



Eastern U.S. Buddha's Study Falun Dafa Association

An Open Letter to the Associated Press

With the release last Friday by AP's Beijing Bureau of the story "*Chinese Government Shows off Repentant Falun Gong Followers*," we at the association, undoubtedly like many of your readers, can only wonder: *Is AP willingly serving as a mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party in its deadly campaign against Falun Gong?*

The CCP's official portrayal of the January 2001 Tiananmen Square self-immolation tragedy is engulfed by unanswered questions. Over the past four years numerous reports by independent media and human rights bodies worldwide have questioned and repudiated claims by the Chinese Communist regime linking Falun Gong to the immolations. As early as August 2001, the statement of International Education Development (IED) at the United Nations noted, "...we have obtained a video of that incident that in our view proves that this event was staged by the government." Many have raised serious, yet unanswered questions. The *Washington Post* is one of several parties that have called into question official CCP narratives of the event.

Communist leaders in China have from day one used the incident to breed hatred and violence against the Falun Gong, both in China and beyond. It has been, in the truest sense, a Beijing "propaganda victory," as *The New York Times* called it. If Beijing's claims about the incident were not suspect enough at first, its adaptation and packaging of the incident in subsequent months should be more than enough grounds for suspicion. That Beijing barred foreign journalists from interviewing the victims (while giving State press regular access) for an *entire year*, and even went so far as to detain those who sought to investigate the story, were obvious indicators that something was afool.

What a startling and regrettable thing, then, that AP's latest story would present the 2001 immolation following the CCP's script so closely *as to almost be indistinguishable*. The article failed to raise any basic challenges to the information the State provided through carefully staged and regulated interviews. Secondly, it gave no voice to Falun Gong. Thirdly, nor did you engage – much less present – the wealth of information that suggest the immolation incident's falsity. It seems all critical faculties were suspended.

Your article in this sense not only represents a breakdown in journalistic standards and practices, but goes so far as to passively reiterate and spread the Party line. Doing so goes far beyond a disservice to your readership. It is a disservice, or worse, to the millions in China who are being targeted for "eradication" as we speak. The Party line, in fact, has a bounty on many of their heads. To the extent that it can dehumanize and discredit the group through incidents like the "immolation" it can more easily torture, maim, and kill Falun Gong adherents. Insofar as your article lends AP's name and credibility now to the CCP line, it has contributed in no small way to the deadly anti-Falun Gong campaign.

Why, if not to serve its own terrible agenda, would China's regime set up for foreign press interviews with its alleged immolation survivors? According to Reporters Sans Frontiers and other human rights organizations, the Chinese regime tries to stamp out any and all independent reporting on Falun Gong. Foreign journalists are not allowed to interview practitioners; unless, that is, they are under the control of their captors. Those that attempt to do so are detained, interrogated and threatened, face the possible revocation of their licenses, and could even be physically abused themselves. Many Chinese citizens have been arrested, tortured, and even killed for reporting on rights violations against the Falun Gong. Falun Gong is allowed absolutely no voice in China.

With so many resources meant to end independent reporting on Falun Gong, why would Chinese officials open the doors and usher in foreign media on this occasion (the immolation anniversary) and under such carefully engineered circumstances? And was this not the same stunt (only with different



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scripted lines) pulled three years ago? Their agenda should be obvious: to paint Falun Gong as a menace and sidetrack would-be scrutiny of the regime's violent persecution.

The Falun Dafa Information Center anticipated Beijing's propaganda shenanigans, and thus sent a media advisory to AP and others detailing concerns. That was before AP's story ran. And yet AP's piece went beyond merely failing to present or engage Falun Gong's concerns to doing exactly what the advisory cautioned against.

Even with the above aside, one does well to ask what significance the AP story's interviewees have. To date, we have received more than 160,000 letters from individuals across China openly declaring that the statements they made while imprisoned and under severe abuse do not represent the truth of what they think or how they were treated. Imagine the ferocity, the barbarity, that was unleashed to make so many people say and do things against their consciences in captivity? Could the immolator interviewees be any different? Is theirs any less a coerced voice – one manufactured in custody over long, untold months? The CCP has been torturing people into “confessions” and “repentances” since as early as the 1940's. This should be nothing new to AP or any journalist, for that matter. And all of this, of course, is meaningful only if first one establishes that the immolators ever *were* Falun Gong adherents.

The persecution of Falun Gong is vast in scope and horrifying in its implementation. We have documented over 38,000 cases of severe abuse or torture in prison camps and detention centers. Thousands are dead. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, languish in labor camps and detention centers throughout China. Brainwashing centers have been established all across the country to use torture – psychological and physical – to destroy people's beliefs and implant the CCP line into their hearts and souls... a process often leaving people psychologically devastated, if not dead. Both the *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as with others, have reported on these tactics and their pervasiveness. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have documented much of this.

Yet, in the face of such horrors – what many human rights lawyers are calling *genocide* – the report from your Beijing Bureau has offered something of a CCP apologetic, reconstituting the very same hate propaganda that makes possible the torture and deaths of so many. We would think that as a news organization AP has a moral and professional responsibility to dig into this story, find the truth, and report it. It may not be easy, but nobody ever said good journalism was. True, it may upset the current powers in Beijing, even making for a rocky business partnership. But then such is the cost of fair and accurate reporting, is it not?

In light of the extensive damage, harm, and disservice your recent article has done, we have no choice but to insist upon the following:

1. That AP issue a public apology for this article and the damage it has caused worldwide.
2. That AP publish a statement from the Falun Dafa Associations of the United States or distribute an article that reports upon the self-immolation and the persecution of Falun Gong truthfully.

We await your reply.

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