

## **Sub-Committee on International Human Rights**

### **Human rights situation of the Uyghurs**

#### **Brief submitted by:**

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The Sub-Committee's study of the staggering human rights crisis faced by Uyghurs in China's western Xinjiang Autonomous Region is welcome and urgently needed.

This crisis is not new. China's unrelenting repression of the Uyghur people goes back decades. For decades, however, governments, including Canada, failed to make it clear to China that this was unacceptable and had to stop. Symptomatic of a failure by the international community to put human rights at the heart of our relationship with China, consistently prioritizing trade and investment prospects to the detriment of concerted human rights advocacy and diplomacy.

And now, the scale of the suffering is unimaginable. Since 2017, authorities in Xinjiang have been engaged in a massive campaign of intrusive surveillance, arbitrary detention, torture, political indoctrination and forced cultural assimilation targeting the region's Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Muslim people. More than 1 million people have been held in "transformation-through-education" or "vocational training" centres, where they have endured a litany of human rights violations.

Consider these headlines of six Amnesty International Urgent Actions, from just the past eight weeks, reflective of the unrelenting nature of the repression.

- 70 year old editor Qurban Mamut held incommunicado
- Uyghur businessman Abuduaini Kadier imprisoned in secret trial
- Grave health concerns for missing Uyghur Gulshan Abbas
- Mahira Yakub, Uyghur indicted for money transfer to her parents
- Uyghur Ekpar Asat jailed for 15 years in secret trial
- Uyghur academic Imunjan Seydin reappears on state broadcast after 3 yrs incommunicado detention

The crackdown has been decried by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and exposed by investigative journalists. Faced with undeniable evidence of mass internment, arbitrary punishment and torture, the Chinese government did eventually acknowledge the camps but absurdly claims that they are voluntary "vocational training centres". The true scope and nature of what has been taking place in Xinjiang is not yet fully known because the Chinese government has steadfastly resisted calls to admit independent monitors into the region.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has pressed "for full access to carry out an independent assessment of the continuing reports pointing to wide patterns of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions in Xinjiang". Over the past year, including just 3 weeks ago, Canada has joined in three unprecedented statements at the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly with more than twenty other countries, echoing that call for unhindered access and independent investigations. The Chinese government has ignored and rebuffed all of those interventions.

Around the world, Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic Muslims are desperate for information about family members in Xinjiang. Many have been reluctant to speak publicly, fearing retaliation. Amnesty has collected hundreds of accounts documenting how Chinese authorities in 22 countries have systematically harassed them.

As a member of the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China -- which was established more than 20 years ago -- Amnesty International released a report in May, follow up to a similar report in 2017, documenting an intensifying campaign of interference, threats and violence against Uyghur and other human rights defenders in Canada, who actively draw attention to China's atrocious human rights record. The response of the Canadian government to these extensive human rights abuses in Canada against Uyghur and other activists working on Chinese concerns, has been deeply disappointing. None of the Coalition's recommendations have yet to be implemented.

There are important ways that Canada must and can make a difference in individual cases. Three Uyghur men - Ayub Mohammed, Salahadin Abdulahad, and Khalil Mamut -- have endured more than 20 years of human rights abuse, first in Xinjiang, then 5 years of unlawful and cruel imprisonment in Guantanamo Bay, and now, despite exoneration by the US government, forcible exile to Albania and Bermuda where they have been waiting for more than 5 protracted years while the Canadian government delays their applications to be reunited with their wives and children who are Canadian citizens. Canada's failure to bring their human rights nightmare to an end is unconscionable.

Finally, you will hear from Kamila Telendibaeva and her lawyer, Chris MacLeod later today. In 2006, Kamila's husband, Uyghur-Canadian Huseyin Celil, was arbitrary arrested, subject to unlawful deportation tantamount to rendition from Uzbekistan and remains unjustly imprisoned in China. For fourteen years the Chinese government has refused to allow this Canadian citizen even one consular visit. Kamila has had no contact with Huseyin's family in China for the past four years. She knows nothing of his fate and is particularly fearful about his health. It is of course important that the Canadian government press hard for the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. It is crucial to press equally hard for freedom for other Canadians unjustly imprisoned in China, very much including Huseyin Celil, who has missed 14 years of his four young sons growing up.

Let me end with six key recommendations. The Canadian government should:

- (1) Implement a whole of government human rights strategy for our relationship with China, ensuring that human rights concerns, including the Uyghur crisis, are prioritized, consistently, in all of our dealings with the Chinese government and Chinese business interests.
- (2) Develop a comprehensive response to the Uyghur crisis, including bilateral and multilateral efforts to press China to immediately release all persons held in "de-extremification", "transformation-through-education" or other facilities in Xinjiang and repeal all measures that restrict the exercise of human rights by Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities; and taking advantage of all avenues for exerting pressure, such as the possible imposition of individual sanctions under Canadian law and ensuring that, throughout their supply chains, businesses do not contribute to or benefit from human rights violations that may be associated with forced labour in Xinjiang.

- (3) Work within the international community to increase pressure on the Chinese government to allow independent and unrestricted access to Xinjiang for fact-finding missions by international observers, including UN Special Procedures.
- (4) Take immediate steps to counter the harassment and intimidation of Uyghur and other human rights defenders working on Chinese human rights concerns in Canada, including implementing the Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China's recommendations.
- (5) Expedite the reunification of Ayub Mohammed, Salahidin Abdulahad, and Khalil Mamut with their families in Canada.
- (6) Intensify efforts on behalf of Huseyin Celil, including a request from Prime Minister Trudeau for an immediate health and welfare visit by Canadian officials, and appointment of a respected and well-connected special envoy to work to secure his freedom and return to Canada.