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**Oral Intervention of Human Rights in China
Delivered at the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' Meeting
with Partners in Advance of the Review**

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished experts of the Committee, for the opportunity to make this oral intervention. My name is Casey O'Connor, and I am a Senior Program Officer with Human Rights in China (HRIC).

I will use my limited time to focus on one overarching implementation challenge that impacts the full range of economic, social and cultural rights issues raised by my NGO colleagues – the problem of **corruption**.

As early as 2005, China's National Audit Agency uncovered \$170 billion in misappropriated and misspent funds during the preceding decade. Such widespread and large-scale corruption can significantly hinder access to education, affordable healthcare and employment opportunities, as well as undermine product safety, construction quality, and land and housing rights. Given the far reaching impact of this problem, HRIC was encouraged to see corruption included among the Committee's list of issues.

In its response, China affirms that the government is “fully conscious of the dangers of corruption and has consistently and clearly fought against it.” (para. 19) To combat corruption, China's response emphasizes the importance of “strengthening the people's awareness of defending their own rights and interests.” (para. 20) The response further acknowledges citizens' right of oversight, right to be informed, and right to participate. (para. 24)

The recent highly publicized trials and convictions of citizens calling for increased transparency of official assets, however, raise serious concerns about reprisals against civil society actors who advance and participate in anti-corruption measures.

The majority of those recently convicted are members of the New Citizens Movement, a loose group of citizens across China who work on key social issues such as equal access to education for migrant children. The Movement, founded by prominent legal scholars, advocates responsible citizenship which includes constructive engagement with the government and the use of rational, moderate and legal methods to press for realization of rights.

Beginning in late 2012, several members of the New Citizens Movement launched an anti-corruption campaign calling for public disclosure of officials' assets. In addition to raising awareness of the issue through open letters, educational materials, and public demonstrations, the group drafted a proposed national law, because, according to one of the founders, "raising an issue is not enough; solutions must be found."

Rather than welcoming this constructive citizen engagement, in the early months of 2013, authorities apprehended and detained more than 20 participants in the campaign. Eight have since been put on trial and, so far, six have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 18 months to four years for "gathering a crowd to disrupt order in a public place."

These convictions come at a critical juncture for both the UN human rights system and China. Reprisals against citizens are an increasing subject of concern within the UN human rights bodies, because when citizens are detained or jailed in response to their efforts to exercise and defend their rights, the rights themselves and the entire system are threatened.

In China, these politicized prosecutions and crackdowns on moderate voices send a dangerous message that even constructive actions will not be tolerated. Furthermore, by using the legal system to punish actors who are attempting to contribute solutions to the problem of corruption, the State party is foregoing the invaluable resources civil society can offer. These State-created disincentives for constructive engagement also threaten to radicalize civil society, and further fuel social discontent and instability.

Thank you.