

TESTIMONY
House of Commons of Canada
Subcommittee on International Human Rights
Human Rights Situation of the Uyghurs

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Greetings to the members of the Subcommittee. I am honored to testify here today. I sit before you as an advocate for Uyghur human rights and a scholar whose research has focused on Uyghur cultural expression for more than a decade.

Just this month, there has been a significant shift in expert analysis of the Uyghur human rights crisis. Authoritative institutions and experts have begun to label what is happening as a campaign of probable crimes against humanity and likely genocide.¹ For many years, the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP, has been systematically destroying the institutions that long served to maintain and pass on Uyghur cultural knowledge. Uyghur-language journals have been shuttered, cultural elites have been disappeared by the hundreds,² mosques have been bulldozed,³ and perhaps 10% or more of the Uyghur population has been taken away to camps and prisons. Recent investigations of forced labor and forced sterilization, including the alarming statistic that

1. On the topic of whether China's abuses constitute crimes against humanity, see United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Simon-Skjodt Center Director Delivers Remarks on China's Systematic Persecution of Uyghurs" USHMM, March 6, 2020, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/simon-skjodt-center-director-delivers-remarks-on-chinas-systematic-persecut>. As for the argument that China's policies likely meet several acts outlined in the UN Genocide Convention, see Rayhan Asat and Yonah Diamond, "The World's Most Technologically Sophisticated Genocide is Happening in Xinjiang," *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/15/uyghur-genocide-xinjiang-china-surveillance-sterilization>.

2. Uyghur Human Rights Project. "UPDATE: 435 Intellectuals Detained and Disappeared in the Uyghur Homeland," Uyghur Human Rights Project (July 2020), <https://uhrp.org/press-release/uhrp-update-435-intellectuals-detained-and-disappeared-uyghur-homeland.html>.

3. Bahram Sintash, "Demolishing Faith: The Destruction and Desecration of Uyghur Mosques and Shrines," Uyghur Human Rights Project (October 2019), <https://uhrp.org/press-release/demolishing-faith-destruction-and-desecration-uyghur-mosques-and-shrines.html>.

population growth among Uyghurs declined by 84% between 2015 and 2018,⁴ have shed light on the government's totalizing campaign of repression.

The CCP claims it must assimilate the population to quell unrest and stamp out terrorist activity, but these are excuses that mask the horrors happening on our watch. By politically indoctrinating and forcibly assimilating Uyghurs, the CCP is attempting to remove their loyalty to any source of authority other than the CCP itself. In conscripting Uyghurs into involuntary work schemes and turning the Uyghur Region into a manufacturing hub for “inexpensive” labor,⁵ the CCP is securing control of Uyghur lands for resource extraction and global trade, while ripping apart Uyghur families and communities in the process. In other words, the relationship between the CCP and the Uyghur Region is, at its core, a colonial one, recalling the dark and painful histories of liberal democracies such as the U.S., Australia, and Canada vis-a-vis their first nations, their indigenous peoples. The CCP is enacting a genocide because it is a colonizer; land and subjugation of the local people are the dual prizes in China's end game.

The CCP has sought totalizing control of the Uyghur Region since it came into power in 1949. It established “autonomy” in 1955; autonomy was and remains a sham. Many Uyghurs profess an almost spiritual connection to this land, their homeland, something that outside observers far too often overlook in their analyses. In the 1990s, as the Chinese state incentivized Uyghur farmers to sell their land, the beloved folk musician Küresh Küsen urged his brethren not to do so, singing:

The land is great, the land is mighty,
the land is the source of life.

4. Adrian Zenz, “Sterilizations, IUDs, and Mandatory Birth Control: The CCP's Campaign to Suppress Uyghur Birthrates in Xinjiang,” *Jamestown Foundation* (June 2020; last updated July 21, 2020), <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Zenz-Internment-Sterilizations-and-IUDs-UPDATED-July-21-Rev2.pdf?x90091>.

Associated Press, “China Cuts Uighur Births with IUDs, Abortion, Sterilization,” *Associated Press*, June 29, 2020, <https://apnews.com/269b3de1af34e17c1941a514f78d764c>.

5. Adrian Zenz, “Beyond the Camps: Beijing's Grand Scheme of Forced Labor, Poverty Alleviation, and Social Control in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk* 7, 12 (2019), <https://www.jpolrisk.com/author/zenz/>.

Brother farmer, I beg of you,
do not sell your land.

During my time living in the Uyghur Region over the past decade-plus, I was struck by how much the concept of *land* and *homeland* shaped everyday life for Uyghurs. In 2015, an acquaintance and her aunt took my mother and me to visit the tomb of a revered Uyghur scholar near Kashgar. This tomb has long been a holy site of pilgrimage but is now a state-designated tourist spot. At the tomb, a sheikh described its history. We wandered the grounds, where in the distance, beyond the state-built museum and tomb, a cemetery lay in a mountain of sand. Deep-green poplars, the quintessential marker of the region's oasis towns, stood in stark contrast to the sea of sand that lay beyond. My acquaintance led us to a stream of clear, pure spring water. We crouched down together. "Can't you see why people would think this place was holy?" she asked me as she scooped spring water into a bottle. I could.

For Uyghurs, their land has sacred significance as a source of meaning and life. That land, along with the sense of home it inspires and the very lives that play out on it, are now under grave threat. The Uyghur crisis is one of the most pressing humanitarian concerns in the world today. The crisis demands a multi-faceted policy response by government actors around the world; it is time for the government of Canada to act on the global promise of "never again." Below are my recommendations:

1. Focus on refugee admissions

First, I urge the Canadian government to focus on safe haven for Uyghur refugees, who are facing a crisis of statelessness.⁶ The Chinese government is violating the right to free movement

6. Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Weaponized Passports: The Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness" (April 2020), Uyghur Human Rights Project, https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/Weaponized_Passports.pdf.

of Uyghurs around the world, on a shocking scale, and it is up to governments like Canada to offer safe haven to those affected.

- Canada should ensure that Uyghur asylum claims are not hampered by the Chinese state's actions making it impossible for many Uyghurs to obtain official documents such as birth certificates.⁷
- Canada should grant Uyghur asylum seekers legal status in a timely manner and follow the lead of nations like Sweden and Germany by making a commitment not to deport Uyghurs to China.

2. Punish and deter harassment of Uyghur Canadians

Second, I urge the Canadian government to punish and deter harassment of Uyghur Canadians. In a 2019 report, my organization documented Chinese police reaching across borders to harass and threaten Uyghurs living outside China, including in Canada, in order to silence them.⁸ This is a violation of their free speech rights under Canadian law and warrants a vigorous response.

- Local and federal law enforcement agencies should be directed to thoroughly investigate instances of attacks on Uyghurs on Canadian soil.
- Canada should take steps to deter and punish harassment, intimidation, threats, pressure to collect intelligence for a foreign power, and other violations of Canadian Uyghurs' rights, by Chinese state agents.

3. Block forced-labor imports

Third, I urge the Canadian government to ensure that products made by Uyghur forced labor do not enter Canada. Importers should not be able to make profits by contracting with companies using Uyghur prison labor and slave labor. It is not enough to call for “due diligence”: due diligence is impossible in a region where people are sent to torture cells for a single word

7. Uyghur Human Rights Project, “‘Another Form of Control’: Complications in obtaining documents from China impacts immigration processes and livelihoods for Uyghurs in the United States,” Uyghur Human Rights Project (July 2018), <https://uhrp.org/press-release/briefing-%E2%80%99Another-form-control%E2%80%99D-complications-obtaining-documents-china-impacts>.

8. Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Repression Across Borders,” Uyghur Human Rights Project (August 2019), https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/UHRP_RepressionAcrossBorders.pdf.

contrary to government orders.⁹ I urge the Canadian parliament to pass Bill S-211, the Modern Slavery Act, and to amend the Customs Tariff to allow the Canadian Border Services Agency to ban slave-labor goods from entering Canada and criminally prosecute importers who break the law.

4. Prohibit companies from exporting high-tech tools

Fourth, Canada should prohibit companies from exporting high-tech tools used by the Chinese authorities for surveillance and racial profiling. A number of Chinese tech companies, which also have deep and close ties to universities and research centers around the world, are directly involved or otherwise complicit in the human-rights crimes perpetrated by the Chinese government against Uyghurs and other mostly Turkic Muslim minority peoples in the region. Canada should ensure that the tools produced and manufactured inside its borders are not put to use in a genocidal regime.

5. Impose coordinated targeted sanctions on perpetrators

Fifth, Canada should impose sanctions on perpetrators under the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, or Magnitsky law, to freeze assets and restrict the international travel of those state actors and entities in China responsible for these crimes. Coordinating these targeted sanctions with other governments will guard against the Chinese government singling out individual countries for reprisals.

9. Adrian Zenz and Scott Nova, “A Letter regarding Xinjiang from Adrian Zenz and Scott Nova,” Worker Rights Consortium, March 9, 2020, <https://www.workersrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/A-Letter-regarding-Xinjiang-from-Adrian-Zenz-and-Scott-Nova.pdf>.

6. Make formal legal determinations as to whether the Uyghur crisis constitutes a genocide

Sixth, I urge the Canadian government to evaluate the situation, taking into consideration existing evidence (including leaked internal Chinese documents), and make independent legal determinations on what is taking place.

7. Advocate for the establishment of United Nations oversight mechanism

Seventh, Canada should work with partners within the UN to establish a special oversight mechanism such as a Special Rapporteur, a Human Rights Council Panel of Experts, or a Secretary General Special Envoy, to monitor and report on the human rights situation in China. Any such mechanism should be granted independent access to the Uyghur region to report on the situation on the ground.

8. Publicly and privately demand that the Chinese government fulfill its human rights obligations

Finally, I urge the Canadian government, in dialogues and exchanges with the Chinese government, to demand respect for its international human rights obligations.