by China of solving the problems of food, clothing and housing for one quarter of the world's population will be written in the annals of history." "Today, ordinary Chinese citizens enjoy better health, nutriment, education and living standards than in any period in the Middle Kingdom's long history."

III. Civil rights and political rights of citizens ensured

Since the founding of the People's Republic, China has made great progress in its efforts to build its democratic and legal systems, and people's civil rights and political rights are maintained and guaranteed according to law.

China's Constitution clearly states that "All power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people." The organs through which the people exercise state power are the National

People's Congress (NPC) and local people's congresses. Deputies to the people's congresses at all levels are elected, and are responsible to and accept supervision from the people.

In China, except for those who have been deprived of their political rights, all citizens aged 18 or above, irrespective of ethnic status, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status or length of residence, have the right to vote and stand for election.

At present, 99.97 percent of China's citizens aged 18 or above enjoy the right to vote and stand for election. According to statistics, the voting rate all over the country has maintained a level of over 90 percent. Every region, ethnic group, social stratum, organization and group has its proportion of representatives in the people's congresses at all levels.

Of the 2,979 deputies elected to the Ninth National People's Congress in 1998, 18.9 percent were workers and peasants, 21.08 percent were intellectuals, 33.17 percent were cadres, 15.44 percent were representatives of various democratic parties and non-party patriots, 9 percent were representatives of the People's Liberation Army, 1.17 percent were representatives from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, and 1.24 percent were returned overseas Chinese.

As the highest organ of state power, the NPC is responsible for drawing up state laws, determining important state affairs and electing the members of state administrative, justice and procuratorial organs, and supervising them. China runs state affairs according to law.

Since the introduction of the policy of reform and opening to the outside world in the late 1970s, the NPC and its Standing Committee have enacted more than 360 laws and legal decisions, and the local people's congresses at different levels have drawn up more than 7,000 local regulations.

The NPC and its Standing Committee hear, examine and discuss the work reports of the State Council and its departments as well as the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and examine the implementation of laws and legal decisions.

The special committees of the NPC also conduct various types of examinations of law enforcement work. In addition, the Standing Committee of the NPC receives petitions from citizens, supervises the work of judicial organs and safeguards citizens' legal rights according to law.

The system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) is an important part of China's democratic political system.

As parties friendly to the CPC, the eight non-Communist parties participate in government and political affairs, engaging in consultations concerning state policies and leadership candidates, management of national affairs, and the drawing up and implementation of state policy, laws and regulations.

On key state issues, the CPC--the party in power--always consults the other parties, solicits their suggestions and negotiates with them.

At the Ninth National People's Congress, representatives from the non-Communist parties and non-party personages accounted for 30 percent and 21.9 percent of the Standing Committee and permanent special committees of the NPC, respectively.

At present, in the departments of the State Council, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, members of the non-Communist parties and non-party personages occupy some senior positions.

At the same time, in the country's 31 provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government and 15 cities at sub-provincial level, members of the non-Communist parties and non-party personages hold the posts of deputy governor of a province or deputy mayor or assistant to the governor of a province or to a mayor.

The people's political consultative conferences at different levels consist of members of all political parties and people's organizations, and non-party personages, with a widespread representation.

The members of the National Committee of the Ninth People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) come from 34 circles, among them, the non-Communist parties, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce and non-party personages, accounting for 59.5 percent of the CPPCC National Committee members and 63.4 percent of the CPPCC National Committee Standing Committee members.

The political consultative organizations play an important role in the state's political life by means of political consultation, democratic supervision and participation in the administration and discussion of state affairs.

Since 1990, more than 100 consultation meetings and forums have been held between the Central Committee of the CPC, the State Council and the central committees of the non-Communist parties and non-party personages.

Between 1992 and 1998, the central committees of the eight democratic parties and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce put forward more than 100 important suggestions concerning reform and opening up, economic construction, democratic and legal system building, anti-corruption efforts and the promotion of honesty to the Central Committee of the CPC, the State Council and relevant departments. Many of these suggestions have been adopted by the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council.

Democracy at the grass-roots level is an important means for ensuring that citizens directly exercise their democratic rights.

By directly electing members of villagers' committees and deciding upon major affairs of their villages through democratic discussions, the rural masses fully exercise their rights of

democratic election, democratic policy- making, democratic management and democratic supervision.

Since 1988, rural areas throughout China have already carried out three or four elections of new villagers' committees. Most of the villagers' committees have established villagers' congresses and representative conferences and the system of making public village affairs.

Since the promulgation of the new Organic Law on Villagers' Committees in 1999, nearly half of the provinces, municipalities directly under the Central Government and autonomous regions have published their own rules and regulations on the election of villagers' committees.

The election of villagers' committees has been increasingly standardized, and villagers' right to nominate candidates is respected.

The election procedure, which guarantees the rights of voters, has been gradually regularized.

The procedure involves the methods by which villagers select formal candidates through preliminary elections, formal candidates run for the election on an equal footing, voters choose from among a large number of candidates, candidates make speeches, voters mark their ballots in specially-designated rooms, ballots are counted openly, and the election results are announced on the spot.

Statistics show that in provinces where elections of members for a new term of office on the villagers' committees were completed in 1999, the proportion of peasants taking part in the elections reached more than 90 percent in most cases and more than 85 percent in other cases.

In urban areas, residents elect by secret ballot directors, deputy directors and members of neighborhood committees, and the election procedure is being standardized.

China guarantees, according to law, that citizens enjoy extensive basic freedoms and rights.

The Constitution clearly states that citizens enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession, of demonstration and of religious belief. Freedom of the person and personal dignity, and the residences of citizens are inviolable. Freedom and privacy of correspondence of citizens are protected by law.

The state has made vigorous efforts to develop press and publications undertakings, creating favorable conditions for citizens to enjoy freedom of speech and the press.

Statistics show that 1998 witnessed the publishing of 30.04 billion copies of newspapers of 1,053 titles, 2.54 billion copies of magazines of 7,999 titles and 7.24 billion copies of books of more than 130,000 titles.

There were 294 radio stations, 560 cable and wireless TV stations at the central and provincial levels, 1,287 broadcasting and TV stations at the county level and 75 educational TV stations.

The national TV network covered over 89 percent of the population, with an audience of more than one billion.

By June 1999, some 1.46 million computers in China had been connected with the Internet, with the Internet users totaling four million.

In China, all social organizations that meet the regulations of the Constitution and other laws and are formed through necessary registration procedures are protected by the state.

By the end of 1998, China had a total of 165,600 social organizations. These organizations and their activities are subject to the protection of the Constitution and other laws.

The state protects the freedom of religious belief and the normal religious activities of citizens.

No State organ, social organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, a religion, nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion.

Incomplete statistics show that China now has more than 100 million religious believers and 85,000 venues for religious activities that have been registered, with some 300,000 professional religious personnel.

There are more than 3,000 national and local religious organizations and 74 religious colleges. Various religions publish their scriptures, and religious books and journals. Of them, 20 million copies of the Bible have been printed.

Chinese religious organizations have established contacts with religious organizations and personnel in more than 70 countries and regions.

Both the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference include people who have religious beliefs and who come from various social groups and organizations.

More than 17,000 religious personnel have been elected deputies to the people's congresses and members of the people's political consultative conferences at various levels.

Public security and judicial organs crack down on crimes according to law, and protect citizens' legitimate rights and interests from being infringed.

According to statistics, in 1998, however, they handled 5.4 million first instance cases, including 480,000 criminal cases, 3.37 million civil cases, 1.45 million cases of economic disputes and nearly 100,000 administrative cases.

The public security and judicial organs cracked down on serious crimes related to murder, explosion, poisoning, robbery, large-scale theft, rape, kidnapping, gangs, and guns, effectively protecting the safety of people's lives and property.

Meanwhile, the legitimate rights of criminal suspects and the accused were protected according to law. Since 1983, people's courts have pronounced more than 40,000 people not guilty according to law because of lack of evidence of crimes.

Over the past few years, in a bid to strictly enforce laws and strengthen the protection of human rights during the judicial process, people's courts have carried out an in-depth reform of adjudication methods.

Efforts have been made according to law to promote public adjudication in an all-round way, and strengthen the supervision of adjudication by society and public opinion so as to ensure judicial fairness.

Except for those unsuitable for public hearing as prescribed by the law, all first instance cases are now subject to public trial. The rate of open court sessions for second instance cases has also been raised gradually.

Judgments in all cases, whether subject to public hearing or not, are announced openly.

While court sessions are opened for case hearing, evidence, cross-examination, attestation and debate have been conducted on the spot, thus increasing the rate of judgment announcements in court.

Procuratorial organs have intensified the supervision of law enforcement by redressing according to law the problems of failure to observe the law, weak law enforcement and miscarriages of justice.

In 1998, the procuratorial organs demanded that public security organs give reasons as to why 9,335 cases had not been filed, of which 5,207 cases were finally designated to be placed on file.

They put forward suggestions for correcting the extended detention of 70,992 people, and raised for correction 9,964 cases which involved violation of the law during investigation.

They approved the arrest of 582,120 of the 689,025 suspects transferred by public security and state security organs for examination and approval of arrest, and issued additional warrants for the arrest of 6,957 people and the prosecution of 3,904 people.

They filed public charges against 557,929 of the 668,425 suspects transferred for approval of prosecution, and decided not to arrest 93,218 people and not to prosecute 11,225 people.

They protested 3,791 criminal judgments they deemed wrong, and raised 1,211 cases for correction, which involved violations of the law in the trial procedure.

They also raised 9,672 cases for correction, which involved violations of the law by related departments for approving the reduction of a sentence term, release on parole, and temporary

serving of sentences outside the prison.

Prison authorities insist on administering prisons according to law. They have devoted great efforts to carrying out the practice of making public prison affairs to inmates, raising the transparency of law enforcement and conscientiously guaranteeing the legitimate rights of convicts.

Statistics show that in 1998, some 361,000 convicts were given reductions of sentence or released on parole, accounting for 25 percent of the total imprisoned population.

The establishment and development of the lawyer and legal aid systems are playing an increasingly important role in protecting the legitimate rights and interests of citizens, and maintaining the correct enforcement of the law.

Currently, China has nearly 9,000 law offices, and the number of licensed lawyers exceeds 100,000. Between 1979 and 1999, lawyers in China pleaded for the accused in three million criminal cases. In 1998 alone, they pleaded for the accused or acted as attorneys in 296,668 criminal cases. As a result, the legitimate rights and interests of the suspects and accused were effectively safeguarded.

Since the Legal Aid Center of the Ministry of Justice and the China Legal Aid Foundation were established in 1996 and 1997, respectively, more than 800 legal aid institutions have been set up. This enables an increasing number of poor citizens to benefit from legal services free or at a reduced charge, according to law. Incomplete statistics indicate that in 1997, legal aid institutions at various levels and personnel engaged in legal services handled some 50,000 cases requiring legal aid, and provided legal advice to more than 400,000 people.

According to 1998 statistics, relevant institutions and personnel in 20 provinces and municipalities handled more than 60,000 cases requesting legal aid, and offered legal advice to 800,000 people. And another survey shows that in the first half of 1999, more than 40,000 such cases were handled in 24 provinces.

Citizens have the right to criticize and make suggestions to government institutions and their staff members.

They also have the right to complain, bring lawsuits against or report law-breaking activities and dereliction of duty on the part of government officials.

To guarantee these rights of citizens, government institutions at all levels have set up offices receiving petitions and personal visits. And the people's procuratorial organs and administrative supervisory systems at central to local levels have established offense-reporting organs.

The news media have also strengthened supervision of cases involving dereliction of duty, abuse of power and infringement upon citizens' legitimate rights and interests by government staff members.

Those who have suffered losses due to the infringement upon citizens' rights by government

institutions or staff members, have the right to compensation according to law.

China specially formulated the Administrative Procedure Law in 1991 and the State Compensation Law in 1995.

To date, nearly 440,000 administrative cases and 2,566 state compensation cases have been handled by people's courts, effectively safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of citizens.

IV. Protection of the rights of women and children

In old China, women did not have any right at all to participate in public affairs. But since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, women's right to participate in the administration of state and social affairs has been protected according to law, with the level of their involvement in public affairs rising constantly.

When the First National People's Congress (NPC) was held in 1954, women deputies only accounted for 11.9 percent of the total, while in 1998, when the Ninth NPC was convened, women deputies numbered 650, constituting 21.81 percent of the total.

Women made up 6.6 percent of the total members of the First National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). At the Ninth National Committee of the CPPCC, women accounted for 341 of the members, making up 15.54 percent of the total. The 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) had 344 women delegates, constituting 16.8 percent of the total.

Currently, four of the state leaders are women, and 18 women serve as ministers and vice-ministers in charge of various ministries and commissions under the State Council.

The Party and government leading bodies of the country's 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities all have women officials, with their number rising by 46.47 percent over that five years ago.

By the end of 1997, women made up 13.838 million of the government staff members, and managerial, professional and technical personnel of state-owned enterprises and institutions, accounting for 34.4 percent of the total.

In old China, women had few employment opportunities. Today, women enjoy equal rights with men to work, as well as the right to acquire equal pay for equal work and special labor protection.

In 1949, there were only 600,000 women workers and staff members in China, accounting for 7.5 percent of the total workforce.

In 1998, women employees numbered 340.67 million, constituting 48.7 percent of the total employees, higher than the world's average of 34.5 percent. Of the 450 million rural laborers

in China, 320 million, or 71 percent, are engaged in agricultural production, of whom, 210 million are women, forming 65.6 percent of the total.

There are only five countries in the world, where women's salaries equal 80 percent or more of men's, while the income of Chinese women is equivalent to 80.4 percent of that of their male counterparts.

Women employees enjoy special care during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation periods, and child-bearing women employees enjoy a three-month paid maternity leave.

In old China, 90 percent of women were illiterate, whereas in 1997, the female illiteracy rate dropped to 23.2 percent, with the illiteracy rate for young and middle-aged women down to 8.5 percent.

In 1998, the primary school attendance rate for girls across the country rose from 15 percent in 1949 to 98.86 percent, basically guaranteeing the right of girls to receive compulsory education.

Since 1990, the gap between the school attendance rates for boys and girls has narrowed from 1.28 percentage points to 0.1 percentage point.

By 1998, Chinese women had received 6.5 years of education on average. The proportion of women students in regular institutions of higher learning rose from 19.8 percent in 1949 to 38.3 percent in 1998. The proportion of girl students in junior middle schools increased from 26.5 percent in 1950 to 46.5 percent in 1998, and that of girls in primary schools grew from 28 percent in 1951 to 47.6 percent in 1998.

By the end of 1998, the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering had a total of 62 women academicians, accounting for 6 percent of the total, higher than the rate in any other country.

The physical conditions of women have greatly improved. In 1949, China had only nine maternity and child care centers, with limited numbers of beds and medical workers. But in 1998, there were 514 maternity and child care hospitals and hospitals for gynecology and obstetrics, with 87,000 beds and 82,000 medical personnel, and 2,724 health care centers for women and children, and 88,000 medical personnel.

A national health care network for women and children has been initially formed.

During the early years of the People's Republic, due to poor health care conditions, old methods prevailed in deliveries, and the mortality for pregnant and lying-in women was as high as 1,500 per 100,000. By 1998, China had 47 hospitals for gynecology and obstetrics, with 108,634 gynecologists and obstetricians trained in Western medicine. The number of midwives rose from 13,900 in 1949 to 48,696 in 1998, and that of rural midwives exceeded 310,000.

Some 66.8 percent of women gave birth in hospital, modern methods were adopted for 94.5

percent of deliveries in rural areas, and the mortality of pregnant and lying-in women dropped to 56.2 per 100,000. The average life expectancy of Chinese women rose from 36 years in 1949 to 73.2 years in 1997.

This is 4.5 years higher than the figure for men and eight years higher than the average life expectancy of 65 years set as a goal by the United Nations for women all over the world by the year 2000. China has adopted practical measures to develop hygienic and health care undertakings for children, protecting the life and health of children.

In 1949, there were only five children's hospitals in China, with 139 beds. By 1998, children's hospitals numbered 37 throughout the country, with 9,808 beds and 60,446 pediatricians trained in Western medicine. In addition, more than 15,000 hospitals at or above the county level had set up departments of gynecology, obstetrics and pediatrics.

The incidence of tetanus among the newborn dropped to 0.27 per thousand. Infant mortality declined from 200 per thousand in the early years of New China to 33.2 per thousand in 1998, and the mortality of children under the age of five was down to 42 per thousand.

Meanwhile, the physical conditions of children have improved noticeably. In 1997, the mortality rate of children under five caused by diarrhea had fallen by 67.8 percent compared with that in 1991, and that caused by pneumonia was down 44.6 percent. The incidence of measles and mortality for Chinese children had dropped by 98.1 percent and 99 percent, respectively, from the figures for 1978.

When implementing the universal immunity program for one-year-old children in 1997, 96 percent of children were inoculated with BCG vaccine, and 96 percent were inoculated against whooping cough, diphtheritis and tetanus 97 percent against polio, and 95 percent against measles.

Early education for children has improved rapidly in China. In 1990, only 32 percent of children from three to six years old entered kindergartens, while by the end of 1998, China had had 180,000 kindergartens with an enrollment of 24 million and about 70 percent of children attend kindergartens for one year before they go to school. A sample survey shows that 94.8 percent of new pupils in grade one of primary schools across the country have received preschool education.

v. Equal rights and special protection for ethnic minorities

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, ethnic minorities, along with the majority Han ethnic group, have been the masters of the state, equally enjoying all of the civic rights granted by the Constitution and laws, and in addition enjoying the special rights of ethnic minorities according to law. The right of the people of the ethnic minorities to participate on an equal footing in state administration is guaranteed. In all the previous National People's Congresses and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conferences, the percentage of ethnic minority delegates and members has exceeded the proportion of the ethnic minority population in the national population.

Ethnic-minority delegates accounted for 14.37 percent of the Ninth National People's Congress delegates selected in 1998, and for 11.7 percent of the committee members of the Ninth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, both surpassing the 8.9 percent proportion of the ethnic minority population in the national population.

Each of the 55 ethnic minorities has its own delegates and committee members. There are over 2.7 million ethnic-minority cadres throughout China, and a fairly large number of ethnic-minority personnel working in central and local state organs, administrative organs, judicial organs and procuratorial organs.

China practices ethnic regional autonomy in areas where ethnic minority people live in compact communities.

According to the relevant laws, among the chairman and vice-chairmen of the standing committee of the people's congress of an autonomous area there must be one or more citizens of the ethnic group or groups exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned.

The head of an autonomous region, autonomous prefecture or autonomous county should be a citizen of the ethnic group exercising regional autonomy in the area concerned, and the other members of the people's governments of these regions, prefectures and counties shall include members of the ethnic group exercising regional autonomy as well as members of other ethnic minorities as far as possible. The people's congresses of the autonomous areas have the right to enact regulations on the exercise of autonomy and separate regulations in light of local political, economic and cultural characteristics. By the end of 1998, 126 regulations on the exercise of autonomy and 209 separate regulations had been enacted by the autonomous areas. If resolutions, decisions, orders and instructions from the higher-level state organs are not suited to the actual conditions of the autonomous areas, the organs of self-government of these areas may be flexible in carrying them out or may decide not to carry them out after gaining approval from the higher state organs.

Furthermore, in accordance with state laws and regulations, organs of self-government in autonomous areas also enjoy the right to control their economies and local finances, the right to develop educational, scientific, technological and cultural undertakings, and the right to use and develop the local spoken and written languages.

Before the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, economy, culture and social development were very backward in its ethnic minority areas. People of ethnic minorities, mainly engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, lived in poverty. Since 1949, the state has adopted special policies and measures to assist and support the economic development and social progress of the ethnic minority areas in the aspects of capital, technology and personnel. According to statistics, the total industrial and agricultural output value in autonomous areas grew from

3.66 billion yuan in 1949 to 852.35 billion yuan in 1998. The output of pig iron, raw coal, crude oil and generated energy in these areas increased respectively from 9,000 tons, 1.78 million tons, 52,000 tons and 80 million kilowatt/hours in 1952 to 7.02 million tons, 175.69

million tons, 20.47 million tons and 132.11 billion kilowatt/hours in 1998. The railway traffic mileage, highway traffic mileage and postal routes totaled respectively 17,100 kilometers, 376,400 kilometers and 1.14 million kilometers, or 4.5 times, 12.8 times and 8.6 times the 1952 figures.

The grain output grew from 15.82 million tons in 1952 to 71.5 million tons in 1998, and the total number of large livestock from 24.39 million head to 55.65 million head. Remarkable improvements have been made in the lives of the minority peoples. In 1997, the net income per peasant in ethnic-minority autonomous areas had reached 1,633.11 yuan, or 21.5 times the 1980 figure; the per capita possession of grain came to 424.4 kilograms, or 1.5 times the 1978 figure; and the average salaries of employees in the ethnic-minority areas amounted to 5,593 yuan, or 7.9 times the 1981 figure.

In old China, the illiteracy rate among ethnic minorities was often over 95 percent. Only 10 percent of school-age children attended school in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, 97 percent of the people in the Tibet Autonomous Region were illiterate, and there were only 16 secondary schools in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Since the founding of the People's Republic, the educational situation in ethnic-minority areas has been improved remarkably, and the illiteracy rate has been reduced by 68 percentage points. By 1998, there were 94 institutions of higher learning and 226,400 students in these institutions in ethnic autonomous areas, 13,466 middle schools with 5.2964 million students, and 90,704 primary schools with 12.409 million pupils.

To date, the state has independently founded 12 specialized ethnic universities and institutes, 59 ethnic teachers' training schools, 158 ethnic secondary vocational schools, 3,536 ethnic middle schools, and 20,906 ethnic primary schools. Since 1990, the gap between the school attendance rate in the areas inhabited by ethnic minority peoples and the average national level has been reduced from 3.7 percentage points to 0.7 percentage point.

The cultures of ethnic minorities are being preserved. Chinese law provides that all ethnic groups have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages. The organs of self-government in ethnic autonomous areas all use one or more languages of their areas to carry out their responsibilities. When several languages are current, they may mainly adopt the language of the ethnic minority which set up the regional autonomy. Since the 1950s, the Chinese government has helped a dozen ethnic minority peoples create or improve 13 scripts. The state has established special bodies to organize the editing and publishing of ancient writings of ethnic minorities. More than 120,000 titles of such works have been collected, of which over 110,000 have been edited and 5,000 published. More than 3,000 experts and scholars organized by the state have completed the editing and publishing of five series of books on ethnic-minority issues, including A Brief History of China's Ethnic Minorities, Brief Records of Ethnic Minorities' Languages and A General Survey of Ethnic Autonomous Areas, comprising over 400 titles with 90 million words.

Now each of the 55 ethnic minority groups has a brief written history. The Chinese government has set up special institutions for the preservation, translation and research of the

three major epics of ethnic minorities. The three epics and treatises concerning them have been published in the appropriate ethnic-minority languages, in Chinese and in other languages. The state respects the folkways and customs of ethnic minority peoples in such aspects as diet, burial, festivals and marriage.

Ethnic minority peoples also enjoy freedom of religious belief, supported by specific state policies.

To date, there are more than 18 million believers in Islam among ethnic minorities, over 30,000 mosques and 40,000 imams and ahungs. The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region has more than 8.1 million religious believers, accounting for over 56.3 percent of its total population, 23,000 places for religious activities (over 20,000 mosques included), 29,000 religious personnel and over 80 religious groups. In Tibet, there are more than 1,700 places for Tibetan Buddhist activities, and 46,000 lamas and monks. In old China, the medical and health conditions in ethnic minority areas were extremely backward. Local and epidemic diseases ran rampant, and the population declined steadily.

Since the founding of New China, medical and health conditions in such areas have been remarkably improved, the populations have increased rapidly and the standard of health has risen greatly.

According to statistics, medical and health institutions in ethnic autonomous areas grew from 361 in 1949 to 16,724 in 1998, the number of hospital beds grew from 3,310 to 392,671 and the number of medical personnel from 3,531 to 605,255. In 1998, the Tibet Autonomous Region had more than 1,300 medical and health institutions, or 21 times the 1959 figure, and over 6,700 hospital beds, or 17.6 times the 1959 figure.

The population of ethnic minorities in China was only 34.013 million according to the first national census of 1953, but it had reached 108.46 million in 1995. In the ethnic-minority areas, the death rate and infant mortality rate keep going down. For example, in the Tibet Autonomous Region the mortality rate of women in pregnancy and childbirth decreased from five percent in 1959 to 0.7 percent in 1998, and the infant mortality rate from 43 percent in 1959 to 3.677 percent in 1998.

Meanwhile, the average life expectancy of Tibetan people has been prolonged from less than 36 years before 1949 to the current 65 years.

VI. The Cross-Century Development Prospects for Human Rights in China

Fifty years is but a moment in human history. Nevertheless, in the past 50 years the Chinese people have made a great historic leap in the development of human rights. In safeguarding and promoting human rights, although setbacks occurred, one indisputable basic fact is that after unremitting efforts over half a century, the poverty-stricken, weak and humiliated old China has become an independent New China in the early stage of prosperity, and the 1.25 billion Chinese people have become the masters of their own fates. They have changed the terrible situation of chronic hunger, cold and ignorance, rid China of the label of "The Sick Man of East Asia," lead a civilized and healthy life of plenty, and enjoy unprecedented

democracy and freedom.

We can say that the human rights situation in present-day China is totally different from that of the old China -- even compared with the years before the initiation of reform and opening-up, the great progress that has been made in this respect is universally acknowledged. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that China is still a developing country. Limited by impediments of natural, historical and economic development, there is still room for improvement with regard to the levels of China's democratic and legal construction, the degree of social civilization and people's living standards.

However, on the basis of 50 years of development, especially with the successful experiences accumulated in the past 20 years of reform and opening-up, the Chinese government and people are capable of solving the problems on the road of advance, and will make constant progress in their endeavors to improve human rights.

First, to fully realize human rights is a basic goal of China's cross-century development. After China adopted the policy of reform and opening-up, it worked out a cross-century economic development strategy to realize modernization in three stages, each stage being aimed at enhancing China's overall national strength and improving the Chinese people's living standards.

This inevitably entails improving the human rights situation. The goals of the first and second stages + to solve the problems of food and clothing of the entire Chinese people and to enable them to live a relatively comfortable life + have already been basically achieved; the goal of the third stage + to reach the level of the medium-developed countries in the mid-21st century, so that the entire Chinese people can realize common prosperity - already has a relatively good foundation.

At the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 1997, on the basis of summing up experiences, and from the height of China's cross-century development, while reiterating the three-stage development strategy, emphasis was placed on the construction of a democratic and legal system. The congress stressed the continuance of political restructuring, the further expansion of democracy, the perfection of the legal system, "governing the country according to law, to build a socialist country ruled by law," and making "governing the country according to law" a basic state policy.

In March 1999, the Second Session of the Ninth National People's Congress included "governing the country according to law, to build a socialist country ruled by law" in the Constitution, making "governing the country according to law, to build a country ruled by law" a basic goal of the political restructuring and the construction of a democratic and legal system, which is fixed in the form of the fundamental law of the state.

In short, we must guarantee human rights in the country's laws and systems. Therefore, the implementation of the strategy of governing the country according to law and the realization of the goal of building a country ruled by law possess important and essential significance in guaranteeing human rights and promoting China's cross-century development of human rights.

Second, since China introduced the policy of reform and opening-up, it has found a road for the promotion and development of human rights that suits its reality. China is a developing country in the East with a long history and a huge population, but with a relative shortage of resources and wealth. To promote human rights in such a country, China cannot copy the mode of human rights development of the developed Western countries, nor can it copy the methods of other developing countries.

China can only start from its own reality and explore a road with its own characteristics. Since the introduction of the policy of reform and opening-up, China has, on the basis of summing up its historical experiences and drawing lessons from them, found a road to building socialism with Chinese characteristics, and therefore has found a road to promoting and developing human rights which is in line with the country's reality. This means putting the rights to subsistence and development in the first place, under the conditions of reform, development and stability, and thus promoting human rights development in an overall way. The characteristics of this road are, in terms of the basic orientation of developing human rights, that we stick to the principle of developing the productive forces and promoting common prosperity, based on the improvement of the living standards of the entire people and promoting the human rights of the entire people; in terms of the order of priority, the top priority is given to the rights to subsistence and development, while taking into consideration the people's political, economic, social and cultural rights and the overall development of individual and collective rights; in terms of the methods of promoting and guaranteeing human rights, we stress that stability is the prerequisite, development is the key, reform is the motive power, and government according to law is the guarantee.

Over the past 20 years, China has stuck to this correct road of development. As a result, not only have the living standards and mental outlook of the Chinese people changed greatly, but a set of relatively complete political and legal systems that guarantee the people's democratic rights have been formed. Thus, great progress has been made in putting human rights into a legal and institutional framework, and China's human rights development has been improving constantly.

Practice has proved that building socialism with Chinese characteristics is a road of development that is in accordance with the fundamental interests of the Chinese people, and also the only road which can effectively promote human rights in China. We can say that China's cross-century development objective in the sphere of human rights has been set, the foundation has been laid, and the road has been opened.

Looking forward to continuous progress in the 21st century, we have every reason to believe that as long as we follow the plans laid down at the Party's 15th National Congress, while continuing to carry out the three-stage economic development strategy, earnestly implement the general plan of governing the country according to law, and strive to build a socialist country ruled by law, China's human rights situation will see steady improvement.

(xinhua)