

# Brief prepared by International Support for Uyghurs for SDIR: Human Rights Situation of the Uyghurs

This purpose of this brief is to provide contextual background information, a summary of the oppressive practices that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has implemented in East Turkistan, and recommendations for the Canadian government to enact. The major issues include but are not limited to concentration camps, forced labor, child separation, forced sterilization, and organ pillaging. Based on the testimony given by witnesses and experts, a list of 12 recommendations for Canada to enact were compiled. The final section of this brief presents useful tools and reports for parliamentarians to use to supplement their knowledge of the dire human rights situation in East Turkistan.

## Who Are the Uyghurs?

Uyghurs are ethnically and culturally Turkic people native to East Turkistan, currently occupied by China. They are mainly Sunni Muslims, and one of the 55 officially recognized and so-called “minority” ethnic groups in China, contrasting the majority ethnic Chinese who comprise 91% of the total population. However, labeling Uyghurs as an “ethnic minority” is part of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) political agenda to delegitimize the national identity of Uyghurs. In fact, Uyghurs are not a minority in East Turkistan, but still a majority, while in China their population may seem very small. According to the 2017 Chinese statistics, their population in China is between 11 to 12 million. Yet, the Uyghur diaspora regards this number as falsified, and estimates it to be between 25 and 35 million.

## Where is East Turkistan?

Uyghurs live in Central Asia, mainly in East Turkistan, a region currently integrated into the Chinese province of Xinjiang (New Territory), officially called by the CCP the “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region” (even though there’s no real autonomy). East Turkistan borders several countries such as Russia, Kazakhstan, India, Tibet, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia. The region is about a sixth of the total area of China with a surface area of 1.83 million km<sup>2</sup>, which is about 1.2 times the size of the province of Quebec. It has a third of China’s natural gas and oil reserves, and 40% of coal reserves. Moreover, East Turkistan is resource rich in metals and minerals such as gold, copper and jade. The region also produces 60% of the cotton in China<sup>1</sup>.

## Timeline

Records show that Uyghurs have more than four thousand years of history in East Turkistan. In early history, their religion was mainly Buddhism. After playing an important role in the Silk Road trade, exchanging cultures from East to West, Uyghurs adopted Islam, and developed a unique culture and civilization. Later came the multiple invasions of the Manchu

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<sup>1</sup> Krajka, D. (2012, September 20). Xinjiang : l'énergie attise le conflit - L'Usine Matières premières. Retrieved from <https://www.usinenouvelle.com/article/xinjiang-l-energie-attise-le-conflit.N114175>

Empire in the 18th and 19th century, renaming East Turkistan as “Xinjiang” (meaning “New Territory”). The Manchu Empire was then overthrown by the Chinese Nationalists which made East Turkistan fall into their hands. The Uyghurs have created their own independent states twice under their rule: the Islamic Republic of East Turkestan in 1933-1934 and the Republic of East Turkistan in 1944-1949. It was taken over by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the People’s Liberation Army with the help of the Soviet Union in 1949.

The Party-State’s non-stop discrimination and repression of the Uyghurs led to different important events such as the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, the student demonstration resulting in the Urumqi massacre of 1988. Also, another student demonstration which turned into the Tiananmen massacre in 1989, the Ghulja massacre in 1997, the Urumchi massacre in 2009, the detainment of Uyghurs in concentration camps in 2016, more events have occurred since. Relevant to Canada, Huseyin Celil, a Uyghur-Canadian, was arrested and detained in China in 2006 and has still not been released to this day. Moreover, a parliamentary hearing on the Uyghur human rights issue was held in 2018.

### **What is Happening in East Turkistan?**

Uyghurs have long been oppressed since they became the subject of the Manchu Empire in the 18th century. Since East Turkistan’s takeover in 1949, the CCP has been much more oppressive towards the Uyghurs than any other Chinese regimes in history. Especially in the last few decades, the Uyghurs have been facing increasingly widespread and deep racism, and islamophobia as a Muslim ethnic group. Using Islam as an excuse in a post 9-11 era, the Chinese government labelled Uyghurs as “dangerous” and sees them as a “threat” to China. The Party-State has been systematically marginalizing the Uyghur language, culture and identity with goals of assimilation. To reach these goals, the CCP has not held itself back from using violent and brutal measures.

### **Concentration camps**

Since the launch of “People’s War on Terror”, Xi Jinping has labeled the Uyghur people of East Turkistan as “terrorists” that need to be contained and “re-educated”. Subsequently, up to three million Uyghurs and other indigenous people of East Turkistan from age 13 to 80 have been sent to concentration camps that the Chinese government refers to as “education and transformation training centers”.

Detainees are indoctrinated and are forced to learn Mandarin. The prisoners are also forced to publicly renounce their own cultural and religious identity while admitting to “mistakes”<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, they are made to take unknown drugs, and are subjected to forced labour, involuntary sterilization, biometric data collection, torture, sexual and physical abuse, as well as mental abuse which has resulted in many deaths.

The CCP claims that the concentration camps are “re-education camps” and “vocational centers” aimed to cleanse the “terrorist ideals” from the Uyghur people and “reintegrate them back in society”. However, the three batches of official Chinese government documents that have been leaked confirmed the brutal crackdown on Uyghurs, and authenticated that these camps are indeed concentration camps: 1) a 400-page Chinese official document where Xi

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<sup>2</sup> Greer, T. (2018, September 13). 48 Ways to Get Sent to a Chinese Concentration Camp. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/13/48-ways-to-get-sent-to-a-chinese-concentration-camp/>

Jinping says that he would “show absolute no mercy” to Uyghurs<sup>3</sup>; 2) a government document that shows how the detention camps are run, and reveals the link between the mass surveillance of Uyghurs and the concentration camps,<sup>4</sup> and 3) a leaked 137-page spreadsheet that demonstrates how Uyghurs are being selected for the concentration camps.

### **Detained Intellectuals**

In an effort to break cultural identity, Chinese authorities have detained up to three million innocent Uyghur men and women in concentration camps. The Chinese Communist Party refers to these camps as “re-education camps” and “vocational training centers”. However, Uyghur intellectuals, artists and celebrities are first to be targeted by the authorities. Do these doctors, poets, professors, artists, scientists, journalists, etc., really need “re-education” and “vocational training”? Many of these Uyghurs received awards from the Chinese government itself, and some have even shown their allegiance to the Party-State. Yet, they are still detained in the camps and even given prison sentences. The CCP’s repertoire of “poverty alleviation” by “re-educating” the “ignorant” and “backward” Uyghurs makes, once again, no sense. These intellectuals, scholars and artists are key to preserving the Uyghur culture, language and identity. This poses problems to the CCP’s plans of eradication of Uyghur culture which makes the target of intellectuals even more important<sup>5</sup>.

### **Forced Labour**

The CCP’s “social re-engineering campaign” has now entered a new phase: mass transferring Uyghurs (and other indigenous people) of East Turkistan to factories across China to engage in forced labour. Government officials are now claiming that the “trainees” of the “re-education camps” or “vocational schools” have “graduated” and have been given jobs to reintegrated society. In fact, it is an exploitative government-led labour transfer scheme where detainees from the concentration camps as well as other Uyghurs residents outside of the camps are transferred and forced to work in factories as slave labour. These labour transfer programs are under a government policy called the “Xinjiang Aid”, more specifically the “Industrial Xinjiang Aid”. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), more than 80 thousand Uyghurs have been transferred between 2017 and 2019<sup>6</sup>. By 2023, the local government aims to have one million workers in textile and garment industries.

According to the ASPI, at least 83 global brands and Chinese companies are benefiting from the use of Uyghur workers potentially doing forced labour through the government-led

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<sup>3</sup> Kuo, L. (2019, November 17). ‘Show no mercy’: Leaked documents reveal details of China’s Xinjiang detentions. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/17/show-no-mercy-leaked-documents-reveal-details-of-chinas-mass-xinjiang-detentions>

<sup>4</sup> ICIJ. (2019, November 24). Read the China Cables Documents. Retrieved from <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/read-the-china-cables-documents/>

<sup>5</sup> List of Uyghur intellectuals imprisoned in China from 2016 to the present. (Last updated by Abduweli Ayup on March 31st, 2020). Retrieved from: [https://shahit.biz/supp/list\\_003.pdf](https://shahit.biz/supp/list_003.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Xiuzhong Xu, V., Cave, D., Leibold, J., Munro, K., Ruser, N. (2020, March 1). Uyghurs for sale. Retrieved from <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale>

labour programs in China<sup>7</sup>. The ASPI has also identified 27 factories using Uyghur forced labour since 2017. These factories are part of the supply chain of the 83 well-known brands<sup>8</sup>.

### **Child Separation**

Children of the concentration camp detainees in East Turkistan are placed in orphanages, welfare centers, and boarding schools even if one of their parents is not in the camp or if there are other family members that can take care of the child. These facilities were created around the same time the concentration camps were established in the region. In these institutions, Uyghur children are stripped from their own identities and are raised according to Chinese cultural practices and identity.

The CCP created a system where if the children's parents are in a concentration camp, then they are classified as having 'special needs' which makes them eligible for state subsidies and for receiving 'centralized care'<sup>9</sup>. In addition to being separated from their families, Uyghur children are also not taken care of properly in the facilities they are placed in. It is reported that once children reach a certain age, they are automatically transferred to a boarding school. Uyghur kids in the boarding school system are only allowed to go back home on weekends and holidays<sup>10</sup>.

### **Forced Abortion and Sterilization**

The Chinese Communist Party does not only want to remove Uyghurs' cultural, religious, and linguistic identity, but they also want to eradicate them completely. As China loosens reproduction restrictions on the Han Chinese population, the opposite is occurring for the Turkic Muslims of East Turkistan.

Women are either involuntarily sterilized or are forced to have intrauterine contraception devices (IUD). "Starting in 2018, a growing number of female former internment camp detainees testified that they were given injections that coincided with changes in or cessation of their menstrual cycles. Others reported that they were forcibly fitted with IUDs prior to internment or subjected to sterilization surgeries."<sup>11</sup> Chinese measures to circumvent high numbers of child births were so successful that in 2018, some Uyghur counties had more deaths than births.

The Chinese government created a project called "Free Technical Family Planning Services to Farmers and Pastoralists" where they provide free birth control surgeries. "The project's explicit aim is to reduce these regions' 2020 birth and population growth rates by "at least" 0.4 percentage points below the 2016 level. The free "birth control surgeries" include IUD placements, abortions, and sterilizations."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>9</sup> "Break Their Roots: Evidence for China's Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang | Journal of Political Risk." Accessed July 1, 2020. <https://www.jpolrisk.com/break-their-roots-evidence-for-chinas-parent-child-separation-campaign-in-xinjiang/>.

<sup>10</sup> "China Treats Uighur Kids as 'orphans' after Parents Seized." Associated Press. Accessed July 3, 2020. <https://apnews.com/903a97b7c62a47b98553b6f422827dd7>.

<sup>11</sup> Zenz, Adrian. n.d. "Uighurs in Xinjiang Targeted by Potentially Genocidal Sterilization Plans, Chinese Documents Show." Accessed July 7, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/01/china-documents-uighur-genocidal-sterilization-xinjiang/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

## Organ Harvesting

It is well known that China has some of the largest organ transplant programs in the world. Some Chinese hospitals' official websites advertise that they're able to provide matching organs within one to two weeks, and in some cases, even in 72 hours. In comparison, other countries such as the U.S, the U.K and Canada have a wait time of about three to four years<sup>13</sup>.

Norman L. Epstein, an emergency physician in Toronto, Canada, and the international chair of the Student Action Committee for End Transplant Abuse in China (ETAC) explains that "this should be an impossible feat, given that no one knows in advance of a healthy organ for transplant until a sudden death of a healthy donor occurs, and only within a few hours. This could only be possible if there was a reservoir of healthy living donors, which, again, China does not have"<sup>14</sup>.

So the question is, where do all of these organs readily available for transplant come from? This can only be explained with the Chinese Communist Party "harvesting" organs from political prisoners and detainees of the concentration camps. This includes members of the Falun Gong, as well as Uyghurs, Tibetans and Christian sects<sup>15</sup>. Starting in 2000, the Falun Gong practitioners were rounded up in detention labour camps, had physical exams and were blood and tissue typed, which is necessary for organ transplant purposes<sup>16</sup>. These experiences are very similar to what the Uyghur detainees of the concentration camps undergo.

Organ harvesting from Uyghurs predates that of the Falun Gong practitioners which began in 2001<sup>17</sup>. The Hon. David Kilgour, a former member of the Canadian Parliament, lawyer, author and activist explains that this type of practices even existed back in the 90s<sup>18</sup>.

An indicator for Uyghur organ harvesting by the CCP is that every Uyghur of East Turkistan has been through a series of physical examinations such as blood tests and DNA tests among others. Blood and DNA are necessary for tissue matching for organ transfers. Another indicator is the CCP preventing Uyghurs to see their deceased family members that were in the concentration camps. This can mean that their organs have been pillaged before their deaths. Other signs of Uyghur organ harvesting include the travel of transplant tourists in East Turkistan, the movement of organs out of the region (with specific signs and lanes at airports), the depletion of the source of organs from the Falun Gong practitioners, and the mysterious disappearances and unexplained deaths of Uyghurs<sup>19</sup>. Uyghurs killed in order to satisfy the demand of Saudi buyers who wanted "Halal organs" (even though this practice is completely forbidden in Islam) is occurring.

"China first admitted to using prisoners as donors in 2005, and vowed to end the practice

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<sup>13</sup> Epstein, Norman. (December 16, 2019). We must speak up for the victims of organ transplants. Retrieved from <https://www.cjnews.com/perspectives/features/epstein-we-must-speak-up-for-the-victims-of-organ-transplants>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Bulka, Reuven (July 5, 2019). China still harvests organs from prisoners – and the world does little to stop it. Retrieved from <https://ottawacitizen.com/opinion/columnists/bulka-china-still-harvests-organs-from-prisoners-and-the-world-does-little-to-stop-it>

<sup>16</sup> Epstein, Norman. (December 16, 2019). We must speak up for the victims of organ transplants. Retrieved from <https://www.cjnews.com/perspectives/features/epstein-we-must-speak-up-for-the-victims-of-organ-transplants>

<sup>17</sup> Kilgour, David. (December 10, 2019). Ongoing nightmare for Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang. Retrieved from [http://david-kilgour.com/2019/DavidKilgour\\_Brussels\\_Uyghurs\\_Dec12,2019.pdf](http://david-kilgour.com/2019/DavidKilgour_Brussels_Uyghurs_Dec12,2019.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

in 2013, again in 2014, before saying the practice ended in 2015”<sup>20</sup>. However, according to studies, the Chinese government has been falsifying the numbers of organ donations. An estimated 60,000 to 100,000 transplants come from victims’ organs every year<sup>21</sup>. Human rights organizations, researchers and political institutions have been presenting evidence of the Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs and other political prisoners being used as an “organ bank”<sup>22</sup>. However, the CCP still keeps denying it to this day.

## Police State

The Chinese Communist Party’s control over Uyghurs is not only physical, but also digital. East Turkistan is now under the world’s most intense government surveillance. The CCP uses surveillance technology and other mass surveillance methods that they call “smart policing” as a way to repress Uyghurs in East Turkistan, and closely monitor their every move.

The budget going into public-security and the newest surveillance technologies have increased dramatically over the past few years. The region is blanketed with facial and number-plate recognition cameras used to track the movement and personal information of individuals. Moreover, tens of thousands of police officers have been recruited in East Turkistan, and thousands of new police stations and security checkpoints have been set up throughout the region. Special machines called “data doors” are situated at some checkpoints<sup>23</sup>. These machines collect information from the mobile phones or the electronic devices of the person passing through the checkpoint without their knowledge<sup>24</sup>. Uyghur people’s knives and front doors are engraved with QR codes that authorities can scan with a mobile app in order to immediately link the house and belongings to their owners<sup>25</sup>. In addition, biometric data of Uyghurs including DNA information, blood samples, iris scans and voice samples are also collected by the Chinese authorities.

In order to compile and analyze the enormous quantity of data on every individual collected through mass surveillance, the CCP uses a central system known as the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP)<sup>26</sup>. With this tool, the authorities then detect Uyghurs and ethnic minorities for “abnormal” behavior and target them for different types of restrictions or even for detention in concentration camps.

## Invasive Homestays

In addition to the mass surveillance and firm attempt by the Chinese Communist Party at assimilation, Uyghurs cannot catch a break even inside their own homes. The government put

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<sup>20</sup> Doherty, Ben (November 14, 2019). Chinese government may have falsified organ donation numbers, study says. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/15/chinese-government-may-have-falsified-organ-donation-numbers-study-says>

<sup>21</sup> Epstein, Norman. (December 16, 2019). We must speak up for the victims of organ transplants. Retrieved from <https://www.cjnews.com/perspectives/features/epstein-we-must-speak-up-for-the-victims-of-organ-transplants>

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, Matthew., Hinde, Raymond., Lavee, Jacob. (November 14, 2019). Analysis of official deceased organ donation data casts doubt on the credibility of China’s organ transplant reform. Retrieved from <https://bmcmethics.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12910-019-0406-6>

<sup>23</sup> Roth, K., Wang, M. (2019, August 16). *Data Leviathan: China’s Burgeoning Surveillance State*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/16/data-leviathan-chinas-burgeoning-surveillance-state>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*



forth a “homestay” program which evolved from Chinese officials regularly visiting and monitoring Uyghurs since 2014. In December 2017, the CCP expanded the “Becoming Family” campaign and mobilized more than a million Chinese officials to live in the homes of Uyghur families in East Turkistan, particularly in more rural areas.

Different sources state that the officials are to stay in Uyghur homes from a week every two months up to two weeks per month. They are also to visit the families during holidays and special events such as birthdays, weddings and funerals. Displaying signs of resistance can make the family members become “suspect” which may land them in concentration camps or even prisons. Consequently, the Uyghur host families do not have the option to refuse the visits. The officials are to inspect the homes for religious elements and confiscate them if such items are found. Moreover, the families are required to provide detailed information about their personal lives and political views to the cadres during the stay. They are also subjected to political indoctrination by the live-in cadres. Forced intimacy is on full display in photos taken by the officials showing their involvement in the intimate aspects of the Uyghur families' lives like doing chores, making beds, sharing meals, tutoring the children, sleeping together and so on.

Some Chinese officials bring cigarettes, alcohol and pork to their Muslim host families who in return feel obliged to partake in acts that are against their religion in fear of consequences if they show resistance. It is also not uncommon for male Han Chinese cadres to sleep alongside the women in the house whose husband or father are most likely in a concentration camp or prison. This often results in the sexual harassment and sexual abuse of Uyghur girls and women.

### **Mosques and Graveyards Demolitions**

The CCP is enforcing the physical destruction and closure of Mosques in East Turkistan. Beijing equips mosques with surveillance systems and visitors must register with their ID to enter the facilities. Chinese officials hide the cultural and religious destruction under the guise of “improvement.” The changes gradually take away the religious and sacred nature of the mosques. Those who survive the complete demolition are repurposed into public spaces. The goal here is not the sincere betterment of worship places, but to cut the ties between the next generation of Uyghurs and their cultural and religious identity which differs from those of the Han Chinese.

Beijing does not stop at damaging mosques, but also attacks Uyghur burial grounds. CNN found through satellite images that more than 100 graveyards were demolished by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese government would not even deny that they are destroying these cemeteries. They claim that the graves were moved “to meet the demand of city planning and promote construction”.

### **Harassment & Intimidation Abroad**

Not only are Uyghurs subjected to systematic oppression from the Party-State in East Turkistan, but they also face harassment and intimidation from the Chinese authorities abroad. Constantly receiving threats and calls, being followed and surveilled, and having all communication cut from families in East Turkistan are common struggles that Uyghurs, and especially Uyghur activists go through. In order to speak up, raise awareness and lend their voice to those who cannot express themselves about the atrocities happening in East Turkistan,

Uyghur activists risk their own security as well as that of their family. The CCP not only wants to silence Uyghurs in East Turkistan, but also those who are living in countries with freedom of speech.

### **Recommendations**

ISU recommends the following, some of which was mentioned during the hearings by experts and witnesses, to help the Uyghurs (for the sake of the brief, we will generalize them as “Uyghurs”, but it also includes other indigenous people of East Turkistan):

1. Provide asylum to Uyghurs refugees and accord refugee status to the stateless.
2. Prevent and punish harassment of Uyghurs in Canada from the Chinese authorities;
3. Prohibit the importation of goods produced with forced labour in whole or in part and put forth a similar bill such as the U.S Bill S2211 and pass a law of due diligence like that of France. Furthermore, maintain and update a watchlist of companies, particularly Chinese companies, known to use forced labour.
4. Apply the Magnitsky Act and expand its sanction list to target and sanction Chinese leadership and officials as well as the architects of the detention centers and systems.
5. Sanction corporations profiting from human rights abuses and control the export of technologies that may be used for mass surveillance in East Turkistan.
6. Recognize and legally determine the Uyghur crisis as genocide and act according to the Responsibility to Protect.
7. Appoint a special envoy to obtain the release of Huseyin Celil.
8. Prioritize the topic of Human Rights in all interactions with China.
9. Build multilateral relationships with democratic allies. Coordinated sanctions may have a bigger impact on China. We also recommend Canada to work with international organizations such as the UN to conduct, on the ground, independent investigations.
10. Call for an annual report to be published by the Human Rights Committee to evaluate the Uyghur human rights situation.
11. Provide funding for individuals and organizations who do research and expose the Uyghur issue to the international community.
12. Provide funding and resources to non-profit groups to protect and preserve Uyghur language, culture, and traditions.

### **Important and informative tools and resources for parliamentarians:**

- The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China,
- Australian Strategic Policy Institute's report → Uyghurs for Sale,
- Congressional Executive Commission on China's annual reports on China
- Center for Strategic International Studies' report → Forced Labor in Xinjiang and Implications for Global Supply Chains,
- The New York Times article → Absolutely No Mercy  
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>
- International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) report → China Cables
- ICIJ report → Qaraqash (Karakax) list



The Canadian Parliament should immediately take a strong stance against China's human rights abuses in East Turkistan, and implement the recommendations provided by experts throughout the two-day Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (SDIR) hearings.

**About ISU**

International Support for Uyghurs (ISU) is a Montreal based non-profit organization. ISU's mission is to promote human rights and democracy for the Uyghur people, and to raise awareness of human rights abuses that occur in East Turkestan in Canada and worldwide. In addition, ISU will operate Uyghur language school to preserve Uyghur language and cultural identity. For this purpose, the organization shall provide workshops, seminars and courses, hold conferences, meetings and offer other services of a similar nature.

Respectfully submitted,

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