

# The Torch and Freedom

After facing major protests in London and Paris as the Olympic torch makes its way to Beijing, the Chinese government is said to be looking for a public relations firm to patch up China's image before the 2008 Games in August. In the spirit of the Olympic ideals, we are prepared to help China — free of charge.

Here's what you do: Stop arresting dissidents. Stop spreading lies about the Dalai Lama, and start talking to him about greater religious and cultural freedoms for Tibet. Stop being an enabler to Sudan in its genocide in Darfur. In other words, start delivering on the pledge you made to the International Olympic Committee to respect human rights — which, by the way, include the freedom of expression and the freedom of assembly.

It is sadly typical of authoritarian regimes to presume that huge protests of the sort that have accompanied the Olympic torch are provocations instigated by devious foreign foes. It was the same when the United States and several other Western countries boycotted the 1980 Moscow Games over the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Since the Kremlin suppressed all dissent, it was beyond the ken of Soviet leaders to imagine that

their actions could actually infuriate people and that they would then act on their outrage.

Just so, the Communist authorities in China have been fanning nationalist resentments among their citizens with claims that protests against their repressive policies are staged by hostile foreign forces bent on ruining China's grand Olympic party. The popular anger then makes it easier for the regime to arrest dissidents, stifle the news media and blame a "Dalai Lama clique" abroad for the troubles in Tibet.

Since the Chinese government does not hesitate to whip up "spontaneous demonstrations" in favor of its policies, it's not a stretch for it to presume that foreign "enemies" are doing the same along the route of the torch. Thus, the pathetic presumption that a P.R. firm can make the protesters go away. It can't and won't.

Nobody expected China to democratize overnight, and, given the country's mighty economic power, nobody really wants to antagonize Beijing. But a nation that applies to host the Olympic Games also must demonstrate that it is worthy of the honor. China has only itself to blame for messing up its coming-out party.