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**See No Evil: UN's Human Rights Commissioner Should Listen to Blind Man**

by Douglas A. Sylva

Sometimes reality takes all the fun out of writing columns. Just as one is poised for flights of metaphorical fancy about the United Nations' (UN) willful blindness towards the continuing reign of terror called the Chinese one-child policy, a real-life blind man makes the point himself. Let me explain.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, was recently in China in order to nudge the Chinese towards enough reform, or the appearance of enough reform, to make it seem less than absurd for the Chinese to ratify one of the UN's flagship human rights treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. She was hoping, in part, for a pledge from the government to stop sending political dissidents into forced-labour camps in order to be re-educated.

The Chinese responded with a "butt-out, lady" or at least the diplomatic equivalent: "Every country should choose its own way to promote and protect human rights in line with its national conditions." Apparently, national conditions in China call for the government to promote and protect human rights by violating human rights.

Unfazed by this rejection, Arbour responded by saying: "During my discussions with Chinese officials, it was often said to me that change had to be gradual. While I do not disagree, I believe the stage is set for expecting more than modest progress in the coming years," which is the diplomatic equivalent of: "I came here for good news, and I will leave here with good news, no matter what you actually tell me."

What is interesting about all of this, from the perspective of the one-child policy, is that, in all of the give-and-take, Arbour never thought it was worth mentioning that China still coerces its women into abortions and sterilizations, and does so on a massive scale.

Arbour even took time out to celebrate "Beijing +10"--the tenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and what many consider to be one of the triumphs of the women's rights movement--in Beijing itself. On her way to the anniversary celebration, she passed women who were not free to have as many children as they would like; she passed women who were forced to have abortions; she passed women who were sterilized because either they or their husbands were deemed genetically unfit to reproduce; and, undoubtedly, she passed many more boys than girls, since unborn girls are routinely aborted so that a family's one legal child can be a male heir.

She passed all of this injustice and delivered an eloquent speech about women and about the United Nations' essential role in protecting women's rights and never said a word about the one-child policy; thus, the metaphorical blindness.

The literal blindness in this story is provided by one Chen Guangcheng, a legal activist who has dared to file a class action lawsuit against the Chinese government on behalf of all the people who have been oppressed in the name of population control in his home city of Linyi. Time magazine gave one example of the application of the one-child policy in Linyi:

The men with the poison-filled syringe arrived two days before Li Juan's due date. They pinned her down on a bed in a local clinic, she says, and drove the needle into her abdomen until it entered the 9-month-old fetus.

"At first, I could feel my child kicking a lot," says the 23-year-old. "Then, after a while, I couldn't feel her moving anymore." Ten hours later, Li delivered the girl she had intended to

name Shuang (Bright). The baby was dead.

To be absolutely sure, says Li, the officials--from the Linyi region, where she lives, in China's eastern Shandong province--dunked the infant's body for several minutes in a bucket of water beside the bed.

In a photo published in the Washington Post, Chen, wearing the dark sunglasses of the blind, stands among a number of people, seeking to tell their own stories. According to the Post:

"A crowd of dishevelled villagers was waiting when Chen Guangcheng stepped out of the car. More women than men among them, a mix of desperation and hope on their faces, they ushered him along a dirt path and into a nearby house. Then, one after another, they told him about the city's campaign against 'unplanned births.'"

Chen garnered unexpected publicity; forced to respond, the Chinese government blamed local officials for violating family planning laws, even though the laws themselves call for coercive measures to control births. The government also has seen fit to place Chen under house arrest.

The Post concluded that, "It might appear a quixotic crusade--a blind peasant with limited legal training taking on the Communist Party's one-child policy, which has long been considered a pillar of the nation's economic development strategy and off-limits to public debate. But the Linyi case marks a legal milestone in challenging the coercive measures used for decades to limit population growth in China."

The crusade would be less quixotic if the United Nations cared, and if the UN's chief human rights enforcer had eyes to see it.