

**SAN FRANCISCO****Falun Gong advocates praise judge's ruling**

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Falun Gong supporters celebrated a report issued by a federal magistrate supporting the rights of six Bay Area practitioners to sue the mayor of Beijing for his alleged involvement in police abuse of the religious group's members during a 1999 rally.

About a dozen people gathered outside the Federal Building in San Francisco last Wednesday to praise the findings of Judge Edward M. Chen, which determined that Liu Qi -- who is now Beijing Party secretary and president of the Beijing Organizing Committee for the 2008 Olympics -- is not entitled to sovereign immunity in the case.

Steve Ispas of San Lorenzo, who practices the meditation exercise that was banned by the Chinese government in 1999, said he was among those arrested and brutalized by Chinese police while in Beijing. Reading Chen's June 11 determination gave him a thrilling feeling of validation, he said.

"It's an incredibly significant step for us that we have the mayor of Beijing being sued," said the 34-year-old software marketer. "I'm glad that justice has a chance."

Joshua Sondheimer, the litigation director for San Francisco's Center for Justice and Accountability, which filed the suit last year, called Chen's report a direct "message to the Chinese government that human rights should be respected in their country."

The case now moves to a U.S. district judge for consideration and a final ruling.

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