

# Human Rights Will Be ‘Important Priority’ In Talks With Chinese, Hormats Testifies

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International Trade

Robert D. Hormats, nominated by President Obama to be undersecretary of state for economic, energy, and agricultural affairs, pledged to Congress Sept. 9 that he will press the Chinese government to improve its record on human rights in discussions concerning trade and other issues.

Hormats said that he views human rights as a “very important priority” that needs to be integrated into every bilateral relationship.

“I expect to be working in China” regularly if confirmed by the Senate, the former Goldman Sachs executive said. “It will be an important topic in the conversations I have with the Chinese.”

Hormats was pressed on the issue at a confirmation hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.), who said that human rights have not been accorded the attention they deserve in discussions with China and other countries (see related report in this section).

“I am disappointed that discussion of human rights issues has not been given a higher priority in the strategic and economic dialogue between the U.S. and global leaders, like China,” Cardin said. “Frank discussions about respect for human rights, which are fundamental to both climate change and economic prosperity, are essential.”

Cardin said that the United States must make an unambiguous commitment to human rights. “If countries around the world, particularly China, believe that democracy, freedom of speech, and human rights overall are less of a priority for the United States than national security or economic negotiations,” he said, “we sacrifice both stability and freedom.”

Hormats said that the Chinese can often appear to be offended by U.S. calls to improve its human rights practices. But he said that—in his discussions with the Chinese—he has sensed that they respect the United States for standing up for what he called “an important American value.”

Hormats served in various capacities in the Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations, including as deputy U.S. trade representative during the Carter administration, and he has worked at Goldman Sachs for the past 27 years, most recently as vice chairman of Goldman Sachs International.

Improving Market Access

He said that, if confirmed, his other priorities as undersecretary of state for economic, energy, and agricultural affairs will be to work to foster growth in the United States and around the world through a wide range of policies in areas including trade and investment.

“These efforts should seek to improve the access of our citizens to global markets,” Hormats said, “and in the process level the playing field for American workers, businesses, and consumers.”

He said that public support in the United States for an open, rules-based international economic system, as well as for global economic institutions, depends importantly on the experiences of American citizens and the benefits they derive from the international economy and the agreements the administration concludes. “This will remain an abiding priority for me,” he said.

Hormats said that he will also seek to strengthen ties between the United States and the most dynamic emerging economies, noting that in the next 50 years emerging and developing economies will account for substantially all of the increase in the global population and a substantial share of the growth in world economic activity.

“Their growth, openness to American products, willingness to work constructively with the United States on key global issues, and support for a well functioning, rules-based international system,” he said, “will be of great importance to the success of America's economic, foreign policy, and national security objectives in coming years.”

He said that promoting active American engagement in enhancing regional cooperation in such areas as the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, the Americas, and Africa will also be a high priority for him as undersecretary of state for economic, energy, and agricultural affairs.

By Gary G. Yerkey