

**ANTI-DISCRIMINATION AMENDMENT (RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS AND
EQUALITY) BILL 2020**

Organisation: Falun Dafa Association of Australia Inc

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FALUN DAFA
ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA INC

**Falun Dafa Association of Australia Submission to the
Joint Select Committee on the Anti-Discrimination
Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill 2020**

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. About Falun Dafa (Falun Gong)	3
3. Is Falun Dafa a Religion?	4
4. Vilification of Falun Dafa	4
4.1 In China	
4.2 In Australia	
5. Propaganda against Falun Dafa	5
6. Chinese Communist Party Influence	6
6.1 In Australia	
6.2 In Australian Media	
6.3 Recent Example on ABC	
7. Response to Inquiry Terms of Reference	9
8. Conclusions	11
9. Recommendations	12
APPENDIX A 21 years of persecution and resilience	13

1. Introduction

The Falun Dafa Association of Australia thanks the Joint Select Committee on the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill 2020, for inviting submissions to the Inquiry.

Falun Dafa, also known as Falun Gong, is an ancient Chinese spiritual discipline in the Buddhist tradition. This submission provides information on Falun Dafa, the Chinese Communist Party's campaign of vilification extending into Australia, and a review of the proposed Bill and laws to protect freedom of religion and belief as noted in the inquiry Terms of Reference.

While it is widely accepted that religious freedom must be protected, we observe there appears to be a focus on discrimination rather than vilification. This submission examines the important area of vilification, that may not be captured under criminal law related to threats and incitement of violence, but can be no less damaging to vulnerable communities.

2. About Falun Dafa (Falun Gong)

Falun Dafa, also called Falun Gong, is a spiritual practice of the Buddhist tradition, indigenous to China. It consists of five meditative qigong exercises and a body of spiritual teachings which have been described as "profoundly moral."¹

At the core of Falun Gong's belief system are the values of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Forbearance (in Chinese, Zhen 真, Shan 善, and Ren 忍). These qualities are taken by Falun Gong to represent the Dao or Dharma – the essential law and quality of the universe.

Australian academic Benjamin Penny notes:

"The best way to describe Falun Gong is as a cultivation system. Cultivation systems have been a feature of Chinese life for at least 2,500 years and probably much more. They are sets of mental and physical regimens that may involve special techniques ... that aim at refining the body into a higher form."²

In China, cultivation practices are traditionally passed down privately from a master to disciples and rarely made public. However, in 1992, the founder of Falun Dafa, Mr Li Hongzhi³ introduced the practice in China through a series of public lectures. Unlike monastic cultivation paths, Falun Dafa is practised openly in society, by people from all walks of life. Practitioners marry, raise children and pursue a wide variety of careers.

The principles of the practice are explained in Mr Li's book, *Zhuan Falun* (Rotating the Law Wheel)⁴ which is the foundation of the practice. The teachings emphasise ethical behaviour, high moral standards, personal growth, and responsibility for one's own actions. Through consistent and dedicated practice, one is able to improve physical and mental health, purify the mind, improve character, and elevate spiritual awareness.

¹ Ontario Human Rights Commission. "Backgrounder - Tribunal finds Falun Gong a protected creed under Ontario's Human Rights Code." January 25, 2006. <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/backgrounder-tribunal-finds-falun-gong-protected-creed-under-ontarios-human-rights-code>

² <https://www.nla.gov.au/benjamin-perry/the-past-present-and-future-of-falun-gong>

³ Practitioners of Falun Dafa respectfully refer to Li Hongzhi as *Shifu*, or Master Li, following traditional Chinese practice. He is referred to as Mr Li in this submission.

⁴ Li Hongzhi, *Zhuan Falun*, 2014 Taipei: Yih Chyun Book Co. Ltd.

Falun Dafa exercise and meditation classes are taught by volunteers in Australia and around the world. These classes are always free of charge and open to the public and all communities. For more information about Falun Gong and the persecution in China please refer to **Appendix A**.

3. Is Falun Gong a religion?

Practitioners in China did not refer to the practice as a religion, since groups that identify as religions are subject to regulation by the atheist Communist Party in China. Mr Li wanted the practice to be independent of government and Party control. The practice has always been taught free of charge, so there are no means of making an income, or having fixed places of worship (as required under Chinese regulations). Benjamin Penny, associate professor of Chinese history at the Australian National University, notes that if Falun Gong had identified as a religion, it would likely have invited immediate suppression.⁵

Falun Dafa has none of the traditional aspects of religion, such as places of worship, tithes or donations, or a hierarchy of ministry. Nevertheless, Falun Dafa is classified as a religion in the West on the basis of its theological and moral teachings, its focus on spiritual development as well as its extensive body of scripture. According to the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG), 1996,

“a religion is regarded as a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense.”⁶

4. Vilification of Falun Dafa

4.1 In China

When Falun Gong was first taught to the public in China in 1992 there was no issue of vilification of Falun Gong. Many people were drawn to its healing effects, and its traditional message of: live your life according to truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance, let go of negative desires and attachments, and be responsible to yourself and others. In 1998, the State Sports Commission found over 70 million people practising Falun Gong in China. Freedom House notes that,

State media reports from that period laud the benefits of Falun Gong practice and show adherents receiving “healthy citizen awards.” In an event that would be unimaginable today, [Mr] Li gave a lecture at the Chinese embassy in Paris in 1995, at the government’s invitation.⁷

After the Chinese Communist Party’s campaign to eliminate Falun Gong began in July 1999, the vilification and propaganda began, and still continues today.

⁵ Benjamin Penny, *The Religion of Falun Gong*. Chicago, University Of Chicago Press, 2012. ISBN 978-0-226-65501-7.

⁶ <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/775012ef0058a77dca25697e00184bdc?opendocument>

⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/2017/battle-china-spirit-falun-gong-religious-freedom>

4.2 In Australia

Falun Dafa was first introduced to Australia in 1995. After Mr Li gave lectures in Sydney in 1996 and 1999, the practice became more popular and accessible to people of Western backgrounds. Between 1995 and July 1999 people who practised Falun Dafa did not face vilification or hate speech from doing the meditation and exercises in public. No one would find it much different to seeing Tai Chi practice in the park.

After 1999 the key driver of vilification and hate campaigns targeting Falun Dafa is the Chinese Communist Party. This is also true in Australia.

5. Propaganda against Falun Dafa

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is expert at demonising a person or group they want to eliminate so the Chinese people will ignore, or even support, the atrocities committed against their targets. The persecution of Falun Dafa by the CCP is founded on a massive state media operation to slander Falun Gong, conducted throughout China to all levels of society. The vilification has continued in workplaces and education institutions, right down to primary schools. Overseas, propaganda continues to be spread through Chinese embassies and consulates, including in Australia. Embassy staff spread misinformation about Falun Gong to government leaders, politicians and other influential people throughout the world. Also, since 2017 the CCP has focused on cultivating foreign sources to discredit Falun Gong and support the Party's views. Refer to section 6.2.

Clive Ansley, a Canadian barrister and solicitor who practised and taught law in China for 14 years, was living in China when the persecution began in 1999. He described the media barrage in an affidavit: ⁸

I was resident in China from the time the persecution against the Falun Gong began in 1999 until the end of May, 2003. I witnessed on a daily basis during that period the unremitting vilification of Falun Gong and Falun Gong practitioners in all areas of the Chinese print and television media. It was the most extreme, and totally unjustified campaign of unmitigated hatred I have ever witnessed. Historically, the only comparable hate campaign of which I am aware is that conducted by Adolf Hitler against the Jews in Europe.

In their 2002 report, *Dangerous Meditation, China's Campaign Against Falungong*, Human Rights Watch noted:

Foreign governments generally have been unwilling or unable to do much in the face of the Chinese crackdown on Falungong beyond providing rhetorical defense for practitioners' basic rights. In some cases, foreign governments have responded to Chinese government pressure by turning their backs on reports of abuses, denouncing Falungong, or, in isolated instances, limiting Falungong members' freedom of association and expression in their own countries.⁹

⁸ Clive Ansley, 'Canadian Lawyer's Testimony', Falun Dafa Australia, 27 September 2006, Retrieved from <http://falunau.org/2006/09/canadian-lawyer-s-testimony/>

⁹ *Dangerous Meditation - China's Campaign Against Falun Gong*, Human Rights Watch, January 2002, Retrieved from <http://www.icnl.org/research/library/files/China/falun.pdf>

6. Chinese Communist Party Influence

6.1 In Australia

Since the persecution began in July 1999, Chinese embassies and consulates in Australia, and their envoys in the fields of business, media and academia have engaged in vilification and incitement to discrimination and hatred against Falun Dafa's teachings and practitioners.

A common method of interference is by emails and letters to politicians and other prominent members of the community, as well as various institutions, such as theatres and council facilities warning them not to have anything to do with Falun Gong practitioners or their activities otherwise there would be repercussions with regard to that person's or institution's future relations with China. This has resulted in legally registered Falun Dafa associations being refused participation in parades and festivals in their local areas.

In 2007, *The Age*¹⁰ reported that in August 2006 Victor Perton, a member of State Parliament, sent an email to all Victorian MPs inviting them to a briefing on a report into organ harvesting in China. Within hours, the Chinese Consul-General in Melbourne, Liang Shugen, apparently had a copy of Perton's email. What surprised Perton was that one of his colleagues would send his email straight to the Consul-General who then sent an email to all state MPs, pressing them not to attend the briefing.

In August 2015,¹¹ the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the Chinese Consul-General in Sydney, Li Huaxin, had written to the president of the NSW Legislative Council, Don Harwin and asked him to forward his letter to all NSW MPs. The letter described Falun Gong as a "downright anti-China group" and pressed MPs not to attend a briefing on international human organ harvesting and trafficking. Nine State MP's, who had previously confirmed their attendance, then cancelled after receipt of the letter.¹²

In an escalation of the CCP 'soft power', hundreds of Confucius schools and institutes have been established around the world, including in Australia under the guise of promoting Chinese language and culture. But the curriculum is controlled from China and certain subjects such as Taiwan, Tibet and Falun Gong are taboo.

Since the 2015 warning from ASIO's then director-general Duncan Lewis, to the Liberal, National and Labor parties, about accepting foreign-sourced political donations, Australia has seen an upsurge in Beijing-related crises.

The June 2017 Four Corners-Fairfax investigation, *Power and Influence*, exposed how China's Communist Party was secretly infiltrating Australia. The following year Australia introduced the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018 and the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme Act 2018.

¹⁰ Tom Hyland, Hard power, soft targets, 11 November 2007, *The Age*

¹¹ Sean Nicholls, China issues veiled threat to NSW MPs over attendance at organ trade forum, 10 August 2015, Sydney Morning Herald

¹² Media release: China threatens and MP's buckle, 12 August 2015

6.2 In Australian Media

As part of its so-called soft power campaign, the CCP has slowly gained control of the vast majority of Chinese language media in Australia.¹³ Using a combination of financial inducements and subtle coercion, newspapers are periodically persuaded to publish CCP-prepared propaganda articles defaming Falun Gong and its founder with the aim of whipping up hatred and demonising Falun Gong and its adherents among the Chinese immigrant community.

An example of the CCP's recent soft power extension into Western media was the China Daily deal brokered with Fairfax Media Ltd, as well as other newspaper publishers around the world, allowing them to pay for a supplement titled *China Watch* containing CCP propaganda articles inserted into The Age, Sydney Morning Herald and Financial Review. A supplement published in January 2017 contained articles that vilify Falun Gong. The ultimate purpose is to undermine Australian and democratic values in favour of the CCP authoritarian system and world view.

Professor John Fitzgerald's 2016 article, "Was the ABC shanghaied by Beijing?" reported on the ABC's efforts to expand its business relationships with China/CCP via the Shanghai Media Group. Professor Fitzgerald notes:

...when national public institutions – like the billion-dollar-a-year, taxpayer-funded ABC – endorse and encourage Beijing's efforts to silence critical voices at home and abroad. Everyday compromises by our national institutions betray not just Chinese Australians, but the rest of us as well.

In 2017 an internal document was leaked from the CCP's Leading Group on Preventing and Dealing with Heretical Religions (aka the 610 office), an extra-legal agency set up on June 10, 1999 to lead the persecution against Falun Gong. The document clearly outlines the CCP's strategy of cultivating foreign sources to report on Falun Gong in a manner that more closely matches Beijing's own demonization of the practice:

By ... cultivating non-governmental forces, we can fight heretical religions such as "Falun Gong," thereby mobilizing influential and friendly people such as experts, scholars, journalists, and overseas Chinese community leaders to speak up. We should strive to have foreign media take a tone more favorable to us [on Falun Gong].

6.3 Recent Example on the ABC

It was truly disappointing to see how Australia's national broadcaster targeted Falun Gong in recent Foreign Correspondent and Background Briefing programs.

Under the claim of "scrutiny" the ABC has used dishonest and biased framing to depict Falun Gong beliefs as divisive, alien, threatening and "cult-like," and to thereby cause viewers to regard Falun Gong with contempt, prejudice, hostility, and hatred. This is an extremely unfair, uncharitable, and negligent approach to news coverage.

¹³ Kelsey Munro and Philip Wen 'Chinese language newspapers in Australia: Beijing controls messaging, propaganda in press', The Age, 10 July 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.theage.com.au/national/chinese-language-newspapers-in-australia-beijing-controls-messaging-propaganda-in-press-20160610-gpg0s3.html>

It has caused misunderstanding, hatred and discrimination of a culturally foreign faith practice, and has exacerbated the trauma of Falun Gong practitioners in Australia who have fled political persecution as refugees.

The ABC's work has already been widely promoted and used by Chinese Communist Party agencies in its anti-Falun Gong propaganda efforts. Following publication of these programs, Falun Gong practitioners in Australia have also begun experiencing an increasing number of abusive and discriminatory incidents from members of the public. These attacks mimic vilifying comments presented in the ABC programs.

To illustrate further: consider whether the ABC would have found it appropriate to run a documentary and podcast series on the "dangerous" religious beliefs and cultural practices of Uyghur Muslims. Like Falun Gong, Uyghur Muslims hold conservative views on sexuality, and like many Falun Gong practitioners, many Uyghurs support Donald Trump's hard line approach to the Chinese Communist Party. Yet such a program would, rightly, never be allowed to go to air due to the religious intolerance it would exhibit, and the violation of individuals' rights to practice their own faith without fear of vilification.

The Background Briefing program on the ABC website ¹⁴ proudly announces:

Background Briefing is daring narrative journalism — Australian investigations with impact. Our award-winning reporters forensically uncover the hidden stories at the heart of the country's biggest issues.

But what exactly is 'narrative journalism'? A research study, "Framing narrative journalism as a new genre: A case study of the Netherlands", ¹⁵ notes:

The use of literary techniques is seen as a precarious affair; it attracts readers but it may also tempt journalists to alter the truth. This is dangerous in the sense that aesthetic considerations may come to dominate over traditional principles of objectivity and factuality, which may ultimately cause journalism to lose its credibility and authority.

So if narrative journalism can abandon the traditional principles of objectivity and factuality, with a loss of credibility and authority, how and why does the ABC defend these programs so staunchly?

The ABC's Editorial Policies at section 7 on *Harm and offence*, state in part:

The ABC broadcasts and publishes comprehensive and innovative content that aims to inform, entertain and educate diverse audiences. Innovation involves a willingness to take risks, invent and experiment with new ideas. This can result in challenging content which may offend some of the audience some of the time. ¹⁶

We submit that the no media, including the ABC should be allowed to "take risks, invent and experiment" where the impact of such journalism is to vilify and cause distress, mental anguish and harm to Falun Dafa practitioners in Australia and around the world - and particularly in China, where ABC's programs are used by the CCP to validate its persecution of millions.

¹⁴ <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/backgroundbriefing/>

¹⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1464884916671156>

¹⁶ <https://about.abc.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5print-15-01-2019.pdf>

We view the ABC's conduct in this matter as an unconscionable form of bullying.

The Australian government's *Health Direct*¹⁷ website describes bullying as:

...when people deliberately use words or actions repeatedly against an individual or a group to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. They usually want to make the person feel less powerful or helpless.

The *Health Direct* website also advises:

If bullying is not challenged and stopped, it can contribute to a culture where bullying is tolerated and everyone feels powerless to stop it.

Remember, you have a right to feel safe and be treated with fairness and respect.

We believe that Falun Dafa practitioners have a right to feel safe and be treated with fairness and respect. There must be a clear message that any form of bullying, that crosses the line into victimization and vilification, should not be defended or tolerated.

7. Response to Inquiry Terms of Reference

In making this submission we note that prohibitions on religious discrimination are inconsistent across Australia. Legislation that prohibits discrimination specifically on the basis of religion exists in all states and territories, except NSW and SA.

We understand we should be mindful of the legislation and reports listed in Terms of Reference, Paragraph 3 and provide the following response.

Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill 2020

This Bill only refers to discrimination on the grounds of religion and not vilification. Therefore it would not provide religious groups with protection against hate speech and vilification on the grounds of religion.

The Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)¹⁸

The current Anti-Discrimination Act in NSW does not have religion as a ground of discrimination. It talks about vilification on the grounds of ethno-religion but not religion by itself. Therefore it does provide protection from religious vilification or discrimination.

Crimes Act 1900 - SECT 93Z (NSW)¹⁹

The Crimes Act 1900 – Section 93Z contains the offence of publicly threatening or inciting violence on grounds of race, **religion**, sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex or HIV/AIDS status. As part of criminal law, it requires the police to bring a charge, and prosecution for an offence can only be commenced with the approval of the Director of Public

¹⁷ <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/bullying>

¹⁸ <https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1977/48>

¹⁹ http://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ca190082/s93z.html

Prosecutions. Therefore, it does not afford protection against hate speech and vilification on the grounds of religion, particularly in relation to media publications.

Religious Freedom Review: Expert Panel Report (2018)²⁰

The Panel noted that as Australia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it has a legal obligation under international law to protect freedom of religion.

The Panel recommended that New South Wales and South Australia should amend their anti-discrimination laws to make it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a person's "religious belief or activity".

With respect to vilification laws, while not making a recommendation on the matter, the Panel encouraged the Commonwealth, State and Territory Attorneys-General to cooperate to ensure greater consistency and national coverage with respect to anti-vilification provisions in accordance with our international obligations.

The Panel also noted support for a Religious Freedom Act or a Human Rights Act.

The Australian Law Reform Commission Review into the Framework of Religious Exemptions in Anti-discrimination Legislation²¹

[Last modified on 12 March, 2020]

On 2 March 2020 the Attorney-General amended the ALRC's reporting deadline to be 12 months from the date the Religious Discrimination Bill is passed by Parliament. We could not find any review that is available at the time of this submission.

Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (VIC)²²

Under section 8, Religious vilification unlawful, this Act states:

- (1) A person must not, on the ground of the religious belief or activity of another person or class of persons, engage in conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons.

Under Section 11, Exceptions - public conduct (1), this Act also includes the following exceptions where a person does not contravene section 8:

A person does not contravene section 7 or 8 if the person establishes that the person's conduct was engaged in reasonably and in good faith—

- (a) in the performance, exhibition or distribution of an artistic work; or
- (b) in the course of any statement, publication, discussion or debate made or held, or any other conduct engaged in, for—
 - (i) any genuine academic, artistic, religious or scientific purpose; or

²⁰ <https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/religious-freedom-review-expert-panel-report-2018.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.alrc.gov.au/inquiry/review-into-the-framework-of-religious-exemptions-in-anti-discrimination-legislation/>

²² http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/legis/vic/consol_act/rarta2001265/s11.html

- (ii) any purpose that is in the public interest; or
- (c) in making or publishing a fair and accurate report of any event or matter of public interest.

So a key criterion of determining whether vilification has occurred under this Act seems to be if what is published fair or accurate, and is in the public interest? Included in that must be an impartial assessment of fairness, accuracy and public interest, not just the publishers justification or compliance with internal codes.

8. Conclusions

We note that the Preamble to the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (VIC) provides a clear statement on the importance of protections for vilification:

Vilifying conduct is contrary to democratic values because of its effect on people of diverse ethnic, Indigenous and religious backgrounds. It diminishes their dignity, sense of self-worth and belonging to the community.²³

However, we also note that there is support for limiting the protections for vilification to threats and incitement to violence (similar to the NSW Crimes Act 1900 - SECT 93Z):

Vilification laws have always caused controversy because they attempt to prevent and punish certain types of speech without unduly infringing upon free speech. However, this controversy can largely be avoided if vilification laws are restricted to threats and incitement of violence.²⁴

We submit that this approach does not protect a person from hate speech and vilification that impacts a victims' mental state, or reputation in the community. That is like saying bullying is okay unless the victim has been threatened with, or impacted by violence.

We are concerned that religious vilification in the media is slipping through the cracks of religious protections, defamation law and secular editorial codes.

The ABC's Editorial guidance note on Harm and Offence²⁵ claims in part:

[In] deciding whether something is likely to cause harm or offence – is to consider the standards of the community. Community attitudes change across time and contexts. Things that were deeply objectionable twenty years ago may well be quite acceptable today.

It's perfectly acceptable for us to broadcast or publish material that might harm or offend, or even content that we know will definitely do so, as long as there's sufficient editorial context and purpose to justify it.

The problem here is that the ABC is policing and justifying itself.

Further, the opinions of secularism may evolve over time so that orthodox religious views may be seem an anathema.

²³ http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdb/au/legis/vic/consol_act/rarta2001265/

²⁴ Criminalising Hate Speech: Australia's crusade against vilification, Monica Wilkie, Centre for Independent Studies. <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2019/09/ap6.pdf>

²⁵ <https://edpols.abc.net.au/guidance/84/>

The teachings of orthodox religions, including the teachings of Falun Dafa, are founded on principles taught by revered spiritual teachers reflecting their respective wisdom traditions linking heaven and earth. Such spiritual teachings cannot change to suit popular trends in the secular world.

Governments may represent and express views of the people. But governments also have the responsibility to know and protect what is truly in the interests of maintaining morality and ethics in society.

Without clear laws to protect against vilification of religious belief and the erosion of such inalienable rights, the very foundation of Australian values is under threat, not just for Falun Dafa practitioners, but for all people of religious faith.

9. Recommendations

1) The NSW Government should review the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Freedoms and Equality) Bill to include express prohibitions on religious vilification in line with Australia's obligations under Article 20(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, i.e.

Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

2) Both at the Commonwealth and NSW government level, legislation similar to the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 should be implemented, especially in respect to religious vilification.

3) A Religious Freedom Act or a Human Rights Act that protects against religious discrimination and vilification should be implemented at a Commonwealth level.

APPENDIX A 21 years of persecution and resilience

July 20, 2020, marked the 21st anniversary of the Chinese regime's brutal campaign to eliminate Falun Gong. And while this campaign has targeted people who practice Falun Gong in China, its impact is being felt around the world. The following article was published by the [Falun Dafa Info Center](#) in July 2019. It is reproduced here with permission to provide background information for this submission.

[Falun Gong](#), also known as Falun Dafa, is a traditional spiritual practice that consists of gentle, meditative exercises and a moral philosophy centred on the tenets of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.

The practice became widely popular in China during the 1990s, and by 1999, according to Chinese state-run T.V., there were [100 million people](#) practicing Falun Gong in China. That's a staggering 1 of every 13 people in the country. Furthermore, as the *Washington Post* reported in 1999, many influential people in the party, the government and the military practiced Falun Gong, in addition to those found in just about every sector of society; from farmers to university professors, factory workers to corporate leaders, high school students to members of the communist party's top leadership.

Yet, in the summer of 1999, former communist leader Jiang Zemin ordered the traditional meditation practice be eliminated. China experts at the time say Jiang was jealous that Falun Gong's widespread popularity was overshadowing his own legacy, and at the same time, Jiang hoped to use the campaign against Falun Gong to build up his own powerbase.

Over the past 20 years, millions of people have been abducted or imprisoned. Hundreds of thousands have been tortured or suffered terrible abuse in custody. Thousands have been tortured to death, and those are just the cases we know about.

Even more horrific are findings from independent investigators concerning the systematic killing of Falun Gong practitioners so their organs could be used to fuel China's booming organ transplant business. In 2016, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed House Resolution 343, which cites "persistent and credible reports of systematic, state-sanctioned organ harvesting from large numbers of Falun Gong practitioners."²⁶ In June 2019, an independent tribunal²⁷ – chaired by Sir Geoffrey Nice QC, who previously prosecuted war criminals – released its conclusion that Falun Gong practitioners have been, and continue to be, killed for their organs "on a significant scale."

The persecution of Falun Gong in China continues to this day.

In its 2018 annual report, Amnesty International stated, "Falun Gong practitioners continued to be subjected to persecution, arbitrary detention, unfair trials and torture and other ill-treatment."²⁸ In its 2019 annual human rights report, the US State Department²⁹ detailed how

²⁶ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-resolution/343/text>

²⁷ <https://chinatribunal.com/final-judgement-report/>

²⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/china/report-china/>

²⁹ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/china-includes-tibet-hong-kong-and-macau-china/>

people who practice Falun Gong have been victims of “systematic torture in custody” by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Clearly, this persecution campaign has destroyed the lives of millions of people. Yet, the impact of this persecution extends beyond the community of Falun Gong practitioners inside China. It is felt throughout Chinese society, and to some extent, around the globe.

How?

First, let’s consider the scale and nature of what’s happened in China. When the communist leadership targeted Falun Gong, they were targeting 100 million people who were simply trying to live their lives according to truthfulness, compassion and tolerance. This set in motion a system of punishing good people and rewarding immoral, even criminal behaviour nationwide.

The result has been far-reaching.

The campaign against Falun Gong has served as an incubator of persecution tactics now being deployed against other targeted groups in China. For example, the methods of physical and psychological torture refined on Falun Gong are now used against Tibetans, Uyghurs and Christians.

The Communist Party’s incentive system used in implementing the campaign against Falun Gong has drastically undermined good governance and societal morality. For example, officials who refuse to persecute Falun Gong risk halted career advancement, demotion, or even being fired. Conversely, those willing to engage in the lawlessness rise through the ranks, gaining more power and influence.

Some medical doctors in China have literally become killers, viewing Falun Gong practitioners as little more than a source for organs. By the same token, international patients who travel to China for an organ often become unknowingly complicit in the killing.

China’s state-run media has so saturated public discourse with false narratives vilifying Falun Gong that even some Western scholars and government officials have unwittingly bought into the lies, and publish or govern accordingly.

And the blatant disregard for international agreements and norms displayed by Chinese communist officials have rendered many international agreements useless, and created hostile, even criminal, market forces that affect industries around the world.

In short, the persecution of Falun Gong has played a key role in fermenting a society where dishonesty is rampant. It has promoted corrupt officials within the Chinese regime that persecute their own people and continually defraud the international community.

As the 20th anniversary of this brutal persecution approaches, we implore the international community to speak up. We must give a voice to and take action for the tens of millions of people in China that have been targeted by the communist regime, and who live their daily lives under threat of arbitrary detention, imprisonment, torture or worse simply for practicing Falun Gong.

Regaining freedom and justice for Falun Gong in China will not only end the persecution they face, it will go a long way for regaining freedom and justice for all the Chinese people, and by doing so, help China become a responsible member of the international community. And that benefits everyone, the world over.