



September 26, 2018

Rep. Ted Yoho, Chair
Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee
511 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Sherman, Ranking Member
Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: September 26 hearing on “China’s Repression and Internment of Uyghurs: U.S. Policy Responses”

Dear Chairman Yoho, Ranking Member Sherman, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of Amnesty International USA and our more than two million supporters and members nationwide, we submit this statement for the hearing record.

Over the past year Chinese authorities have intensified their crackdown on Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, through mass internment, intrusive surveillance, political indoctrination, and forced cultural assimilation. Most of the detainees’ families have been kept in the dark about their loved ones’ fate and are often too frightened to speak out. China must end its campaign of systematic repression and shed light on the fate of up to one million predominantly Muslim people arbitrarily detained in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (“XUAR”).

On September 24, 2018, Amnesty International published a new briefing titled, *China: Where are they? Time for answers about mass detentions in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region*, which documents the plight of people who have lost touch with relatives and friends inside the XUAR. Amnesty International interviewed more than 100 people outside of China whose relatives in XUAR are still missing, as well as individuals who were tortured while in detention camps there.

While Amnesty International has not had access to these centers and has not independently verified the reports, we believe that they are credible. Satellite imagery,

documents made public by local government organs, and a major intensification of the state security apparatus throughout Xinjiang all point to what has been documented in many personal anecdotes. Those who have travelled or have family abroad, along with those who are religiously observant, have expressed the slightest criticism of the Chinese government, or have expressed an interest in preserving the Uyghur language and culture have all faced pressure from the authorities, along with their families and associates. The Chinese government acknowledges the detention of Uighurs but claims they are in technical training institutes; however, their whereabouts are unknown, and any information is nearly impossible to gather.

Mass detention camps began appearing in 2014, spreading at an alarming rate across Xinjiang province since then. In its 2018 review of China, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD Committee) expressed concern over human rights violations in XUAR. Lack of information remains a paramount challenge in investigating the issue, but the CERD Committee estimates that there are “anywhere between several hundred thousand and just over one million” people have been detained. The legal process regarding these camps is questionable, as there are no trials, lawyers, or opportunities to appeal the decision throughout the entire ordeal. Individuals live in fear of being exposed and cut communication with family members in hopes of securing their safety.

For example, Kairat Samarkan was sent to a detention camp in October 2017 after he returned to the XUAR following a short visit to neighboring Kazakhstan. Police told him he was detained because he was accused of having dual citizenship and had betrayed China. He was detained for over three months. Kairat told Amnesty International that he was hooded, forcibly shackled on his arms and legs, and was forced to stand in a fixed position for 12 hours. He described that there were nearly 6,000 people held in the same camp, where they were forced to sing political songs and study speeches of the Chinese Communist Party. They could not talk to each other and were forced to chant “Long live Xi Jinping” before meals. Kairat told Amnesty International that the detention abuses drove him to attempt suicide, shortly before his release. Kairat’s story is just one of many heartbreaking interviews we conducted to document the human rights abuses going on in Xinjiang.

Ethnic tensions in XUAR have long persisted but only recently has such information been steadily exposed to the international community, and the situation is nothing less than

urgent. Veiled by the pretext of countering terrorism and religious extremism, Chinese authorities are operating under secrecy and denial of human rights abuses against ethnic Muslim groups.

Those who resist or fail to show enough progress reportedly face punishments ranging from verbal abuse to food deprivation, solitary confinement, beatings and use of restraints and stress positions. There have been reports of deaths inside the facilities, including suicides of those unable to bear the mistreatment.

While only pieces of the deterioration of human rights in Xinjiang are known, they demand recognition and truth from the Chinese government. Cultural alienation, censorship, and forced disappearances are well documented in the testimonies of witnesses and reliable evidence gathered by Amnesty International in September 2018.

Intrusively detailed biometric data from XUAR's residents such as fingerprints, DNA and voice samples, and 360-degree body imagery permeate the region with each passing day. Mosques are no exception, as facial recognition software is said to be installed. Uyghurs have been forced to download a government designed application on their phones that tracks all of their activities; failure to do so could get one sent to the internment camps. Since 2014, surveillance has spread rapidly and is one of the most sophisticated in the world with "national security" as a justification for the government's actions, resulting in the "Regulation on De-Extremification" in XUAR. XUAR's party secretary, Chen Quanguo, is a leading figure in characterizing it as a "no rights zone," according to CERD Co-Rapporteur Gay McDougall. In 2016, Chen increased the size of police and security personnel and presence of high-tech surveillance systems to restrict mobility that aimed to specifically target ethnic Muslims.

The Chinese government is negligent in failing to protect its people according to international legal standards. China's Constitution, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, Cultural Rights, to which China is a state party, prohibit discrimination based on ethnicity, language, and religion.

Congress should impress on the Administration and the Chinese government the importance of fulfilling its human rights commitments to the international community

and its own people. In particular, Congress should insist that the government of China undertake the following actions:

- Call on the Chinese government to immediately close all political education camps in Xinjiang and release all individuals held, and end the Strike Hard Campaign
- Urge the U.S. Administration to participate in China's 2018 Universal Periodic Review, send a high-level delegation, and raise concerns about Xinjiang.
- Every Congressional delegation that visits China should request access to the Uighur region and specifically to the detention centers. Congressional delegations that focus on economic ties should condition their visits on access.
- Request law enforcement agencies investigate threats and retaliation carried out against Uighur U.S. citizens and against all Uighurs on U.S. soil.
- Affirm U.S. policy that it will cease, in accordance with their obligations under international law, all forced transfer, directly or indirectly, to China of Uighurs, Kazakhs or other Chinese nationals from XUAR, if they would face a real risk of serious human rights violations.
- Appropriate funds for documentation, casework, evidence collection and preservation to address the plight of Uighur refugees and asylum seekers in the region and throughout the world.
- Support assistance for civil society organizations that focus on Uighur human rights work in the space of capacity building, culture preservation, legal aid, and rehabilitation.

For more information, please contact Francisco Bencosme by phone at: (202) 845-5075 or email at: fbencosme@aiusa.org.

Sincerely,



Francisco Bencosme
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Advocacy and Government Affairs