

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue #8-01 : Measures to address the violation of human rights of the Uighur population in China

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Introduction

The Uyghurs, an ethnic group situated in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region in northwest China have been reported being subjected to the oppression and severe violation of their human rights by the Chinese Government. According to internal documents leaked to the New York Times, Xi Jinping, the incumbent president of China has called for officials to show "absolutely no mercy" during their combat in response to terrorism following the attack launched by Uyghur militants at a train station in Kunming on March 1, 2014. According to BBC News, Adrian Zenz, a leading expert on China's policies in Xinjiang, has provided documents from the Kunes county justice system from 2017 and 2018. The term "transformation through education" of "key groups" was mentioned to euphemize the indoctrination of the Uyghurs. In one of the documents, the "education" process was described to involve "washing brains, cleansing hearts, strengthening righteousness and eliminating evil". The Uyghurs were allegedly forced into exploitative working, living under abusive conditions, and have been forced to suffer from mass surveillance, detention, indoctrination, and coerced sterilization (UN).

According to sources, hundreds of thousands have been held in facilities operated by the Chinese Government with the purpose of re-education. Many

have been transferred forcibly to work in low-skilled and labor-intensive industries located in Xinjiang or in other parts of the country. According to accusations, it is estimated that China has detained up to 2 million people in a system of internment camps. However, the allegations were denied by the people of the Chinese Capital, who defended “the system as a vocational training and deradicalization program vital to ensuring the region's security” (CNN). According to BBC News, several former detainees and a guard have revealed first-hand experiences regarding an organized system of mass rape, sexual abuse, and torture. Although there are people who were fortunate enough to be released, they were left with permanent trauma and “lived in constant fear of being sent back”. The Government of China has violated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by stripping away from the Uyghurs various human rights proclaimed within the articles. This includes the right to exercise freedom of thought, conscience, and religion upheld under Article 18 (UDHR). According to the Chairperson of the Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the Chinese Government should cease the adoption of any measures that defy “international law, norms, and standards relating to human rights” (UN).

Definition of Key Terms

Uighur/Uyghur (wee guhrs)

The Uyghurs are a Turkish ethnic group (most of whom identify as Muslims) who have been considered a religious minority by the government of China. They are native to the Xinjiang region which is located in Northwest China.

Autonomous

A region or country that is autonomous, in theory, means that it has the freedom to govern itself. The Uyghurs are native to Xinjiang which is an autonomous region, but still faces restrictions from the central government.

Concentration/internment camps

Concentration/internment camps refer to a place in which many people are forcefully imprisoned with inadequate facilities and harsh living conditions. More than one million Uyghur muslims are suspected to be in concentration camps in Xinjiang, China.

Cultural genocide

Cultural genocide refers to actions taken to erase or destroy nations/ethnic groups. The government of China has been accused of cultural genocide due to its attempts to eradicate the Uyghur population using various methods such as coerced sterilization and indoctrination.

Mass Surveillance

Mass surveillance is the use of technology to monitor large groups of people, instead of only surveilling individuals suspicious of crime. This is something that occurs all over China including the Uyghur internment camps.

Coerced sterilization

Coerced sterilization is a process that involves removing a person's ability to reproduce against their will, usually through surgical procedures, and is implemented by the government. Uyghur women are being forcefully sterilized in an attempt to suppress the Uyghur population.

Indoctrination

Indoctrination is the process of teaching a person or group to accept a set of beliefs without meaningful consideration. Uyghurs are being subject to indoctrination in which they are forced to listen to lectures and sing hymns praising the Chinese Communist Party.

General Overview

China is facing harsh criticism from countries around the world as they are being accused of genocide. Human rights groups believe that more than a million Uyghurs, mostly Muslim, have been detained over the past few years. China has continually denied the existence of these camps, however evidence suggests that more than 85 camps, other studies even suggesting up to 380, have been identified within the Xinjiang region.

History of the Uyghurs

The Uyghurs are the oldest group of Turkic-speaking peoples in Central Asia, and have been around since the 3rd Century CE. They have previously ruled two independent kingdoms, one of which was overthrown in the 8th century, and the other in the 13th. The majority of the Uyghurs are "sedentary village-dwelling people." And their chief cities are Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang, and Kashgar, which is near the border between Russia and China. The Uyghurs currently located in Xinjiang, are Sunni Muslims.

History of Xinjiang

Previously ruled by the Tang Dynasty, Xinjiang is located in northwest China, and is made up of mostly deserts and mountains. In the 10th century the power of the Tang dynasty decreased, and Xinjiang had an abundant Arab influence, and allowed Islam to gain many converts. This also allowed for the influence of language, as the Turkic language began to be spoken. Since then the region's rule has changed numerous times, from the Chinese Empire, to Yang Zengxin who was assassinated in 1928. Then in 1955 the region was established as autonomous, which led to the migration of many Han to the region (Ethnic Chinese). Over time this has led to disparities and disagreement between the Uighur and Han populations, and has led to a significant increase in protests and

violence.



Map of the autonomous region of Xinjiang and its location in China.

Accusations & Allegations

China has been accused of committing genocide by countries like the United States, Canada and the Netherlands. Secretaries of states from several countries have called the actions of the Chinese government “crimes against humanity,” and “violations of the most basic human rights.” While China strongly denied the accusations, they have since admitted to the existence of these camps, calling them “re-education camps.” China claims the reasoning for the need of the “re-education camps” are to prevent terrorism and to remove Islamist extremism. They also claim that reports accusing them of detaining Uighurs are false. However, other reports and members of the minority claim they have

been both detained and abused because of their religion and cultural identity.

Why the Uighurs?

China claims that the reason for the “re-education camps” specifically targeting Uighurs is due to the fact that their extremist views present a threat to society. Furthermore, they insist the Uighur militants are preparing a violent campaign, that would include bombings, sabotage, and civic unrest in the independent state. China’s defence comes from two attacks in 2013 and 2014 that Uighur militants claimed responsibility for. The first being an attack on China’s Tiananmen Square, where a vehicle drove through a group of pedestrians killing five, and injuring dozens more. The second, being a knife attack on Kunming station that killed 29 people, and injured hundreds more.

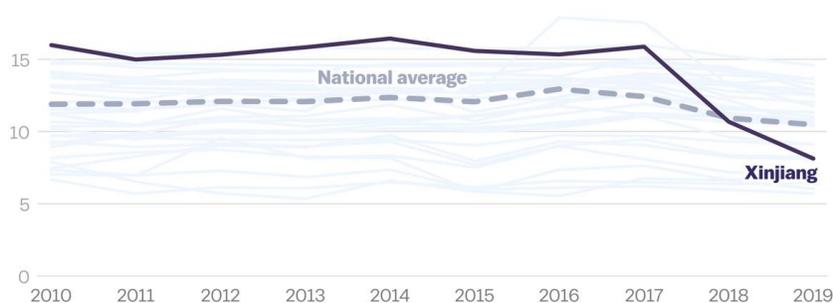
Life in the “Re-education Camps”

While specific information on life in these camps is rare, there have been several testimonies and leaked documents that allow for a peek into the horrific conditions detained Uighurs Muslims face. They are being stripped of their religious freedoms and face “an oppressive system of mass surveillance, detention, indoctrination, and even forced sterilisation.” Additionally, women in these camps face systemic rape, sexual abuse, and torture. Former detainees and guards have spoken out about how they either saw or experienced evidence of organized systems of mass rape. They are also forced to watch propaganda programmes as the Chinese attempt to “re-educate” them by stripping them of their language, religion, and culture. Furthermore, prisoners are being forced to renounce their own ideologies, and the methods being used are similar to that of brainwashing. Not only are those detained face extreme violations of their human rights, it can even be seen outside the camps. They are being prevented from “performing traditional religious burial rites, marriage ceremonies, and circumcisions.” Furthermore they are being placed into these camps because they are being arrested, however the majority of these cases

have involved arbitrary arrests, in which the Uyghurs detained have been innocent. China argues that thanks to their 2016 Counterterrorism Act they can proceed with mass arrests of citizens simply for practicing their religion. All in all the treatment of the Uyghurs in China violates their human rights, and while China may choose to defend their actions international parties must get involved to prevent it.

Births in China's Xinjiang region have dropped sharply in recent years

Births per 1,000 people in each of China's regions



Source: China Statistical Yearbook

Vox

Graph demonstrating the decrease in births in the Xinjiang region over the years.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The Communist Party of China

Being the current ruling party of China, the Chinese Communist Party represents the government of China and is therefore held accountable for maintaining repressive measures against the Uyghur regional minority. The party claimed that it is essential to have “re-education camps” as an effort to combat terrorism and to “enhance national security” as well as to deliver “a curriculum that includes standard spoken and written Chinese, understanding of the law, vocational skills, and deradicalization.” In 2020, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese

Communist Party defended the policy toward Xinjiang by claiming that it is “totally correct” and that “it must be held to for the long term”. During the same year, the UN ambassador of Beijing has denied the accusations of religious intolerance and stated that “the reports by human rights organizations and journalists” were based on “lies and rumors.”

The United States of America

As one of the most powerful and influential countries in the world, the United States has taken the initiative to officially declare China’s mistreatment of the Uyghur population a genocide. In 2019, Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan said that “it was incumbent on U.N. member states to ensure it was able to closely monitor human rights abuses by China” and expressed that the United States invites other countries to collaborate on bringing an end to China’s repression of this religious minority.

Canada

Since the Canadian parliament has passed the motion on February 23, Canada became the second country to recognize China’s committing of genocide. It is also important to note that an amendment passed by lawmakers called upon the International Olympic Committee to move the 2022 Winter Olympics from Beijing in the event that the Xinjiang policy continues.

The Federal Republic of Germany

Germany has explicitly expressed its concerns about the Xinjiang situation and has led dozens of countries to call on China to respect the human rights of its religious minorities. In 2020, the German Ambassador presented a statement backed by 39 countries condemning China’s abuses against the Uyghur population.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands

On February 25, the Dutch parliament became the first European legislature to label China's treatment of its Uyghur minority as a genocide. The nonbinding motion pointed out that China's "measures intended to prevent births" and operations of "punishment camps" pertain to the United Nations Resolution 260, which is known as the genocide convention.

The Republic of Cuba

Cuba is among the 50 plus countries that defended China's policies in regards to combating "terrorism and extremism" in the Xinjiang region. In support of the actions taken by the Chinese Government, Cuba denounced the "unfounded allegations" made by countries such as the United States and condemned the politically-motivated interferences against China. In 2020, in opposition to Germany's statement, the nation's UN representative led another statement on behalf of 45 countries in favor of the measures adopted by the Chinese authority. Within the statement, it was argued that the Xinjiang policies helped to ensure the wellbeing of all ethnic groups as it maintained a peaceful environment with no terrorist attacks in the past three years.

The Russian Federation

Russia is one of the 45 countries in support of the Cuban statement and one of the endorsers of a Pro-China letter written in 2019. In addition, the foreign minister of Russia has partnered with China and made a joint condemnation of Western sanctions on China over the abuse of the Uyghur Muslims.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In support of its largest trading partner, Saudi Arabia has expressed strong approval of China's policies toward the Uyghurs despite being a Muslim country. During a visit to the Chinese capital, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia remarked

on his support for China to exercise its right to carry out “anti-terrorism” and “de-extremism” measures.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
28 October 2013	Three Uyghurs drive a truck into a crowd in Beijing leading to 42 injured and 5 dead. Authorities blamed the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) for the attack, which was also the "first suspected Uyghur-led act of political violence."
29 May 2015	Funding for the “Xinjiang Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project” (the name similarly used to address the detention centers) is approved by the World Bank.
2016	“The Chinese government begins collecting biometric data such as DNA, voice recordings, and facial scans from the entire population of Xinjiang to track daily activities on WeChat through messages, calls, photos, and videos.”
14 February 2017	Three Uyghurs attack and kill five civilians.
4 March 2017	The “XUAR Department of Justice issues a directive ordering the establishment of transformation centres throughout southern Xinjiang”.
13 August 2018	The existence of the internment program is confirmed at the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

August 2020 A “satellite imagery study by BuzzFeed revealed that Xinjiang authorities had built over 260 massive detention structures since 2017”.

2020 A report by the Human Rights Watch stated that “this growing international willingness to condemn the Chinese government forced it to respond, and Beijing for the first time gave confirmation of the number of Uighur and other Turkic Muslims detained in Xinjiang, revealing that 1.3 million people had gone through what it termed ‘vocational training centres’”.

UN involvement

The United Nations expressed concerns about the credible reports they received with respect to the infringement of human rights practiced within the Xinjiang region of China. During an interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres revealed that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights (OHCHR) is negotiating with China with regard to the granting of unconstrained access to Xinjiang for the purpose of conducting investigations into their detention centers. However, there is a flaw within the structure of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that protects China from being held responsible for genocide and other crimes against humanity occurring within its borders. This is thanks to the veto powers which the nation obtains as one of the permanent members of that committee, causing no resolution going against the Xinjiang policy to be passed.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue (Past action)

Nations have taken various approaches to tackle this issue and some of these include:

1. Labelling China's actions as genocide

The United States was the first country to declare the human rights abuses of the Uyghurs as genocide on January 19, 2021. Countries such as Canada and the Netherlands supported the United States by passing a non-binding motion in February 2021 to recognize China's actions as genocide, followed by the United Kingdom's House of Commons in April 2021. The involvement of major countries in this issue is the first step in order to force China to stop their actions. Furthermore, the harsh term 'genocide' used to describe their actions demonstrates to other countries the severity of the situation, which will spark more international support in order to solve this issue.

2. Imposing legal sanctions on Chinese officials involved in the oppression of Uyghurs

On March 22, 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctioned two current Chinese government officials in relation to the serious human rights violations against ethnic minorities such as the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. These individuals were Wang Junzheng, the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), and Chen Mingguo, Director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (XPSB). The actions taken by the United States were coordinated with the European Union, United Kingdom, and Canada, who also made similar moves in order to exert maximum pressure on the Chinese government. Although this has created political and financial consequences, due to the sanctions including travel bans and asset freezes, it is a monumental step in the right direction. According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, these global human rights sanctions regimes are a method to pressure the government of China to take accountability for

their actions and prohibit their access to the international financial system in the meantime.

3. Banning imports of various goods produced in the Xinjiang province on accounts of forced labor

On February 18, 2021, the U.S. House of Representatives reintroduced the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. This act aims to “ban all products from Xinjiang unless the importer can prove through ‘clear and convincing evidence’ that the goods were not made by forced labor.” Some of the products under this list include tomatoes, cotton, and hair products. Additionally, many global clothing brands such as H&M have announced a ban on buying cotton from the Xinjiang region. This is a major movement that encourages people of all nations to open their eyes to the severity of the situation in Xinjiang. It also jeopardizes China's economy which will force them to think about the consequences of their inhumane actions.

Possible Solutions

While the conflict is a clear violation of human rights, previous evidence shows that China has no plan in putting an end to the discrimination and abuse even after being called out by multiple foreign governments. Therefore there is a need for intervention from the global community. A possible solution that would pressure China into ending these “re-education” camps would be for foreign governments to implement sanctions on China. However, in order for these sanctions to have an impact they must be significant enough to be detrimental to China's economy, forcing them to solve the issue. These sanctions would preferably come from powerful governments, such as the United States and Canada. Another option in resolving this issue may be partition. Partition is defined as “a change of political borders cutting through at least one territory considered a homeland by some community.” However, this would mean that

the Chinese government would be willing to contribute to a resolution. While this is extremely unlikely given the state of China's current government, it would allow for the Uighurs to have political space. Overall finding a solution to these extreme violations of human rights by the Chinese government may be extremely difficult, however it is crucial. And without the cooperation of China it may require foreign governments to go to extreme measures in order to put an end to these inhumane actions.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The sustainable development goal this issue relates to is goal number 16, **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**. In order for this goal to be achieved the issue regarding the violation of human rights of the Uighur population in China needs to be resolved. As a global society we cannot promote “inclusive societies for sustainable development” if there are still groups of people being punished and marginalized for their beliefs. Additionally, in order to promote peaceful societies that provide justice for all — one should be able to freely express their religion without fear of retribution or consequences. In order to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, there cannot be religious nor political divides that lead to violence and the violation of human rights.

Appendix

I. Links:

- A. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>
 1. This link provides further information on the Sustainable Development Goal related to the issue, and will allow delegates to further their understanding on the topic.
- B. <https://apnews.com/article/ap-top-news-international-news-weekend-reads-china-health-269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c>

1. News article that provides graphs and further evidence into the violation Uighur women face regarding their reproductive rights.

C. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/features/uighurs/>

1. An interactive series that gives a further overview of the issue, why it came to be, and the world's response.

II. Graphs & Maps

A. <https://www.businessinsider.com/china-uighur-prison-camp-suspected-locations-maps-2019-11>

1. Maps and images that demonstrate the size and locations of the suspected re-education camps located in Xinjiang, Western China.

B. <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22311356/china-uyghur-birthrate-sterilization-genocide>

1. Article with graphs demonstrating the decrease in the Uighur population over the years, and the increase in IUDs and sterilization methods.

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