

**Forum:** UNHRC

**Issue:** Preventing Human rights violations against the Uighur community in Mainland China

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## Introduction

The Uyghurs are a Turkic-speaking Muslim minority who have lived in Xinjiang for 6400 years. Xinjiang is the largest province of the People's Republic of China, rich in gas and natural resources in the northwestern region. Uyghurs are ethnically, culturally and linguistically distinct from the Han Chinese, who make up the majority of the country's population.

For decades, the Chinese government has been waging a campaign of repression against the Uyghurs, of mass surveillance, forced assimilation, mass internment, torture, and other human rights abuses. These repressive actions have intensified since 2009 when ethnic-Uighurs clashed with government policemen in Urumqi (which resulted in the deaths of nearly 200 individuals and the arrest and detention of 1,400).

In 2019, the United Nations estimated that up to 2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities had been arbitrarily detained in so-called "re-education camps". The Chinese government has denied any wrongdoing and insists that the camps are for "vocational training" and "deradicalization." However, mounting evidence suggests that the true purpose of the camps is to systematically erase the Uyghur identity and stamp out any form of dissent.

The Han Chinese form the majority in the country and the Uyghurs are one of the country's 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups, along with the Hui, Tibetans, and Kazakhs. According to the US State Department report prepared in 2018 for Congress, China is committing genocide and crimes against humanity against ethnic minorities across its northwestern region. Former detainees allege that Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities are systematically persecuted and systematically killed by the Chinese government in detention centres across Xinjiang, which the U.S. government has labelled "one of the world's most repressive states".

In the Xinjiang province, Uyghurs have been subject to mass arbitrary detentions, and oppressive laws: including restrictions on Ramadan, Hijabs and long traditionally Muslim beards. The PRC's authoritarian government has denied these charges and

described its actions as anti-terrorism efforts. However, this has done little to quell concerns from foreign governments such as the United States, its allies and many civil and human rights activists.

The Uyghur genocide has been described as "the largest mass incarceration of an ethnic minority since the Holocaust." In 2021, the Biden administration announced that it would recognize the Uyghur genocide.

## **Term Definitions**

### **Genocide**

The definition of the crime of genocide as contained in Article II of the Genocide Convention of 1948 is a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. These crimes could include: Killing members of the group, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group, causing bodily or mental harm to members of the group, forcibly transferring children of the group to another group and deliberately inflicting on the groups conditions of life.

### **Arbitrary detention**

The detention or arrest of a person in circumstances where there is no proof or suspicion that they broke the law, or in which there has been no proper due process of law or order. Arbitrary describes a detention's inappropriateness, injustice, unpredictability, or disproportionately. Since the imprisoned lack the means to protect themselves from extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances, torture, and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, victims of arbitrary imprisonment are particularly vulnerable to human rights breaches.

### **Uyghur Muslims**

The Uyghurs are a mostly muslim Turkic ethnic group originating from Central and East Asia. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Northwest China is acknowledged as being the Uyghurs' original home. They are one of the 55 officially recognized ethnic minorities in China. The Uyghurs are acknowledged by the Chinese government as the official inhabitants of Xinjiang and a regional minority.

### **Authoritarianism**

The idea of unquestioning surrender to authority above personal independence of thought and action. Authoritarianism in politics refers to any political system that concentrates power in the hands of a ruler or a small elite that is not legally obligated to answer to the general population.

## Background Information

### Historical context

The oppression of the Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region started long before the presidency of Xi Jinping. Since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949, Muslim Uyghurs have experienced restrictions on their ability to practise their religion and cultural traditions. "Other Chinese enjoy a growing freedom to worship, but the Uyghurs, like the Tibetans, find that their religion is being used as a tool of control." Said Brad Adams, the director of Asian Human Rights Watch. According to documents obtained and interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch, the Uyghurs of Xinjiang are the targets of system surveillance, control, and suppression of religious activities. At its worst, activists who adhere to their religion in a way that state authorities or leaders deem offensive face detention, torture, and occasionally execution. Those accused of participating in separatist activity which authorities associate with terrorism face the worst consequences. Independent religious activity is occasionally associated with a breach of national security, a major crime in China that is harshly punished.

In the late 1980s, China's Communist Party began to implement a policy of large-scale repression against Uyghur Muslims: encouraging Han Chinese citizens to migrate into the Uyghur region and continuing their oppression. These were carried out by local authorities, including the Chinese authorities' years-long campaign of "de-ethnicizing" the Uyghur population in Xinjiang and other Muslim communities in China's western Xinjiang region.

In 1994, a searing indictment issued by Human Rights Watch documented how the Chinese Communist Party actions against Uyghurs had escalated as far as mass killings, prison camps and torture. In 1999, Human Rights Watch issued another report<sup>1</sup> on China's human rights record in Xinjiang which found that since 1949, there have been no procedures set up by the Government of China to address violations of the human rights of ethnic Kazakhs or ethnic Kyrgyz who are often victims of collective repression or punished for exercising their right to freedom of expression and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/asia/china-bck1017.pdf>

association on religious minority groups such as Uyghurs and Tibetans under China's politically motivated laws.

## **Han occupation of Xinjiang**

Uyghurs started leaving Xinjiang as early as the 1960s. In the 1990s, when independent Central Asian nations like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan emerged as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union, demands for Uyghur independence from China gathered momentum. The Chinese government has encouraged the Han, who are the majority ethnic group in the nation (92%) to relocate to Xinjiang. In 1949, Han Chinese people made up only 6.7% of the area's population but that has increased to over 40 percent currently. The bulk of 12 million Uyghurs still reside in rural areas and have been largely left out of this progress despite Xinjiang being the largest region in the nation and having the largest GDP among non-coastal provinces.

## **War on Islamic Terror**

China started labelling Muslim Uyghur activists as terrorists in the 1990s after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996. Although there is minimal proof of widespread extremism in Xinjiang, several hundred Uyghur militants in Afghanistan in 1998 had some connection to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. After 9/11, when the United States adopted the language of the worldwide "War on Terror," fears of domestic attacks grew. The negative profiling of Uyghur individuals as terrorists was aimed to create widespread discrimination and hate towards the Uyghurs amongst the Han Chinese. This campaign was the perfect justification for the Communist Party's prosecution.

Attacks on the Han Chinese and the CCP have occurred for decades, some including the 1981 attack on the People's Liberation Army (PLA) arsenal close to Kashga. Or the 1997 bombings of three buses in Ürümqi, Xinjiang, China. Where a total of 68 people were injured, including at least 3 children, in the 9 fatalities. Certain Uyghur groups proudly claimed responsibility for the attacks. The Chinese government started its crackdown on the minority circa 1990, carrying out at least 106 government executions from 1991 to 2007. The CCP detained thousands of suspected Uyghur separatists and suppressed demonstrations across the province.

## Last 10 years

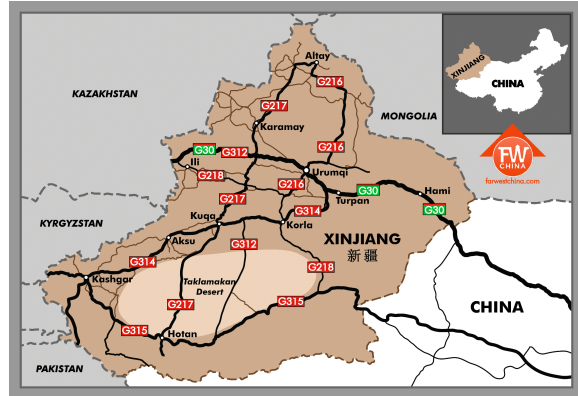
In July 2009, ethnic riots erupted in Xinjiang's capital of Urumqi, resulting in the deaths of nearly 200 people and many more injuries<sup>2</sup>.

The Chinese government reported that the majority of the dead were Han Chinese, while Uyghur groups claimed that the number of Uyghur casualties was drastically undercounted. According to Australian academic Michael Clarke, editor

of the book *The Xinjiang Emergency: Exploring the Causes and Consequences of China's Mass Detention of Uyghurs*, the 2009 incident marked a turning point in the Communist Party's treatment of the Uyghurs.

Since then legislatures in several countries have since passed non-binding motions describing China's actions as genocide, including the House of Commons of Canada, the Dutch parliament, the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, the Seimas of Lithuania, and the French National Assembly. Actions such as the soft-boycott of the Beijing Olympics and some restrictions on trade have had little to no impact on the situation for the Uyghurs.

On the 31st of August the office of the UN high commissioner for human rights published an assessment of the human rights situation in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region, in response civil society organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch called for joint action at the UN Human Rights Council's 51st session. However, no joint action was take, in fact the issue was rejected by the Human Rights Council and hence not debated.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.farwestchina.com/travel/xinjiang-maps/>

## **Countries and Organisations Involved**

### **People's Republic of China**

PRC stands accused of systemic violence against the Uyghurs. China justifies its approach to the Uyghurs as a response to the terrorist threat posed by extremist separatist groups. These policies, in addition to some long-standing prejudices between the Han and Uyghurs, have sometimes resulted in tension between the two ethnic groups. PRC categorically denies that its so-called “strike hard campaign” against the Uyghurs violates Human Rights. Nevertheless, a 2022 United Nations report on Beijing’s alleged abuses against Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region confirmed that the Chinese government’s campaign to combat what it describes as extremism and terror threats in the region amount to “serious human rights violations” with “a discriminatory component.”

### **United States of America**

The US is one of the Fifty United Nations member countries that issued a joint statement that condemned the Chinese government’s persecution of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. It was the largest group of states to publicly denounce Beijing’s human rights violations in Xinjiang, which the UN’s human rights office determined may amount to crimes against humanity. The USA officially accused the PRC of genocide against the Uyghurs in January 2021 when the secretary of state Mike Pompeo stated: “This genocide is ongoing, and (...) we are witnessing the systematic attempt to destroy Uyghurs by the Chinese party-state,” Following this declaration the Biden administration in the US and the Canadian, Dutch and UK parliaments have all described the situation in Xinjiang as genocide, after reports of forced sterilisations and forced labour in the northwestern Chinese region. Chinese representatives have denied all allegations and accused the US secretary of state of spreading “poison” with the genocide allegations.

### **Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch**

More than 20 organisations are pressing the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to initiate monitoring and reporting on the crisis targeting



Uyghurs, as well as other key populations in China, especially in light of growing credible assessments of crimes against humanity. Among the organisations are Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Service for Human Rights (ISHR). The violations targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims have been determined by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to constitute crimes against humanity. These NGOs call on governments of the US and then EU, among others, to adopt economic sanctions against China.

### **Uyghur population**

The Uyghur population in China is estimated at 12.8 million, which is less than 1% of China's entire population. This minority group has faced a long history of oppression which has intensified since 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party was established. 1 million Uyghurs are currently living in detention centres. The Uyghur Muslims have a different religion, are culturally, linguistically and ethnically unlike the majority Han Chinese population. Unlike the Uyghur Muslims, the Han Chinese are majoritarily Buddhist, Confucianists or Taoists.

## Timeline of Events

- 22nd of December 1949** of The People's Liberation Army drove into the Hexi Corridor in The Gansu Province and incorporated the Second East Turkestan Republic (Xinjiang) into the People's Republic of China.
- 1st of April 1950** Osman Batur led an ethnic-Uyghur rebellion against the PRC government in Xinjiang Province beginning on April 1, 1950. Him and 25 other rebels were captured and executed in February of the next year.
- 1st of October 1965** of The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) was established by the PRC government.
- April 1967** The East Turkestan People's Revolutionary Party (ETPRP) was established in opposition to the PRC government.
- 26th of May 1981** On May 26, 1981, ethnic Uighur separatists attacked a People's Liberation Army (PLA) arsenal close to Kashgar, but government troops stopped an attempted uprising in June of that same year. On October 30, 1981, ethnic riots in Kashgar claimed the lives of two people.
- 5th of February 1997** of Chinese police round up a group of 30 "separatists" during Ramadan and execute them. This provokes a series of huge demonstrations in the city of Ghulja. These resulted in the use of tear gas, clubs and water canons. The PLA (People's Liberation Army) intervenes resulting in 9 fatalities. This is known as the Ghulja incident.
- 25th of February 1997** of Three explosives detonated on three buses in Ürümqi, Xinjiang, China. A total of 68 people were injured, including at least 3 children, in the 9 fatalities. The bombings were committed by Uyghur separatists. Certain diaspora Uyghur groups claimed and admitted responsibility for the attacks. This provoked even stronger regulations against protestors and observation of Uyghur communities.
- 25th of June 2009** of The Shaoguan incident. False accusations of the sexual assault of a Han Chinese woman led to a violent altercation between Han Chinese and migrant Uyghur workers at a toy factory. At least two Uyghur coworkers were killed by enraged Han Chinese males, and about 118 individuals were injured, the majority of them Uyghurs, when groups of Han Chinese attacked Uyghur coworkers.
- 5th of July 2009** of The start of many days of rioting in Ürümqi, the capital of Xinjiang on July 5, 2009. Towards least 1,000 Uyghurs took part in the first day's

rioting, which started as a protest but quickly turned into violent attacks primarily directed at Han people. There were 197 fatalities overall, the most of whom were Han people, 1,721 injuries, and several structures and cars destroyed. Numerous Uyghurs vanished after extensive police searches in the days after the riots.

- 18th of July 2011** 18 young Uyghur males protested the local government's campaign against the burqa. At noon, the men stormed into a police station on Nuerbage Street, killed two security officers with knives and bombs, and kidnapped eight people. The Chinese government announced that this attack was a planned religious terrorist attack on the Han population linked to the ETIM.
- 23rd of May 2014** The Government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched the "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism" in the far west province of Xinjiang, In response to growing tensions between the Han Chinese and the Uyghur populations.
- 2016** Civil Servant-Family Pair Up, also known as Pair Up and Become Family is launched. This is a Chinese government policy that requires designated Uyghur households to be paired with Han Chinese governmental officials, with the families being obligated to house the civil servants. More than a million Chinese government employees have been compelled to live in the homes of Uyghur families as of 2018, in order to monitor and analyse cultural assimilation resistance as well as to spy on religious and cultural traditions.
- 1st of April 2017** Long beards and the wearing of hijabs in public were both banned. It was against the law to refuse to follow family planning laws, watch or listen to state-run television or radio, or allow your kids to attend state-run schools.
- 2017** China's Ministry of Public Security began to procure race-based monitoring systems which could supposedly identify whether or not an individual was Uyghur. This enabled the addition of a "Uyghur alarm" to surveillance systems despite its dubious accuracy. Additionally, stricter border controls were put in place.
- 16th of October 2018** The abuses were called to attention for the first time in an official UN gathering by Gay McDougall, an American lawyer serving on a U.N. human rights committee.
- 22nd of July 2019** UN special experts and numerous countries write a letter to Bachelet's office calling out the abuses in Xinjiang and demanding U.N. access to the region. China responded by gathering more countries — 50 — to push back against the charges. Those countries

submitted a letter celebrating China's "remarkable achievements" in human rights and defending China's actions in Xinjiang as legitimate counterterrorism measures.

**31st of August 2022** The UN high commissioner for human rights published an assessment of the human rights situation in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous region, at the UN Human Rights Council's 51st session. Some of the highest-ranking human rights officials determined that the Chinese government has committed serious human rights violations against the largely Muslim, Uyghur population, and even more damning, that there is a substantial basis to believe that the government has also committed crimes against humanity.

## **Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions**

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

The rights and liberties of all people are stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was created by a UN committee led by Eleanor Roosevelt, and was approved by the General Assembly as Resolution 217 on 10 December 1948. The Declaration of Human Rights consists of 30 articles outlining an individual's "Basic rights and fundamental freedoms" and reiterating their inherent, unalienable, and universal nature. Regardless of "nationality, place of residence, gender, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status," nations are obligated by the UDHR to recognize that all people are "born free and equal in dignity and rights."

### **OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur**

#### **Autonomous Region**

The OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China is a report published on 31 August 2022 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concerning the treatment of Uyghurs and other largely Muslim groups in China. The report found that a large number of abuses have been occurring in the PRC such as: Arbitrary detention, forced labour, sexual violence and sterilizations, political indoctrination and suppression of religious practices.

### **1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide**

The Genocide Convention, also known as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), is an international agreement that criminalizes genocide and requires state parties to work to make it illegal. It was created in response to the atrocities committed during WW2 and was approved by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1948. The CPPCG was the first legal document to define genocide as a crime. Any of the following five "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" are

considered genocide, according to the Convention. Member states are barred from committing genocide and are required to work to have this prohibition enforced. Whether they are private citizens, public servants, or political leaders with sovereign immunity, all of the offenders must be brought to justice.

## **Previous Attempts to Solve Issue**

### **Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)**

Through research-based campaigning, the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) advances the rights of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim populations in East Turkistan, also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by the Chinese government. UHRP was established in 2004 as a Uyghur American Association project and changed its status to a nonprofit corporation in 2016. To uphold the civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights of Uyghurs in accordance with international human rights norms, they publish reports and analyses in both English and Chinese. Additionally to providing government agencies and international organisations like the UN and EU with studies and policy suggestions.

### **ICC's Dismissal of December 2020**

In December 2020, a case brought to the International Criminal Court was dismissed because the crimes alleged appeared to have been "committed solely by nationals of China within the territory of China, a State which is not a party to the Statute ", meaning the ICC couldn't investigate them. The complaint against China was filed by two Uighur exile groups, the East Turkistan Government in Exile and the East Turkistan National Awakening Movement. In addition to abuses against Muslims inside China's borders, the Uighur groups had also lobbied the court to investigate Beijing for pursuing the repatriation of thousands of Uyghurs through unlawful arrests in or deportation from other countries, including Cambodia and Tajikistan.

## Possible Solutions

Although most countries recognize that there is injustices occurring in the Xinjiang region, nations have been hesitant on officially proclaiming it a genocide as China is the largest economy in the world. Recognizing the atrocities as genocide would mean Member States are obliged by international law to intervene.

One possible solution would be reaffirming religious freedom in Nations. The People's Republic of China has restricted the wearing of the Hijab and other religious practices and expressions. Religion is one of the Universal Human rights and prohibiting expression would not adhere to the declaration. Reaffirming these rights and freedoms would go against the reeducation camps trying to convert Uyghur Muslims into Chinese communists. This idea could be a solution for Member States who value their existing trade relations with China yet want to condemn the presence of reeducation camps. It is important to keep in mind the fact that China would oppose this idea by stating that it is a violation of China's sovereignty. This could possibly lead other Authoritarian states to follow in the PRC's footsteps.

Another solution could be countries urging the PRC to facilitate the passage of NGOs, Human Rights organisations and journalists in mainland China. Their presence would allow objective information to spread across the world. Thus counter balancing the PRC's filtered and biased media outlets as to what is occurring in the Xinjiang region. This would help China's international reputation and help assuage concerns over their human rights policies.

Lastly, Member States could urge the global private sector to take responsibility for labour practices in their supply chains. This would mean that any forced or slave labour, as allegedly happens inside Uyghur detention centres, as depicted by satellites and national documents, would require appropriate actions and measures from companies, such as sourcing affected supplies from elsewhere.



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