

Submission to the Canadian Subcommittee on International Human Rights by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute

On the issue of forced labour from Xinjiang in China

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The Chinese government has facilitated the mass transfer of Uyghur and other ethnic minority¹ citizens from the far west region of Xinjiang to factories across the country. Under conditions that strongly suggest forced labour, Uyghurs are working in factories that are in the supply chains of at least 83 well-known global brands in the technology, clothing and automotive sectors, including Apple, BMW, Gap, Huawei, Nike, Samsung, Sony and Volkswagen.

The research report ["Uyghurs for Sale: Re-education, forced labour and surveillance beyond Xinjiang"](#), released March 1, 2020 by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), estimated that at least 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred out of Xinjiang to work in factories across China between 2017 and 2019, and some of them were sent directly from detention camps.² The estimated figure is conservative and the actual figure is likely to be far higher. In factories far away from home, they typically live in segregated dormitories,³ undergo organised Mandarin and ideological training outside working hours,⁴ are subject to constant surveillance, and are forbidden from participating in religious observances.⁵ Numerous sources, including government documents, show that transferred workers are assigned minders and have limited freedom of movement.⁶

China has attracted international condemnation for its network of extrajudicial 're-education camps' in Xinjiang.⁷ The report exposes a new phase in China's social re-engineering campaign targeting minority citizens, revealing new evidence that some factories across China are using forced Uyghur labour under a state-sponsored labour transfer scheme that is tainting the global supply chain.

Since 2017, more than a million Uyghurs and members of other Turkic Muslim minorities have disappeared into a vast network of 're-education camps' in the far west region of Xinjiang,¹¹ in what some experts call a systematic, government-led program of cultural genocide.¹² Inside the camps, detainees are subjected to political indoctrination, forced to renounce their religion and culture and, in some instances, reportedly subjected to torture.¹³ In the name of combating 'religious extremism',¹⁴ Chinese authorities have been actively remoulding the Muslim population in the image of China's Han ethnic majority.

The ‘re-education’ campaign appears to be entering a new phase, as government officials now claim that all ‘trainees’ have ‘graduated’.¹⁵ There is mounting evidence that many Uyghurs are now being forced to work in factories within Xinjiang.¹⁶ This report reveals that Chinese factories outside Xinjiang are also sourcing Uyghur workers under a revived, exploitative government-led labour transfer scheme.¹⁷ Some factories appear to be using Uyghur workers sent directly from ‘re-education camps’.

ASPI has identified 27 factories in nine Chinese provinces that are using Uyghur labour transferred from Xinjiang since 2017. Those factories claim to be part of the supply chain of 83 well-known global brands.¹⁸ Between 2017 and 2019, we estimate that at least 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred out of Xinjiang and assigned to factories through labour transfer programs under a central government policy known as ‘Xinjiang Aid’ (援疆).¹⁹

It is extremely difficult for Uyghurs to refuse or escape these work assignments, which are enmeshed with the apparatus of detention and political indoctrination both inside and outside of Xinjiang.²⁰ In addition to constant surveillance, the threat of arbitrary detention hangs over minority citizens who refuse their government-sponsored work assignments.²¹

Most strikingly, local governments and private brokers are paid a price per head by the Xinjiang provincial government to organise the labour assignments.²² The job transfers are now an integral part of the ‘re-education’ process, which the Chinese government calls ‘vocational training’.²³

A local government work report from 2019 reads: ‘For every batch [of workers] that is trained, a batch of employment will be arranged and a batch will be transferred. Those employed need to receive thorough ideological education and remain in their jobs.’²⁴

This report examined three case studies in which Uyghur workers appear to be employed under forced labour conditions by factories in China that supply major global brands. In the first case study, a factory in eastern China that manufactures shoes for US company Nike is equipped with watchtowers, barbed-wire fences and police guard boxes. The Uyghur workers, unlike their Han counterparts, are reportedly unable to go home for holidays (see page 8). In the second case study of another eastern province factory claiming to supply sportswear multinationals Adidas and Fila, evidence suggests that Uyghur workers were transferred directly from one of Xinjiang’s ‘re-education camps’ (see page 18). In the third case study, we identify several Chinese factories making components for Apple or their suppliers using Uyghur labour. Political indoctrination is a key part of their job assignments (see page 21).

Recommendations

The Chinese government should uphold the civic, cultural and labour rights enshrined in China’s Constitution and domestic laws, end its extrajudicial detention of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, and ensure that all citizens can freely determine the terms of their own labour and mobility.

Companies using forced Uyghur labour in their supply chains could find themselves in breach of laws which prohibit the importation of goods made with forced labour or mandate disclosure of forced labour supply chain risks.⁹ The companies listed in this report should conduct immediate and thorough human rights due diligence on their factory labour in China, including robust and independent social audits and inspections. It is vital that through this process, affected workers are not exposed to any further harm, including involuntary transfers.

Foreign governments, businesses and civil society groups should identify opportunities to increase pressure on the Chinese government to end the use of Uyghur forced labour and extrajudicial detentions. This should include pressuring the government to ratify the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention on Forced Labour, 1930 (No. 29) and Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention.¹⁰ Consumers and consumer advocacy groups should demand companies that manufacture in China conduct human rights due diligence on their supply chains in order to ensure that they uphold basic human rights and are not complicit in any coercive labour schemes.

Methodology

This research report draws on open-source Chinese-language documents, satellite imagery analysis, academic research and on-the-ground media reporting. It analyses the politics and policies behind the new phase of the Chinese government's ongoing repression of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. It provides evidence of the exploitation of Uyghur labour and the involvement of foreign and Chinese companies, possibly unknowingly, in human rights abuses.

In all, ASPI's research identified 83 foreign and Chinese companies directly or indirectly benefiting from the use of Uyghur workers outside Xinjiang through potentially abusive labour transfer programs as recently as 2019. Some brands are linked with multiple factories.

The data is based on published supplier lists, media reports, and the factories' claimed suppliers. ASPI reached out to these 83 brands to confirm their relevant supplier details. Where companies have responded, we included their clarifications in the report.

ASPI notes that a small number of brands advised they instructed their vendors to terminate their relationships with these suppliers in 2020. Others said they had no direct contractual relationships with the suppliers implicated in the labour schemes, but no brands were able to rule out a link further down their supply chain.

The report includes an [appendix](#) that details the factories involved and the brands that appear to have elements of forced Uyghur labour in their supply chains.

Citations and notes

Please [download the PDF](#) of the full report (56 pages) to access the full and extensive citations and notes that accompany this report.

About ASPI

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ASPI aims, through its website, publications, blog, events and media activities, to be innovative, accurate and well-informed and to broaden public knowledge about the critical strategic choices our country will face over the coming years. The institute's work helps to foster strategic expertise in Australia through dialogue, research and its contribution to public debate. ASPI strives to provide a strong focus and constructive commentary on the practical choices and issues which confront Australia's strategic policy decisions, and this is reflected in ASPI's core values of collegiality, originality and innovation, quality and excellence, and independence.

ASPI was established by the Australian Government in 2001 and is partially funded by the Department of Defence with other sources of revenue including sponsorship, commissioned tasks, a membership scheme, sale of publications, advertising and event registration fees. More information [here](#).

Footnotes

1 The Chinese government's 're-education' policies have mainly targeted the Uyghurs but also other Turkic speaking Muslim minorities such as the Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tartars, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Hui. This report refers to them collectively as 'Uyghurs' or 'ethnic minorities' for brevity.

2 'Detention camps' and 're-education camps' are used interchangeably in this paper.

3 'Xinjiang Aid, to the hearts of the masses' (对口援疆 · 做到群众心坎上), Anhui Guoyuan Financial Holdings Group Co. Ltd (安徽国元金融控股集团有限责任公司), 26 July 2018, online; 'Hotan migrant workers find employment in Jiangxi Nanchang's high-tech enterprises' (和田外出务工人员 在江西南昌高新企业就业掠影), Hotan People's government (和田市人民政府), 8 April 2019, online.

4 Yu Mingtong (于明彤), 'Guangdong industry Xinjiang Aid: Helping Kashgar ethnic women find employment' (广东产业援疆 助力喀什少数民族妇女就业), International Online (国际在线), 9 November 2018, online; "Xinjiang Aid", to the hearts of the masses' (对口援疆 · 做到群众心坎上), Anhui Guoyuan Financial Holdings Group Co. Ltd (安徽国元金融控股集团有限责任公司), 26 July 2018, online.

5 'Nilka, Xinjiang: Multiple measures to explore for improving model of organised rural labour transfer employment outside of Xinjiang' (新疆尼勒克：多措并举探索提升农村劳动力疆外有组织转移就业新模式), Xinjiang Public Employment Net (新疆公共就业服务网), 25 June 2019, online.

6 Guidelines for Guangdong enterprises to hire Xinjiang workers (trial) (广东企业招用新疆籍劳动者指引 (试用)), Guangdong Employment Service Administration (广东省就业服务管理局), 18 January 2019, online. For additional details on the security measures and government minders, see section 'Forced Uyghur Labour'.

7 Rick Noack, 'In a first, 22 nations condemned China's repression of Uigher Muslims. Without the US', The Washington Post, 12 July 2019, online.

8 See the United State's Tariff Act of 1930, online, and Australia's Modern Slavery Act 2018, online.

9 Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, online.

10 Adrian Zenz, 'Brainwashing, police guards, and coercive internment: evidence from Chinese government documents about the nature and extent of Xinjiang's "vocational training internment camps"', Journal of Political Risk, July 2019, 7(7), online; Fergus Ryan, Danielle Cave and Nathan Ruser, Mapping Xinjiang's 're-education' camps, ASPI, Canberra, 1 November 2018, online.

11 James Leibold, 'Despite China's denials, its treatment of the Uyghurs should be called what it is: cultural genocide', The Conversation, 24 July 2019, online.

12 Rob Schmitz, 'Ex-detainee describes torturer in China's Xinjiang re-education camp', NPR, 13 November 2018, online.

- 13 Mu Xuequan, 'China Focus: Xinjiang determined in counter-terrorism, deradicalization, maintaining development', Xinhua Net, 10 December 2019, online.
- 14 'Trainees in Xinjiang education, training program have all graduated', Xinhua, 9 December 2019, online.
- 15 In 2019, investigations conducted by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre revealed that Australian companies Cotton On and Target were at risk of using forced labour in their supply chains. Sophie McNeill, Jeanavive McGregor, Meredith Griffiths, Michael Walsh, Echo Hui, Bang Xiao, 'Cotton On and Target investigate suppliers after forced labour of Uyghurs exposed in China's Xinjiang', Four Corners, ABC News, 17 July 2019, online; Nathan Ruser, 'What satellite imagery reveals about Xinjiang's 're-education' camps and coerced labour', The Strategist, 16 July 2019, online; Adrian Zenz, 'Xinjiang's new slavery', Foreign Policy, 11 December 2019, online; Amy Lehr and Mariefaye Bechrakis, 'Connecting the Dots in Xinjiang: Forced Labour, Forced Assimilation and Western Supply Chains,' A Report of the CSIS Human Rights Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 2019, online.
- 16 Steve Hess, 'Dividing and conquering the shop floor: Uyghur labour export and labour segmentation in China's industrial east', Central Asian Survey, December 2009, 28(4), 404, online.
- 17 The appendix lists all Chinese and global brands implicated, as well as the cities and provinces in China where the factories are known to be using Uyghur labour.
- 18 This estimate is based on data collected from Chinese state media and official government notices.
- 19 'Xinjiang Human Resources and Social Security Department: Strengthening labour cooperation in the region to promote long-term stable employment' (新疆自治区人力资源和社会保障厅：强化区内劳务协作 促进长期稳定就业), Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国人力资源和社会保障部), 11 January 2019, online. 41
- 20 Chris Buckley and Austin Ramzy, 'Inside China's push to turn Muslim minorities into an army of workers', New York Times, 30 December 2019, online.
- 21 Interim measures for the management of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's rural surplus labour forces to transfer employment to reward funds (新疆维吾尔自治区农村富余劳动力转移就业以奖代补资金管理暂行办法), online.
- 22 Bill Birtles, 'China defends "vocational training centres" amid international pressure over mass Uighur detentions', ABC News, 17 October 2018, online.
- 23 Work report of the People's government of Moyu county in 2019 (2019年墨玉县人民政府工作报告), Moyu county government Network (墨玉县政府网), 12 November 2019, online.
- 24 Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour, ILO indicators of forced labour, International Labour Organization, 1 October 2012, online.