

Dear Aldermen,

We are a group of Chinese students and scholars at Yale University. We are writing to apply for permission to host a public gathering of approximately 500 people in an appropriate public space on the afternoon of April 26th, 2008.

It has recently been brought to our attention that the Board of Aldermen has approved street closure for a mock torch relay on April 26th, 2008 to protest against China's alleged human-rights violations. While we sincerely appreciate and share your concern with China's human rights conditions, we feel the responsibility to make our own voice heard as well—a voice which we believe represents the vast majority of the Chinese community in New Haven. Our peaceful gathering will aim to present a balanced picture of Chinese human rights conditions and to promote the Olympic spirit of unity, inclusiveness, and equality. This event is jointly organized by the students and scholars of Yale University and leaders of the local Chinese community.

We, overseas Chinese, perhaps care more than anyone else about human rights in China. Every human rights violation in China potentially affects our families and friends residing in China. Our deepest gratitude goes to the well-meaning Americans who not only welcome our stay and accept us into the community, but also endeavor to improve human rights in China. Nevertheless, we are exceedingly regretful that this good intention is being exploited by special interest groups to further their own agenda.

The Falun Gong group and its affiliates, the major organizers of this mock torch relay, are not truthful promoters of human rights. The Falun Gong group's track records are replete with exaggerations and fantasies. The group is marked by their outright hostilities toward China, and some of their claims have been discredited by the United States government. We are concerned that this mock torch relay may turn out to be another public display of vicious and untruthful attacks on China. In that case, it would be a mistake to honor their causes as promoting "human right," and indeed, it would be a mockery to the sacrifice that Chinese people have made.

We recognize and appreciate legitimate concerns for human right violations in China. We do not unconditionally endorse actions of the Chinese government. But we also want nothing short of a truthful presentation of the human rights conditions in China. A biased picture provided by special interest groups would not help promote human rights in China. On the contrary, it would endanger further improvements by inviting cynicism and distrust.

Presenting the public with a balanced image of modern China is also of vital interest to the United States. A one-sided version that demonizes China would not only cloud the judgment of the citizens in both countries, but also create misunderstandings and hostilities between the two governments. At this delicate moment, an open-minded citizen would certainly appreciate a different opinion of China. The world expects the United States and China to address human rights issues in an open and collaborative manner, not in antagonism and isolation.

We also believe that the Olympic torch, a symbol of understanding and cooperation that transcends national, cultural, and racial boundaries, should not be mocked. The history of New Haven, shaped by immigration and integration, is a history of bringing people together regardless of their cultural heritage or race. We hope that our public gathering will confirm and further the ideals of this city, ideals that echo with the Olympic spirit of promoting peace and cooperation without discrimination.

In addition, we would like to briefly note the violence that occurred during the recent anti-China protests in San Francisco, Paris, and London. Dozens of protesters were arrested for their aggressive and violent behavior, many of whom are associated with the organizers of this mock torch relay. The principal organizer of New Haven's protest, the local Falun Gong Club, has had a troubled relationship with the Chinese community. Members of our group have been threatened or aggressively harassed by the Falun Gong Club, and many of them have expressed concerns that the anti-China sentiments stirred by this mock torch relay may affect their future safety..

We will promptly provide any further information of our proposed gathering upon request. We look forward to your understanding and support, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

Yeqing Zheng
Committee of Supporting Beijing Olympics at Yale