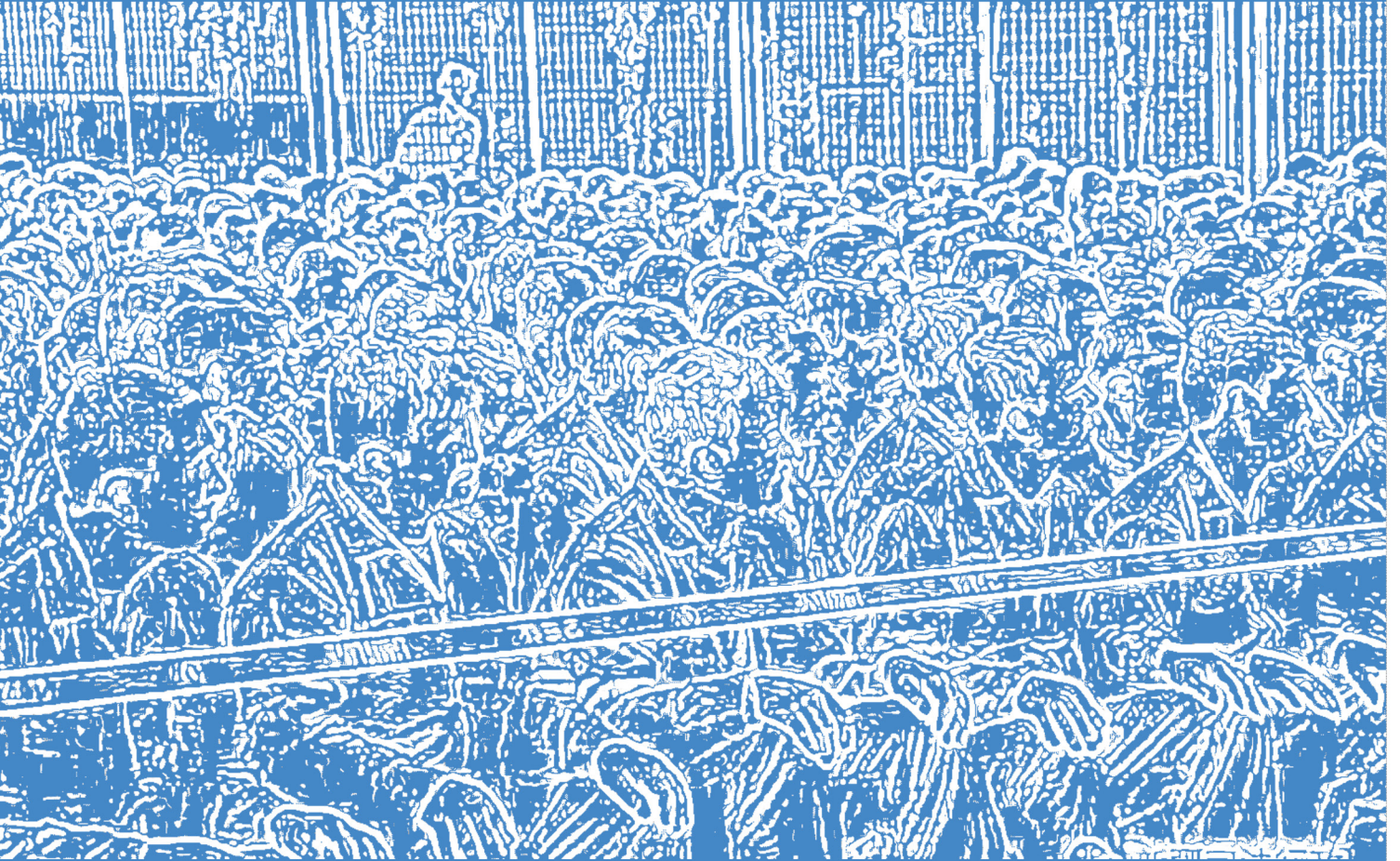




WORLD  
UYGHUR  
CONGRESS



# 2020 | ANNUAL REPORT

2020 Human Rights Situation  
in East Turkistan

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The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is an international organization that represents the collective interests of the Uyghur people, both in East Turkistan and abroad. The principal objective of the WUC is to promote democracy, human rights and freedom for the Uyghur people and to use peaceful, non-violent and democratic means to determine their future.

For more information, please visit our website: [www.uyghurcongress.org](http://www.uyghurcongress.org)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2020 has been notable as the features of the Chinese crackdown in East Turkistan became increasingly apparent to the world at large. These features include systematic destruction of Uyghur culture and religion, forced sterilizations, abortions, and other birth prevention measures, State-corporate nexus in exploitation of Uyghur forced labour and large-scale use of digital surveillance and big data, so much so that the Uyghur genocide can safely be described as the first technology-enabled genocide of the world.

During much of 2020, the Chinese government maintained its heavy handed policies in the region under the excuse of preventing the Covid-19 pandemic. Governmental authorities imposed sudden and arbitrary lockdowns, sprayed Uyghurs with corrosive chemicals, created artificial food shortages and forced Uyghurs to ingest dubious medicines. Furthermore, Uyghur forced labour was being utilized to produce safety equipment and disposable masks for the rest of the world.

In spite of the global pledge to “never again” allow the horrors of the Holocaust to be repeated, we witness the Chinese government’s continued development and expansion of the concentration camp system in East Turkistan. Survivors have described the goal of the Chinese Communist party to be the destruction of every Uyghur through surveillance, mass arbitrary internment, indoctrination, dehumanization, sterilization, torture and rapes in the camps.

This year has further seen the pillage of precious cultural heritage in East Turkistan. Reports have indicated that over two-thirds of the region’s mosques have been affected and about half of the protected cultural sites have been damaged or destroyed.<sup>1</sup> The Uyghur language and religious practices are also at a heightened risk of disappearance as they have been prohibited in large parts of East Turkistan.

In the face of these developments, we also witnessed brave solidarity displayed by the Uyghur diaspora in support of their friends and families back home. There were large-scale advocacy and awareness-raising efforts all over the world for the enforced disappearances and grave human rights violations being perpetuated by the Chinese State in East Turkistan.

Finally and most importantly, we saw the international community including States, international organizations and civil society actors take a firm stand against the Chinese government by increasingly speaking out against the Uyghur genocide and imposing concrete sanctions and restrictions on Chinese individuals and entities. All major nations including the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, Australia, Japan and some Muslim countries have raised their voice against the plight of the Uyghurs and their continued genocide.

# Human Rights During Times of Covid



Virus threat in camps; Image: Yette Su

Globally, 2020 has been a difficult year. While the entire world has been tackling the threat of the coronavirus, Uyghurs have been weighed down under the double burden of living through a genocide and surviving the pandemic. The Uyghur experience of the pandemic has been particularly brutal as they have been subjected to arbitrary and enforced disappearances into concentration camps, forced labour in government-sponsored factories, sexual violence and forced sterilization and separation from their loved ones in their own homeland.

The subjugation and repression of Uyghurs has shown no sign of decreasing even in the midst of a deadly pandemic that continues to ravage the world.

In mid-July 2020, the Chinese government imposed an arbitrary and sudden lockdown in East Turkistan after a cluster of cases emerged in its capital Urumqi.<sup>2</sup> Residents were given no notice of the lockdown before the authorities abruptly ordered them to stay inside their already sharply monitored homes. Harsh restrictions made it impossible for residents to procure food, medicine and other essentials.<sup>3</sup>

The brutal lockdown included the government forcibly sealing the houses of residents and people being chained to community gates with handcuffs, reportedly as a punishment for leaving their homes.<sup>4</sup> One middle-aged Uyghur woman reported that when she was detained at the height of China's coronavirus outbreak, she and others in her cell had to strip naked once a week as guards hosed them down with disinfectant. The woman recalled that

***“It was scalding, my hands were ruined, my skin was peeling”.***<sup>5</sup>

Many residents also reported that they were being coerced into swallowing the “Lianhua Qingwen” pill, a herbal remedy China has been promoting as a treatment for Covid-19.<sup>6</sup> Research on the medicine remains dubious and there is a dearth of rigorous clinical data to show its effectiveness against the virus. A Uyghur woman who was released after over a month in detention and subsequently locked in her room, reported that once a day, community workers forced white unmarked bottles of traditional Chinese medicines on her, telling her that she would be detained if she did not drink them.<sup>7</sup> Some residents also complained that they were required to film themselves while taking the medicine.<sup>8</sup>

Videos, photos and writings available online provide credible and highly alarming evidence that the sudden lockdown without notice also created a massive hunger crisis in East Turkistan.<sup>9</sup> A particularly disturbing video sourced from Weibo shows a young Uyghur man screaming

***“I’m starving. I’m starving. My wife and children are starving”.***

at several officials who are filming him. In another video a young woman speaking Chinese chases after an elderly Uyghur man, asking him to remain indoors. He responds to her in Uyghur asking: “What is a person supposed to eat when they get hungry?”<sup>10</sup>

The impact of the virus has been the most harsh on the 3 million Uyghur and Turkic people who have been arbitrarily detained in internment camps reminiscent of Nazi-style concentration camps. Survivors have described the detention facilities to be extremely unhygienic and cramped. One survivor said that inmates were made to share a handful of plastic bowls and spoons between them all.<sup>11</sup> Such treatment is especially ironic as the burden of the management of the virus globally has fallen on the shoulders of Uyghurs in concentration camps and factories. Investigations by The New York Times have revealed that several Chinese companies may be using Uyghur forced labor to produce Covid-19 related personal protective equipment and face masks that are then exported to various foreign countries.<sup>12</sup>

While exclaiming worldwide solidarity to combat the virus, the international community thus holds a moral responsibility to protect the Uyghurs from what is being increasingly recognized as a gruesome 21st-century genocide.

# Due Process Violations

## Enforced Disappearances



Disappeared Uyghurs; Image: sulu.artco

In early 2017, there was a dramatic rise in the number of enforced disappearances of Uyghurs in East Turkistan. Notably, this coincided with the introduction of Chinese “re-education camps” in the region, where the disappeared Uyghurs were being sent off to. Initially 120,000 Uyghurs were sent to five camps around Kashgar. By March 2018, it was estimated that 880,000 to one million Uyghurs were sent to these camps.<sup>13</sup> Today, around 3 million Uyghurs are believed to have disappeared into China’s dubious network of concentration camp facilities.<sup>14</sup>

The disappeared have been detained under the pretext that they need “education” to rid them of extremist thought. However, this claim is completely baseless as many of the detained are educated and well-respected figures. The Chinese government is persecuting Uyghurs on the basis of their ethnic and religious identity.<sup>15</sup>

Tashpolat Tiyp is one such example. Tiyp, a model academic, was the head of Xinjiang University. He was globally connected, and held an honorary degree from a prestigious university in Paris. However, in 2017, he disappeared with no explanations by officials. His friends believe that after a secret trial, Tiyp was convicted of separatism and sentenced to death.<sup>17</sup> In another such instance, Adila Sadir narrated that her father, Sadir Ali, an educated entrepreneur in real estate in Urumqi had been missing. It was only later that she learnt that he was arrested by authorities in June 2018 and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment, allegedly because he fasted during Ramadan - even though fasting was not prohibited at the time.<sup>18</sup> Adila also reported that her grand uncle Abidin Ayup, a 92-year old religious scholar, had disappeared. Despite his age and health condition, he was sent to a concentration camp in 2018.

***The court document referred to him as “an inheritor of religious extremist thought”.<sup>19</sup>***

His family still has no information about him.<sup>20</sup>

Simultaneously, Uyghurs abroad also started losing contact with their friends and families in East Turkistan. The Uyghur Transitional Justice Database (UTJD), a Norway-based project, has been recording the details of the disappeared in East Turkistan based on the testimonies of their relatives and friends settled in foreign countries.<sup>21</sup> Till date, it has recorded numerous stories of Uyghurs

disappeared in their own homeland (over 5,081 in over 95 internment camps and 83 prisons). Similarly the Xinjiang Victims Database has collected testimonies related to over 13,000 victims.<sup>16</sup> However, there are hundreds of thousands more such stories that will never be told because the disappeared do not have families abroad or their loved ones have been silenced by the Chinese State. It is easy to think of these cases as numbers alone, however, these are mothers, daughters, sons, uncles, lovers and friends being missed by their families and loved ones. China has left no stone unturned in its attempts to detain and disappear everyone, ranging from ordinary people, activists, scholars, writers, the elderly to even little children.



## “Re-education” Camps

Most of the disappeared have most likely been sent to what China refers to as “re-education camps”. Till 2018, China denied the existence of such camps, after which officials started normalizing the camps as places providing “free vocational training” rather than what they truly are: concentration camps where Uyghurs and other Turkic people are being kept indefinitely without due process.<sup>22</sup>

Sayragul Sawutbay from Mongulkore county, Ghulja in East Turkistan was forced by the Chinese government to teach Mandarin in a Chinese concentration camp between November 2017 and March 2018 before her miraculous escape. Sayragul was awarded the 2020 International Women of Courage Awards by the United States and the 2021 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award by the German city of Nuremberg for revealing the truth about the inside functioning of Chinese concentration camps. She narrated that she saw people from all kinds of backgrounds, from 13 to 84 year-olds, detained in the camps. There were people who had reared animals all their lives. People could be heard sobbing and crying for help at all times and sexual violence and torture was rampant. She said that the police had unlimited powers in the camps. They forced people to eat pork and tortured those who refused. Even if they killed Uyghurs, they were not punished.<sup>23</sup>

Her story can be corroborated with stories of other first-hand witnesses. Qelbinur Sidik was also forced to teach Mandarin in a Chinese concentration camp in 2017. Before she started, she was merely informed that she would be teaching Chinese to “illiterates”. She was asked to teach through CCTV screens on the wall, and on the other side were her students, including women and elderly, crowded in dark rooms without windows, beds or other basic furniture. She was also made to teach people whose hands and feet were chained, some of them being forced to crawl. She also saw that many of her students did not need

any education and had been well-off, honest people before the crackdown. She spotted one of the richest men of the capital Urumqi in the camps until he disappeared. Her students would disappear often.

***“At first, they were in good health”, she said, “but I saw them wither away. Some couldn’t even walk anymore”.***

She saw intellectuals, businessmen, and students speaking perfect Mandarin, who were being punished for crimes as simple as browsing Facebook, which is prohibited in China.

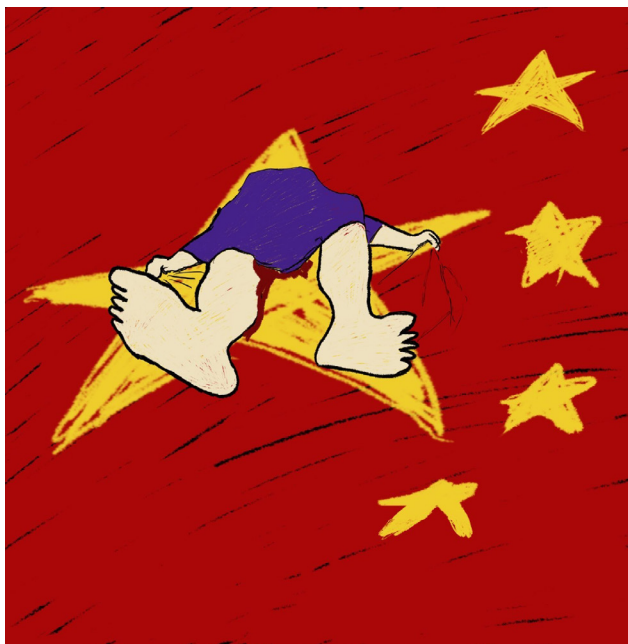
A police officer at the camp told her about the torture methods that they used. “He explained to me that there are four kinds of electric shocks: the chair, the glove, the helmet and anal rape with a stick”. She was told that there was also a camp for those who had studied abroad. All the inmates there were highly educated and were detained upon arrival in East Turkistan when returning to visit their families. The sanitary conditions in camps were vile. There was only a single toilet bucket in each cell that was emptied once a day. One minute was allowed for face washing in the morning and showers were rationed to once a month. Inmates were injected with unknown substances, their blood was collected and they were given strange pills to swallow. Sidik was eventually summarily dismissed, but she was continuously blackmailed until she escaped to the Netherlands.<sup>24</sup>

Deaths are frequent in the camps. In May 2018, World Uyghur Congress President Dolkun Isa received verified information - one month after the event - that his mother had died in an internment camp, where she was detained under the charge of “religious extremism”.<sup>26</sup> Another former camp detainee, Mihrigul Tursun, stated that she witnessed the death of nine women in the ward.<sup>27</sup>

***She related her horror story of being drugged, interrogated for days without sleep, and strapped to a chair and given electric shocks. She was separated from her infant triplets for three months. When she was finally released, one of her babies had died,***

and the other two were gravely ill. The surviving babies were tube fed and underwent surgeries, she said.<sup>25</sup> Similar tales have been narrated by Zumret Dawut and scores of other Uyghur and Kazakh women.

## Sexual Violence and Forced Sterilization



Mass rapes; Image: sulu.artco

Survivors report that sexual violence is rampant in the concentration camps. Recently, in detailed accounts obtained by the BBC, women who have been released from Chinese government's concentration camps reported being systematically raped, sexually abused and tortured in detention. Tursunay Ziawudun, who spent nine months inside China's vast and secretive system of detention camps in East Turkistan, spoke about women being removed from cells every night and raped by one or more masked Chinese men. She said that she was tortured and gang-raped on three separate occasions, each time by two or three men.

The BBC also interviewed a Kazakh woman from East Turkistan who was detained for 18 months in a concentration camp. She said that she was "forced to strip Uyghur women naked and handcuff them, before leaving them alone with Chinese men". In another interview, Gulzira Auelkhan stated that the Chinese men "would pay sums of money to have their pick of the prettiest young inmates". Referring to a fellow raped woman, Gulzira said that

***she was "like someone who simply existed, otherwise she was dead, completely finished by the rapes".***<sup>28</sup>

Ziawudun also corroborated the claim that women in camps were made to undergo forceful sterilization procedures. She said that she saw a woman who was just 20 years old coerced into being sterilized. A recent investigation by the Associated Press also provides evidence for the same. As per interviews and data analysis, it was found that the Chinese state regularly subjects Uyghur women to pregnancy checks and forces intrauterine devices, sterilization and even abortion on hundreds of thousands. Seven camp survivors told the Associated Press that they were force-fed birth control pills or injected with fluids without any explanations. Many felt dizzy, tired or ill. Various women stopped getting their periods. Many discovered that they were sterile after having been released and leaving China.<sup>29</sup> The aforementioned Qelbinur Sidik also stated that she was forced to undergo sterilization at the age of 50.<sup>30</sup>

A recent report on forced sterilisation in East Turkistan demonstrates that it has been an intentional strategy from the Chinese government to reduce and manage the Uyghur population.

***Official CCP documents ‘bluntly mandate that birth control violations are punishable by extrajudicial internment in “training” camps, <sup>35</sup>***

confirming evidence from the leaked “Qarakash List” document.<sup>31</sup> Further documents from 2019 reveal plans for a campaign of mass female sterilisation in rural regions dominated by Uyghur populations, targeting between 14 (in Guma County)<sup>32</sup> and 34 percent (in Hotan City) of all women of childbearing age<sup>33</sup> with sufficient funding to perform hundreds of thousands of tubal ligation sterilization procedures in 2019 and 2020.<sup>34</sup>

The report further states that by 2019, Chinese authorities planned to subject at least 80% of women of childbearing age in southern Xinjiang to birth prevention surgeries. In 2018, 80% of all new IUD (a contraceptive device) placements in China were performed in Xinjiang, despite the fact that it makes up only 1.8% of China’s population. The report states that the project was implemented in all of the southern parts of the Uyghur Region, where most of the Uyghur population resides, and continued in 2020 with increased funding.<sup>36</sup>

The efficacy of the forced sterilization policy can be judged by the fact that the population growth rates in the two largest Uyghur prefectures in the Uyghur Region fell by 84% between 2015- 2018 and fell even further in 2019.<sup>38</sup> In 2020, the Chinese authorities set an unprecedented near-zero growth target in the Kizilsu prefecture, a region dominated by Uyghurs and Kazakhs.<sup>39</sup> Women detained in the concentration camps corroborate

***“Their goal is to destroy everyone,”***

they say, referring to the surveillance, internment, indoctrination, dehumanisation, sterilization, torture and rapes.<sup>37</sup>

# Labour Rights



Uyghur women work in a cloth factory in Hotan county, Xinjiang province, China; Image: DUHRF

The concentration camps have been functioning since 2017 and since then it is estimated that around 3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic people have disappeared into them.<sup>40</sup> However, it is being reported that the “re-education camps” are now entering a new phase of development. Chinese government officials now claim that all “trainees” have “graduated” and have been transferred to factories all over China to be put into the productive workforce. China’s labor transfer schemes are endorsed to be part of a massive poverty alleviation campaign of the Chinese government.

However, in February 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) came out with a report titled “Uyghurs for Sale”, that put forward evidence to suggest that more than 80,000 Uyghurs and other Turkic people have been forcefully transported from the camps to other parts of China in special segregated trains to work in factories with abusive working conditions, such as political indoctrination, “military-style” management and a ban on religious practices.<sup>41</sup>

## Forced Labour

Chinese state media claims that participation in labour transfer programs is voluntary and officials have denied any commercial use of forced labour from East Turkistan. However, once they have been placed in the factories, it is extremely difficult for Uyghurs to refuse or escape these work assignments which are intertwined with the apparatus of detention and political indoctrination. Constant surveillance and the threat of arbitrary detention continually hangs over those who refuse the government-sponsored assignments. The workers' ideologies and behaviors are closely monitored in the factories. The ASPI report brought to light that the factory bosses manage Uyghur workers by constantly tracking them, physically and electronically. Additionally, the police regularly searched dormitories and phones of the factory workers for religious content.

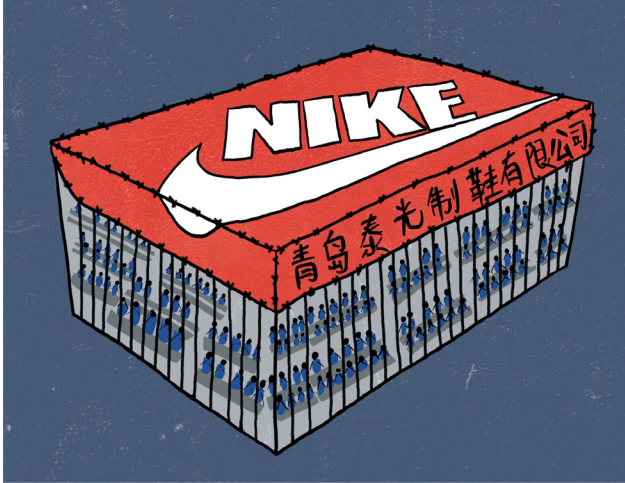
***If a Quran is found, the worker can be sent back to the “re-education camp” for 3 to 5 years.***<sup>43</sup>

There exists a close nexus between the government and Chinese companies to jointly exploit the Uyghur workers. Government documents indicate the existence of a large-scale government plan, known as the “mutual pairing assistance” program, for companies from various parts of China to establish satellite factories in East Turkistan in conjunction with the concentration camps. Reports indicate that through this program, richer regions, mostly in the eastern parts of China, are spending billions of Chinese yuans to establish factories in East Turkistan.

Some of these directly involve the use of labour from concentration camps, while others are part of abusive labour programs that require parents to leave children as young as 18 months old in state-run orphanages, while the parents are coerced into working full-time under constant surveillance. Chinese government authorities incentivize and facilitate these companies to open factories near the concentration camps. Local governments also receive additional funds for each individual from the camps who is forced to work in these sites for minimal or no compensation. In April 2019, Xinjiang authorities started setting up a plan to attract textile and garment companies. Under this plan, local governments received funds to build production sites for these companies near the camps. Companies received huge subsidies to train each inmate (approx. 260 USD per inmate), as well as other incentives. The subsidies, coupled with the artificially low labour costs, create huge gains for these companies. Additionally, there is also evidence of forced prison labour in the cotton, apparel and agricultural sectors. Prisoners are forced to work under threat of harsh penalties, such as solitary confinement.<sup>42</sup>

It is estimated that 1 in 5 cotton garments produced in the global apparel market today have been produced in such factories in East Turkistan and are therefore tainted by forced labor.<sup>44</sup> ASPI's research identified 82 foreign and Chinese companies that are directly or indirectly benefiting from the use of Uyghur workers in these abusive factories. Many of these are leading international brands that ordinary people all over the world use everyday.<sup>45</sup>

## Working Conditions



Forced labour box; Image: sulu.artco

Working conditions are harsh with long hours, poor food quality and little to no pay. The ASPI report informs that

***most of the labourers are overworked as they work in the factories during the day and in the evening and have to attend a night school where they study Mandarin, sing the Chinese national anthem and receive “patriotic education”.***

They are not allowed to go home even for holidays. Additionally, the workers are forced to live in segregated and carefully guarded dormitories. They have little freedom of movement and they are completely isolated from their families and children. In one of the factories in East China it was noted that the Uyghur workers spoke almost no Mandarin and thus communication with locals was non-existent.

The Uyghurs were made to eat in a separate canteen or in a Muslim restaurant across the road from the factory, where the “halal” signs had been crossed out. It was also reported that in some cases Uyghurs were paid considerably less than their Han counterparts.<sup>48</sup>

In order to tackle the situation of forced labour in Chinese factories, the United States House of Representatives passed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Bill. If passed by the United States Congress, this law would make it official policy to assume that all goods manufactured in East Turkistan are made with forced labour. It will go on to impose sanctions on “any foreign person who knowingly engages” in forced labour using Uyghur and other Turkic people. It would further require firms to disclose their dealings with East Turkistan-based factories.<sup>46</sup> In January 2021, the United Kingdom and Canada also made coordinated announcements to help prevent their respective businesses from being complicit in, or profiting from, human rights violations in East Turkistan. They announced a number of measures including prohibition of imports of goods produced from forced labour, sanctions and export controls.<sup>47</sup>

# Freedom of Expression and Privacy Violations



Suffocated freedoms; Image: Yette Su

It is no secret that China suppresses digital freedoms on a grand scale. In 2020, for the sixth consecutive year, China retained its position as the worst abuser of internet freedom in Freedom on the Net rankings.<sup>49</sup> China commonly arrests journalists, practices mass censorship and uses extensive surveillance to implement its policy goals and national security objectives. The government's monitoring of private communications within the country is not only common, but in fact popular.<sup>50</sup> China's complete disregard for individual privacy is exemplified by the fact that encrypted messengers like Whatsapp, Telegram and now Signal have been banned in China.<sup>51</sup>

## Arrests of Journalists, Scholars and Prominent Personalities

In 2020, China continued the repressive policies of subjugating and arresting journalists. Paris-based Reporters Without Borders has ranked China 177th out of 180 countries in an annual global press freedom index issued in April 2020. It went on to state that "China's state and privately-owned media are under the Communist Party's close control while foreign reporters trying to work in China are encountering more and more obstacles in the field". More than 100 journalists and bloggers have been detained in China on grounds related to threats to national security. A disproportionate number of them are Uyghurs.<sup>52</sup>

Ilham Weli (Xinjiang Daily's deputy editor-in-chief), Mirkami Ablimit (the head of the newspaper's subsidiary Xinjiang Farmer's Daily) and Memtimin Obul and Juret Haji (directors of Xinjiang Daily) remain arrested for publishing "two-faced" articles in the newspaper's Uyghur language section. The vague term "two-faced" is commonly used by the Chinese authorities to accuse those who allegedly secretly oppose government policies.<sup>53</sup> Gulmira Imin, a Uyghur website administrator, who was jailed for life in 2019 on charges of "splittism, leaking state secrets and organizing an illegal demonstration", also remains in prison. She was allegedly tortured in custody.



Educated and well to do Uyghur scholars and prominent personalities, who have no need for “education,” have not been spared. The Uyghur Human Rights Project has identified at least 386 Uyghur intellectuals detained and disappeared since early 2017.<sup>54</sup> Aziz Isa, an Uyghur intellectual in exile has stated that the Chinese government is targeting Uyghur intellectuals and elites in order to re-engineer the Uyghur population to suit a Han Chinese nationalistic vision and interests.<sup>55</sup> Islamic scholar Mohammed Salih Hajim, anthropologist Rahile Dawut, pop singers Abdurehim Heyt and Ablajan Awut, comedian Adil Mijit and football player Erfan Hezim are just some examples.<sup>56</sup> Another notable example is Perhat Tursun, one of the most famous modernist Uyghur authors. He is a self-proclaimed Kafka character whose novels are very influential in Uyghur society.

Two years ago, in January 2018, it was confirmed that Perhat Tursun had been detained by the Chinese government. In January 2020, news filtered out that he has been given a 16-year prison sentence.<sup>57</sup>

More notably, professor and economist Ilham Tohti, winner of the European Parliament’s 2019 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought who was sentenced to life in prison for “separatism”, also remains in prison. Jewher Ilham, Tohti’s daughter, recently told Radio Free Asia that

***“Without free speech, how is it possible for people to gain understanding between each other? Without a free press, how do people learn the truth?”<sup>58</sup>***

The Chinese authorities have also been deploying intimidation tactics to obstruct the functioning of foreign journalists and experts covering the Uyghur genocide. Foreign journalists are being forced to leave China. The head of BuzzFeed Beijing, Megha Rajagopalan<sup>59</sup> is among the 20 journalists who have been expelled from China in 2020 alone.<sup>60</sup>

## Mass Surveillance and the Use of Big Data



A Chinese national flag flutters near surveillance cameras mounted on a lamp post in Beijing; Image:

Of all the information coming out of East Turkistan, the biggest reveal has been The Intercept's leak of more than 400 pages of internal Chinese documents in January 2021. The Ürümqi Police Database Reveals brought to light the suffocating surveillance of Uyghurs in their own homeland. Chinese authorities have collected millions of text messages, contacts and phone call records as well as e-commerce and banking records from Uyghurs and Turkic people. Additionally, through the "Physicals for All" program, the Chinese government has been collecting pictures, fingerprints, iris scans, blood type, DNA and "household registration" information of all people in the region.

Local health authorities directly forward this information to the police for profiling and storage purposes. All of this information is linked to the individual's national identification number. People are not informed about what the government intends to do with this information and neither are they permitted to opt out of this program. China does not have relevant privacy regulations in place. This kind of information gathering is in complete violation of individual privacy, dignity and bodily integrity.<sup>61</sup>

***Invasive surveillance techniques are also being used to watch for signs of any involvement with religion, which is generally equated with extremism.***

For example the Chinese government has been found using a sophisticated software platform (the “Integrated Joint Operations Platform”) to generate a list of Uyghurs engaging in “problematic behaviors”. The big data program flags individuals who may be engaging in suspicious behavior on the “Aksu list”. Chinese officials then evaluate and send suspected individuals to concentration camps in East Turkistan. The “suspicious activities” can be as innocent as practicing Islam, traveling, contacting people abroad or even just getting off the digital grid (e.g. turning devices off).<sup>62</sup>

It is clear that the Chinese government has no plans to stop. It has been reported that it is now working to develop systems using home televisions and smartphones to push video surveillance into people’s homes. Beginning in 2016, the police in the region started using hand-held or desktop scanning devices that can break into smartphones and extract and analyze all information contained in them. Residents in East Turkistan are also being required to install GPS tracking devices in their vehicles. Those who refuse are not allowed to buy fuel.<sup>63</sup>

A former employee of TikTok’s parent company, ByteDance, has revealed that on request from Chinese authorities, it tried to develop an algorithm to censor live streams in the Uyghur language.<sup>64</sup>

***The Chinese system has pushed digital surveillance to its limits. No country in the world has used big data in such a way to persecute its own citizens.***

## Propaganda by the Chinese Government

The Chinese government has deployed an aggressive information control strategy to prevent access to objective information on East Turkistan. White papers issued by the Chinese government are one of the primary means of spreading rampant misinformation and propaganda. They have been deployed by the Party for various reasons, from reshaping historical narratives to propagating lies like the party-state being immensely threatened by religious extremism and separatism. The government has also tried to use White papers to advocate that concentration camps are humane institutions that promote vocational education.<sup>65</sup> A White paper issued in 2019 went on to state that East Turkistan has long been an inseparable part of Chinese territory, that the region has never been referred to as “East Turkistan” and that different ethnic groups living in East Turkistan constitute an integral part of the Chinese nation. It also spread misinformation about the demographics of the region by stating that Uyghurs are not descendents of Turks and that Islam is neither an indigenous belief of the Uyghur people, nor the sole one of the Uyghur people.<sup>66</sup> Another recent White paper titled “Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang”, issued in September 2020, sought to whitewash the occurrences in the concentration camps by claiming that China is providing “organized employment-oriented training on standard spoken and written Chinese, relevant legal knowledge and labor skills”. It further claimed that its “vocational training” is necessary to move people out of poverty and “backwardness”.

Another popular means of spreading misinformation has been a type of hostage propaganda in which the Chinese government is producing and disseminating videos featuring coerced statements by the family members of the Uyghur diaspora. The

***coerced family members are forced to denounce their overseas relatives for spreading “lies”.***

These propaganda videos add to the trauma that Uyghurs overseas are already suffering due to their relatives being missing in the camp system.<sup>67</sup> On January 3, 2020, CCTV Video news agency brought out a press release by the Information Office of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, in which the authorities claimed that most people labeled as “missing” by international media were actually leading normal and safe lives. Former detainees in the videos were shown to be praising the vocational schools and training centers that help them overcome their past when they were “influenced by extreme thoughts”.<sup>68</sup>

# Religious and Cultural Persecution



Mass internment; Image: sulu.artco

In April 2018, the Chinese government issued a white paper titled “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief” in an attempt to salvage its plummeting reputation as a country that is heavily clamping down on religious groups. This white paper was a poor attempt at whitewashing the Chinese position on freedom of religious belief. It stated that different religious communities in China have the freedom to practice self-management and independence in religious affairs.

It also went on to state that “believers and non-believers in China enjoyed the same political, economic, social and cultural rights”.<sup>69</sup> The content of this White paper is in complete contrast to the plethora of evidence being brought to light by various reputed media channels and testimonies by Uyghurs.

## Counter-Terrorism Efforts

The Chinese government has been basing its brutal suppression of Uyghurs on its efforts to curb terrorism, a notion rooted in blatant islamophobia. Recently leaked documents of the Chinese government, the Xinjiang Papers, reveal that terrorist attacks abroad and the drawdown of American troops in Afghanistan heightened the Chinese leadership's fears and helped shape the crackdown. Chinese officials reportedly argued that attacks in Britain resulted from policies that put "human rights above security". Party leader Xi Jinping himself urged the party to carry out the brutal crackdown of Uyghurs and Turkic people in East Turkistan. The leaked papers revealed that

***officials expected students to be "grateful" that the authorities had taken their relatives away:***

"No matter what age, anyone who has been infected by religious extremism must undergo study".<sup>70</sup>

China's anti-terror policies are implemented using the notorious Counter-terrorism Law implemented in 2015.<sup>71</sup> This law defines terrorism as "Any advocacy or activity that, by means of violence, sabotage or threat, aims to create social panic, undermine public safety, infringe on personal and property rights, or coerce a state organ or an international organization in order to achieve political, ideological or other objectives".

The usage of the vague and broad language in this text is being interpreted to include Islamic "thought" or "speech" which has made it legally justifiable for the Chinese State to arrest Uyghurs on arbitrary grounds. As the various aforementioned leaks reveal, the aim of the Chinese government is to utilize its draconian laws to completely eradicate Uyghur religion and culture. In pursuance of this, the CCP enacted the "de-extremification regulation" in March 2017. The Regulations prohibit a large range of behaviors associated with Islam that are labeled "extremist". The list of banned expressions include having long beards, wearing long Islamic clothing, fasting during Ramadan, Uyghur names for children and even possessing the Holy Quran itself.<sup>72</sup> Taking note of this, concerned United Nations Working Groups and Special Rapporteurs called on Chinese authorities to repeal the draconian regulations.<sup>73</sup>

## Destruction of Uyghur Tangible Cultural Heritage - Case Study of Kashgar



A woman walks past demolished houses in Kashgar, East Turkistan; Image: Gilles Sabrie/The New York Times

### ***Since 2015, China has been carrying out a systematic policy to destroy symbols of Uyghur heritage and culture.***

At the fore of this destruction has been the pillage of the city of Kashgar, the historical heart of Muslim Uyghur culture. Residents of the city state that Kashgar is the quintessence of Uyghur culture. It has the highest concentration of Uyghurs anywhere in the world and it is a unique cultural genius that for centuries has been the uncontested spiritual capital of the Uyghurs. With its destruction, the Chinese are destroying the heartbeat, center and epitome of Uyghur culture.<sup>76</sup> The Chinese government announced its intention to raze up to 85 percent of its Old City in 2009.<sup>77</sup> Since then, large swaths of the city have been destroyed or sinicized. Mosques in the old city have been destroyed or turned into shops or bars. Islamic signifiers such as minarets, domes and Arabic calligraphy have been removed.

Kashgar's 15th-century Id Kah Mosque has lost the star-and-crescent structures that crowned its roofs, the multicolored scriptural plaque that adorned its entrance and its congregation. The entire old city in which the mosque was ensconced has been demolished, its inhabitants have been displaced and in their place a vast plaza has been created that in no way reflects the Uyghur spirit.<sup>74</sup>

Not only has the city of Kashgar been sinicized, but its entire way of living has been decimated too. The traditional mud brick style construction has given way to Chinese style architecture, the centuries old mud-brick bazaar in the central square has been shut down, thousands of traditional Uyghur aywan houses have been razed and schools and factories in the city have been transformed into concentration camps.<sup>75</sup> The European Parliament passed a resolution in March 2011 calling on China to end forced resettlement of Uyghurs in Kashgar. However, China has continued the rampage.

## Destruction of Uyghur Intangible Cultural Heritage

The decimation of the city of Kashgar is reflective of the larger Chinese agenda to destroy all aspects of Uyghur heritage all over East Turkistan. Most mazars and mosques in the entire province have been destroyed or musemified. Pilgrimages and religious festivals have been forbidden. Uyghur language, religious leaders, food practices, traditional weddings and traditional houses have been prohibited or demolished. Uyghurs are forced to consume alcohol and pork, in total contradiction of their religious beliefs.

***A tedious and suffocating myriad of technological surveillance has been imposed on the communities and in the region to ensure that no one can practice their religion or culture even in secret.***

Separation of families is common. Children are forcefully lodged in boarding schools, away from their parents who have been forced into concentration camps. In these boarding schools they are taught Mandarin and are prohibited to speak the Uyghur language. In June 2017, a drastic five-point directive was issued by Hotan's Education Department, completely outlawing the use of the Uyghur language for students at all education levels from primary to secondary schools. In practice, this law completely prohibits young Uyghurs from being taught in the Uyghur language and even prevents them from speaking to one another in their mother tongue between classes or on campuses.

The curriculum and activities are designed to indoctrinate Uyghur students to exclusively pledge allegiance to the Communist Party and completely abandon their culture. For example, during Ramadan in 2019, school and university students were required to report to the canteens at their learning institutions at least three times per week to have lunch. If they did not do this, they themselves, their parents, as well as their school faculties could be punished or even sent to a political indoctrination camp.<sup>78</sup>



# Rights of Refugees and Diaspora

## Harassment of Uyghurs in the Diaspora



Protesters rally in support of Uyghurs' human rights in Hong Kong; Image: Reuters

An estimated 1-1.6 million Uyghurs live outside China.<sup>79</sup> Significant diasporic communities can be found in the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Smaller communities live in other countries, including Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Turkey and the United States. Members of the Uyghur diaspora often speak of the immense psychological plight of having relatives that remain in East Turkistan. In addition, they are also under direct threat from the Chinese government. Recently, Amnesty International conducted a study to assess the types of harassment faced by Uyghurs abroad. Interviewees complained about intimidating phone calls by Chinese officials to obtain personal information. Some even reported that they had seen individuals and groups of Chinese agents photographing them.<sup>80</sup>

Various Uyghur activists have been targeted for speaking out. Abdurehim Gheni, a well-known Uyghur activist in the Netherlands, told Amnesty International that he was regularly followed and intimidated by Chinese agents. He said that one time he was photographed and threatened at the weekly one-man peaceful demonstrations that he held at Dam Square in Amsterdam. Amnesty's study revealed that, like Gheni, most Uyghurs live in constant fear and mistrust as China continues to recruit informants. Marham (pseudonym), who also lives in the Netherlands, said that he was contacted over WeChat by a former classmate who now works for China's security police.

The man asked him to gather information about other Uyghurs living in the Netherlands and send it to him.<sup>81</sup> The Ürümqi Police Database Documents also revealed that applying for asylum abroad can result in being classified as a terrorist in China to prevent the "backflow" of foreign ideas.<sup>82</sup> Thus, much like Uyghurs in China, Uyghurs abroad are also living in a constant atmosphere of fear and harassment.

## Fate of Asylum Seekers and Threats of Refoulement



*A shop in Istanbul that sells Uyghur clothing; Image: The New York Times*

In the last few years, Istanbul has become the largest diaspora hub for Uyghurs fleeing persecution in China due to the linguistic and historical connections between the nations. The Uyghur community in Turkey numbers over 50,000, the majority of which lives in Istanbul's Sefakoy and Zeytinburnu neighborhoods.<sup>83</sup> Istanbul offers hope for Uyghurs. Blue East Turkistan flags are openly displayed in windows.

Several publishing houses, bookshops and cultural centers espouse Uyghur literature. In Istanbul, various Uyghur artists and intellectuals have found platforms and audiences for their work. Entrepreneurs, including many women, have set up small workshops, where they produce and sell traditional Uyghur clothing and homewares. One can also find numerous restaurants serving authentic Uyghur pulled noodles and fresh naan.<sup>84</sup>

However, the future looks uncertain for the Uyghur community in Turkey and an increasing sense of danger haunts them. President Erdoğan was the only Muslim world leader who denounced China's clampdown on Uyghurs as a "cultural genocide". However, his stance has softened since Turkey's descent into an economic meltdown. In 2018, Ankara turned to Beijing for a \$3.6bn loan, along with other Chinese investments in infrastructure projects and credit swap lines to bolster Turkey's depleted foreign exchange reserves.<sup>85</sup> In exchange,

***Turkey has signed an extradition treaty with China to speed up the return of Uyghurs suspected of "terrorism".<sup>86</sup>***

This could be a potential death sentence for the Uyghur community in Turkey.

Other countries, like Egypt, Thailand and Indonesia, have already started deporting Uyghurs. In 2017, the Egyptian government cracked down and forcefully deported Al Azhar University's Uyghur Muslim students in complete violation of international law. Since then, as per the records of Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms, 90 to 120 Uyghurs have been arrested, in addition to other arrests in airports. It is likely that the arrested may have been deported.<sup>87</sup> Indonesia also deported four Uyghurs to China in September 2020. The deportees had been convicted in 2015 of terror-related offenses in Indonesia.<sup>88</sup>

Additionally 109 Uyghur refugees were returned to China from an immigration detention facility in Bangkok, Thailand in 2015, despite international outrage.<sup>89</sup> The BBC has also reported that Saudi Arabia and UAE also arrested exiled Uyghur Muslims and deported them to China in collaboration with Beijing.<sup>90</sup> However, not all hope is lost. The Malaysian government has taken a firm stand against deporting Uyghurs in the country to China.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, in 2018 Sweden and Germany also adopted a Moratorium on deportation of Uyghurs to China.<sup>92</sup> The United States, Canada and many other European countries have also taken a strong stand against China's treatment of Uyghurs.

# Moving Towards a Genocide

## Re-education Camps or Concentration Camps?



Image: sulu.artco

Chilling parallels have been drawn by academics and activists between Nazi concentration camps from the 1940s and Chinese re-education camps today. On January 27, 2021, holocaust memorial commemoration day, rabbis, Jewish community leaders and Holocaust survivors based in the United Kingdom raised awareness about China's brutal treatment of the Uyghurs. In a recent letter to the British prime minister, the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, Marie van der Zyl, wrote: "There were similarities between what is reported to be happening in China and what happened under the Nazis in the 1930s and 40s". She urged Boris Johnson to take action, as the violations against Uyghurs were "shaping up to be the most serious outrage of our time".<sup>93</sup>

China is a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide that criminalizes the commission of genocide. Article II of the Convention defines genocide to include "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about the physical destruction of a group, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group and forcibly transferring children of the group". On the basis of mounting evidence documenting the Chinese government carrying out each of these prohibited acts, the WUC contends that China's treatment of Uyghurs fits the definition of genocide.

China has been causing serious harm to Uyghurs and bringing about their destruction by lodging them in concentration camps where rape, forced labour conditions, brainwashing and torture is rampant. Additionally, the Chinese authorities are preventing births in the Uyghur community by forcefully sterilizing Uyghur women and forcibly transferring children to boarding camps, away from their families and culture. All of this points towards the Chinese government's specific intent and systematic policy to physically, biologically and culturally destroy the Uyghurs as a distinct ethnic group.

## International Recognition of the Genocide

The Uyghur crisis is increasingly being recognized as a genocide by various countries. Recently, Mark Cassayre, the United States' representative at the UN Human Rights Council, officially declared that the United States "condemns China's abuse of members of ethnic and religious minority groups including crimes against humanity and genocide in Xinjiang".<sup>94</sup> Canada's House of Commons has also voted unanimously to declare China's treatment of its Uyghur population a genocide, while passing an amendment asking Canada to call on the International Olympic Committee to

***move the 2022 Winter Olympics from Beijing "if the Chinese government continues this genocide".***<sup>95</sup>

The Dutch parliament has also passed a resolution declaring the Chinese government's actions against the Uyghurs as a genocide. Several other parliaments, including those of the United Kingdom, Lithuania, Belgium and Italy, are set to discuss this matter.<sup>96</sup>

The NGO Genocide Watch has also stated that it "considers the forced sterilizations and forcible transfer of children of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in East Turkistan to be acts of genocide" and subsequently issued a Genocide Emergency Alert in November 2020.<sup>97</sup> More recently, leading lawyers at Essex Court Chambers (London), instructed by the Global Legal Action Network,

the World Uyghur Congress and the Uyghur Human Rights Project, have authored a legal opinion which concluded that there is a credible case that acts carried out by the Chinese government against the Uyghur population in East Turkistan amount to crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide.<sup>98</sup> The Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, in cooperation with the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, also came out with an independent and comprehensive report confirming the finding of a genocide taking place.<sup>99</sup>

In pursuance of the grave human rights violations against Uyghurs, various countries have also passed Magnitsky-style sanctions against Chinese officials and entities responsible for the crimes against Uyghurs. On 17 June 2020, then-President Donald Trump signed and brought into effect the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, 2020. Pursuant to this act, the United States intelligence agency can identify officials responsible for persecuting Uyghurs. Persons identified would then be subject to sanctions which include asset blocking, visa revocation and ineligibility for entry into the United States.<sup>100</sup> More recently, the European Union in coordination with the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States, has also agreed to a new package of similar sanctions on four Chinese individuals and one entity over human rights violations against the Uyghurs.<sup>101</sup>

# Recommendations

## Recommendations to the Chinese Government

### Due Process and the Rule of Law

- The Chinese government must make provisions to allow investigations of grave human rights violations and genocide in the East Turkistan region by independent bodies such as the United Nations Human Rights Council.
- The Chinese government must start criminal proceedings against all persons responsible for torture, sexual violence and other grave human rights violations in the concentration camps, in forced labor factories in East Turkistan and elsewhere in China.
- Chinese authorities must immediately shut down all concentration camps operating in East Turkistan and unconditionally release all Uyghurs detained therein.
- Chinese authorities must allow family reunification with missing family members and to search for the disappeared in East Turkistan.

### Freedom of Speech and Privacy

- The Chinese government must immediately release all journalists, bloggers, scholars, artists, athletes and religious believers imprisoned** for peacefully exercising the right to free speech. The imprisoned must be given access to lawyers and legal support, proper medical treatment and fast track trials.
- The Chinese government must end physical and online censorship that blocks users' access to global social media platforms and websites that provide news and information regarding social, political, religious and human rights affairs and it must end technology and law-enabled restrictions on the use of virtual private networks.
- The Chinese government must shut down the Integrated Joint Operations Platform and the Physicals for All program in the East Turkistan region. It must delete all collected data and suspend the collection and use of biometric data until the introduction of a comprehensive national legislation to protect individual privacy.
- The Chinese government must implement international standards and recommendations from United Nations bodies and experts regarding free speech, encryption and surveillance.

## **Religious and Cultural Rights**

- The Chinese government must repeal its current policies and legislations that explicitly and implicitly link Islam to extremism and violence.

- The Chinese government must put an immediate end to all demolitions of Uyghur neighborhoods and cultural sites in Kashgar until a transparent and genuine process of consultation has been undertaken with local residents.

- The Chinese government must put an end to the destruction of all sites of cultural value to the Uyghurs, including mosques, mazars, graveyards and other sites in East Turkistan.

- The Chinese government must abolish boarding schools in East Turkistan that forcefully impose Mandarin education and culture on Uyghur pupils. Children must have the choice to attain education in the medium of their choice and practice their culture.

- The relevant Chinese authorities working to administer cultural heritage and the National Commission of China for UNESCO should work actively to protect precious cultural heritage.

## **Diaspora and Refugee Rights**

- Chinese authorities must put an end to all kinds of intimidation, threats and harassment against Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic persons living overseas.

- The Chinese government must halt requests to deport refugees and asylum seekers to China in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

## **The Uyghur Genocide**

- The Chinese government must take all available steps to prevent future persecution of Uyghurs and other Turkic groups. It must guarantee protection and necessary support to all marginalised groups surviving the genocide and crimes against humanity in East Turkistan.

- The Chinese government must put an immediate end to the policies of forced separation of families, forced sterilization of women and forcibly transferring children to boarding schools away from their families and culture.

## Recommendations to the International Community

- The United Nations High Commissioner for human rights should use her independent monitoring and reporting mandate to report on the human rights situation in East Turkistan.

- The United Nations Human Rights Council should adopt a resolution to create a commission of inquiry to investigate the crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity unfolding in East Turkistan.

- States and international organizations must collect all the available evidence on China's crimes against the Uyghurs, and assess whether these constitute genocide and/or crimes against humanity. In bilateral and multilateral exchanges, they should raise concerns regarding international crimes.

- States and international organizations must impose targeted sanctions, such as travel bans and asset freezes on Chinese individuals and institutions that are complicit in the genocide of the Uyghur and Turkic people. If States do not yet possess autonomous sanctions mechanisms, they should urgently be introduced.

- Foreign governments and businesses should identify opportunities to end their complicity in the use of Uyghur forced labour. Businesses must end their existing relationship with Chinese suppliers - especially those active in East Turkistan - if they fail to conduct due diligence regarding their supply chains, in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. They should also sign the Call to Action from the coalition to end Uyghur forced labour: <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/call-to-action/>

- UNESCO should take immediate steps to engage with the Chinese government in relation to the current status of Kashgar's Old Town. Additionally it must work to make recommendations and develop comprehensive Conservation Management Plans for heritage hubs in the East Turkistan region.



- International and domestic courts of all countries must admit criminal cases against Chinese individuals and institutions complicit in the genocide based on provisions of the Rome Statute, The Genocide Convention and the principle of universal jurisdiction.

- Foreign States must impose import bans on products made with Uyghur forced labour and impose export controls to deny the Chinese government access to technologies that are being used to violate basic rights in East Turkistan. More generally, States must ensure that human rights are put squarely at the center of any trade relations or upcoming agreements with China.

- Civil society and consumer groups should demand from companies manufacturing in China to conduct human rights due diligence on their supply chains to ensure that they are not profiting from any forced labor schemes.

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