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Suit targets Beijing mayor

He shouldn't lead Olympic efforts, Falun Gong say

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The Center for Justice and Accountability announced Saturday it had filed a federal lawsuit against Liu Qi, the mayor of Beijing and president of the Beijing Olympic Committee.

The suit was filed on behalf of six practitioners of Falun Gong, a spiritual movement that has been banned in China.

The six practitioners allege that Qi, as the top official in Beijing, is responsible for beatings that they claim they received while practicing Falun Gong. The suit, filed under the Alien Tort Claim Act, is asking for damages to be determined at a jury trial.

Qi, in Salt Lake City to observe the 2002 Winter Games, was served with the suit while waiting for a transfer at the San Francisco International Airport Thursday.

Attorney Terri Marsh explained that, under alien tort claim rules, the defendant must be served in the jurisdiction where the suit was filed, in this case the U.S. Northern District of California.

Under federal court rules, Qi has 20 days to respond to the suit.

While Qi was unavailable for comment, Qian Decun, first secretary in China's U.S. Embassy, said the suit is another in a series of things Falun Gong practitioners have done in an effort to discredit the Chinese government.

"The Falun Gong is an evil cult," he said.

Practitioners of Falun Gong have been using the 2002 Winter Games as a springboard to spread their message that thousands of practitioners have been imprisoned and tortured to death at the hands of the Chinese government.

Saturday, they said Qi shouldn't be allowed to head an Olympic organizing committee.

"Here is a person that is supposed to be a representative of peace and goodwill while he has been committing human rights violations for years," said Leeshai Lemish, one of the named plaintiffs in the suit.

Falun Gong, which consists of yoga-like exercises and is based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion and forbearance was originally welcomed in China but was banned in 1999 after leaders there labeled it a cult.

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