



HRW: CHINA IS COMMITTING CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY



EAST TURKISTAN PRESS AND MEDIA ASSOCIATION
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UK LAWMAKERS DECLARE CHINA'S TREATMENT OF UYGHURS IS GENOCIDE

British lawmakers have unanimously declared China's ongoing crackdown in Xinjiang a genocide, joining the United States, Canada and the Netherlands in condemning Beijing's actions against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in the far-west region in the strongest possible terms.

China has been accused of detaining up to 2 million people in a system of camps set up across Xinjiang in recent years, with survivors alleging widespread abuse, including brainwashing, torture, rape and forced labor. Beijing has denied the worst accusations, defending the system as a vocational training and deradicalization program vital to ensuring the region's security.

Following a debate on Thursday, the House of Commons passed unopposed a non-binding resolution condemning "mass human rights abuses and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region."

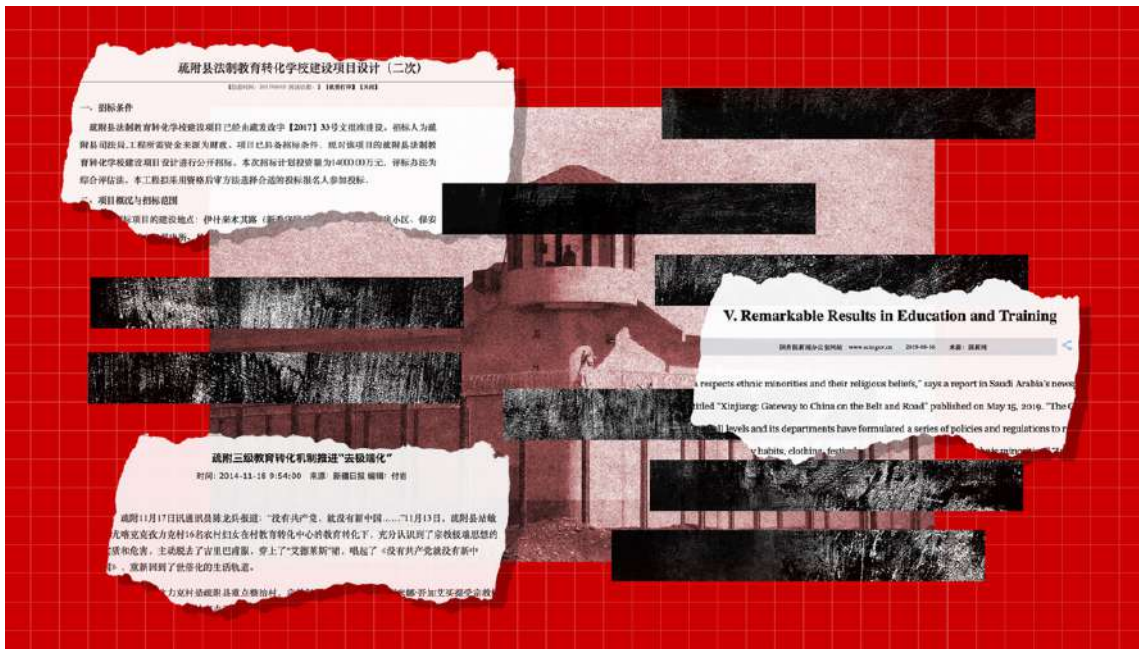
"Today's vote must mark a turning point. No one can still deny the scale of the abuses taking place in the Xinjiang region," Labour

lawmaker Yasmin Qureshi, a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China UK, said.

"That this government is pursuing deeper trade ties with China while these abuses continue is unthinkable."

Introducing the motion Thursday, Conservative lawmaker Nusrat Ghani told lawmakers that "while we must never misuse the term genocide, we must not fail to use it when it's warranted."

Governments insist that genocide can only be determined by competent courts, said Ghani, but "every route to a court is blocked by China."



“Our government is handcuffed, paralyzed by the United Nations. We need to take back control,” she said. “Our route to tackling genocide cannot be controlled by China.”

While the move will likely be seen as having no real impact on UK government policy, it is sure to damage relations between London and Beijing. Ties are already severely strained by Britain’s decision to impose sanctions on Xinjiang, and the resulting tit-for-tat Chinese penalties, as well as China’s moves to limit democracy in Hong Kong, a former British colony.

Beijing has made clear its anger at London for introducing a path to citizenship for holders of British Nationals (Overseas) passports following the imposition of a new national security law on Hong Kong, and lawmakers in the UK have pushed for the British government to take further action in response to recent election law changes, including sanctioning Chinese and Hong Kong officials.

In a recent statement, China’s foreign ministry warned the UK “not go further down the wrong path” in regard to action over Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and reiterated its determi-

nation to safeguard its “national sovereignty, security and development interests.”

‘INTERROGATE THE EVIDENCE’

Per the United Nations Genocide Convention -- to which China is a signatory -- genocide is an attempt to commit acts “with an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, (ethnic), racial or religious group.”

There are five ways in which genocide can take place, according to the convention: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The last time the House of Commons made such a declaration was in 2016, when lawmakers voted to classify the actions by ISIS against Yazidis and other minorities in northern Syria a genocide. That motion was approved unanimously.



Speaking during Thursday's debate, former Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith urged the government to rethink its position on China's actions in Xinjiang.

"We will not gain any particular friendship by not calling out genocide from the Chinese. It is simply not a tradeable item," he said. "The UK government has said endlessly -- and I understand this -- that only a competent court can declare genocide, that is absolutely the original plan.

"But the problem is that getting to a competent court is impossible. At the United Nations it is impossible to get through to the International Court of Justice, it is impossible to get through to the International Criminal Court as China is not a signatory to that and therefore will not obey that."

SANCTIONED BY CHINA

Ghani -- who has been working to raise concerns over the treatment of Uyghurs in China -- was among a number of British lawmakers sanctioned by China last month for having "maliciously spread lies and disinformation" in relation to Xinjiang's human rights issues.

That move came after the UK, in coordination with the European Union, Canada and the US, announced sanctions over Xinjiang, targeting those responsible for the crack-down there.

At the time, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said "it speaks volumes that, while the UK joins the international community in sanctioning those responsible for human rights abuses, the Chinese government sanctions its critics."

"If Beijing want to credibly rebut claims of human rights abuses in Xinjiang, it should allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights full access to verify the truth," he said in a statement.

On Wednesday, Raab announced he was slashing aid to China by 95%, to £900,000 (\$1.25 million), as part of a wider program of cuts to the UK foreign aid budget.

The remaining £900,000 will fund programs on open societies and human rights, the minister said in a statement.

By Laura Smith-Spark and James Griffiths, CNN





NEW REPORT SLAMS CHINA FOR ‘SYSTEMATIC’ OPPRESSION AGAINST UYGHURS

Human Rights Watch has urged the United Nations to take necessary steps to address what it calls China’s crimes against humanity targeting Uyghur Muslims and other Turkic minorities in the Xinjiang region.

A new report released Monday by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Stanford Law School’s Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic says the Chinese government has committed crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims and other Turkic minorities in Xinjiang.

The report, entitled “‘Break their lineage, break their roots’: China’s crimes against humanity targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims,” compared existing research, media reports, government documents and data from China, concluding that Beijing is carry-

ing out widespread and systematic policies of mass detention, torture, cultural persecution and other offenses.

“Chinese authorities have systematically persecuted Turkic Muslims — their lives, their religion and their culture,” said Sophie Richardson, China director at HRW, in the report. “Beijing has said it’s providing ‘vocational training’ and ‘deradicalization,’ but that rhetoric can’t obscure a grim reality of crimes against humanity.”

According to the report, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines crimes against humanity as serious specified offenses that are “knowingly committed” as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population.

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

The alleged crimes highlighted in the report include imprisonment, deprivation of liberty

in violation of international law, persecution of an identifiable ethnic or religious group, enforced disappearance, torture, murder, inhumane acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to mental or physical health, forced labor and sexual violence.

The report urges the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to create a commission of inquiry (COI) to investigate the crimes.



“The COI should have a mandate to establish the facts, identify the perpetrators, and make recommendations to provide accountability,” the report said. “The COI should be comprised of eminent persons, including experts in international human rights law, crimes against humanity, the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, and gender issues.”

Several Western countries have imposed coordinated sanctions against several Chinese officials believed to be responsible for the human rights violations in Xinjiang. In a tit-for-tat move, Beijing imposed sanctions on several individuals and entities in those countries.

‘WIDESPREAD AND SYSTEMATIC’ VIOLATIONS

According to HRW, an estimated 1 million people have been detained in 300 to 400 facilities across Xinjiang since 2017, with

courts in the region allegedly handing down “harsh prison sentences” without due process.

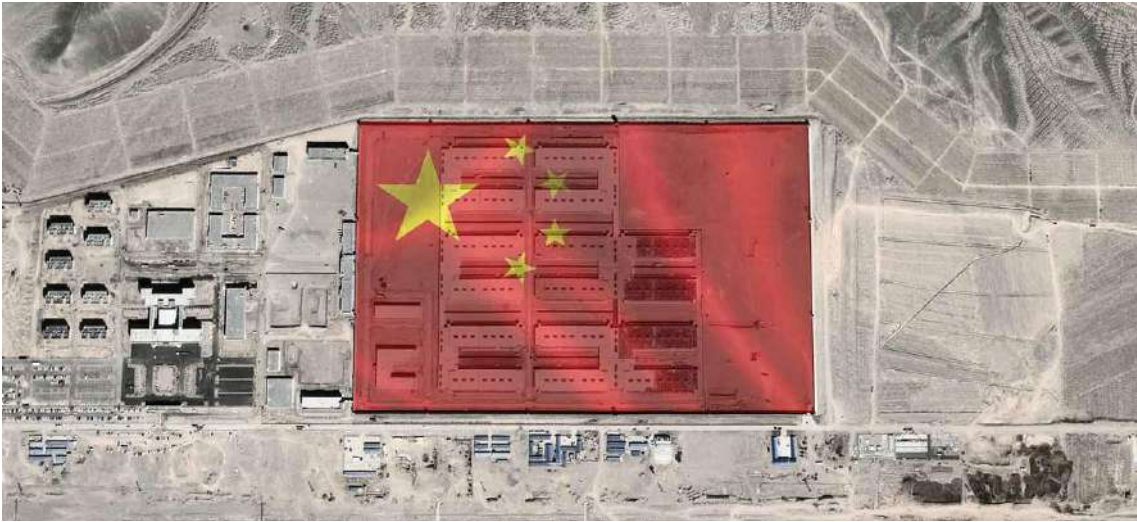
“According to official statistics, arrests in Xinjiang accounted for nearly 21% of all arrests in China in 2017, despite people in Xinjiang making up only 1.5% of the total population,” the report said.

Additionally, evidence shows that local authorities in Xinjiang have used various methods to damage or destroy at least two-thirds of mosques in Xinjiang. Local authorities also implement a vast surveillance network across the region by collecting DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans and blood types of Xinjiang residents between the age of 12 and 65.

HRW’s Richardson told DW the report highlights how the Chinese government’s policies that have affected Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities in the past several years. “We reached the conclusion that these violations fit that definition of widespread and systematic,” she said.

Experts say that growing evidence against China allows the international community to address the human rights violations in Xinjiang.

“I think it’s particularly important [for countries] to call on the UN to establish a commission of inquiry into not only crimes against humanity, but also genocide,” said Yonah Diamond, legal counsel for the Raoul Wallenberg Center for Human Rights and one of the authors of a recent independent report that determined Beijing’s actions in Xinjiang have violated the UN Genocide Convention.



“Often when a genocide is occurring, you have counts of crimes against humanity also brought into the docket,” Diamond told DW.

TAKING CHINA TO TASK

Rights activists say it is crucial for the UN’s high commissioner for human rights to put the Xinjiang human rights issue on the UNHRC agenda. “The high commissioner should try to find pathways forward, whether that’s through a resolution or whether that’s through other tools like an urgent debate,” said Richardson.

“I think it’s also important to remember that there are options available to governments outside of the UN system. There are rec-

ommendations about the merits of national or federal prosecutors starting to gather evidence, and there is also the prospect of universal jurisdiction cases,” she added.

Diamond says countries and independent experts are responsible for taking China to task.

“There is a real consensus within the international legal community that crimes against humanity and genocide are happening in Xinjiang,” Diamond said. “Governments should continue to use the Global Magnitsky Act or human rights sanctions to target individuals and entities most responsible for [the human rights crisis in Xinjiang].”

Experts believe these legal determinations can also offer support to overseas Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. “We want to let the Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic communities inside and outside of Xinjiang know that we certainly recognize this is an ongoing nightmare, and we want to do everything we can to push forward the idea of accountability,” Richardson said.

By William Yang





THE PANDEMIC'S CHILLING EFFECT ON FREE SPEECH

You're reading an excerpt from the Today's WorldView newsletter. Sign up to get the rest, including news from around the globe, interesting ideas and opinions to know, sent to your inbox every weekday.

"Our world is facing a pandemic of human rights abuses," wrote United Nations Secretary General António Guterres in a February op-ed for the Guardian. He lamented how the spread of the coronavirus had exposed brutal inequities in many societies, forced tens of millions of people deeper into poverty, and set back progress on gender equality by decades.

Guterres also pointed to how some governments have used the public health emergency as an excuse for harsh crackdowns. "Using the pandemic as a pretext, authorities in some countries have deployed heavy-handed security responses and emergency measures to crush dissent, criminalise basic freedoms, silence independent reporting and restrict the activities of nongovernmental organisations," he wrote.

More than a year since the onset of the pandemic, there's a growing body of evidence to underpin what the U.N. leader described as its "shrinking" of "civic space." Human Rights Watch documented at least 83 governments worldwide that used the pandemic "to justify violating the exercise of free speech and peaceful assembly ... The victims include journalists, activists, healthcare workers, political opposition groups, and others who have criticized government responses to the coronavirus." The Committee to Protect Journalists found that, in 2020, a record number of journalists were imprisoned globally, some of whom were reporting on the pandemic.



According to PEN America, a freedom of expression advocacy organization, in 2020, at least 273 writers, academics and public intellectuals in 35 countries were in prison or unjustly held in detention in connection with their writing, their work or related activism. It's a considerable uptick from the organization's estimate of at least 238 writers and public intellectuals in 2019.

And the pandemic is in part to blame. "Writers have helped expose truths and counter falsehoods in ways that have shaped the global public health response," noted PEN

America in its report for the "Freedom to Write Index," which released Wednesday. "At the same time, the emergency provided cover for crackdowns on human rights and expansions of government power over speech and expression."

Those crackdowns took place on almost every continent: "In Uganda, novelist and journalist Kakwenza Rukirabashaija was detained and tortured in April, under charges purportedly related to COVID but which appear to have been motivated by authorities' displeasure over his writing," the report not-

ed. “In China, police officers used the pretext of a ‘coronavirus prevention check’ to find and arrest the essayist and activist Xu Zhiyong at his lawyer’s home, and to place poet Li Bifeng into ‘enforced quarantine’ as a form of detention. In Cuba, police invoked a coronavirus-related ‘health code violation’ in November as a pretext to raid the headquarters of the artistic San Isidro Movement, arresting more than a dozen members of the movement.”

This is the second year the organization has conducted what it describes as a “census” of detained writers worldwide. The pandemic deepened the adversity faced by those they monitored, with numerous writers and dissident voices contracting the coronavirus in prison. In June 2020, Saudi columnist Saleh al-Shehi likely died of covid-related complications. “Writers are shining a light on the ways in which these governments have failed to sufficiently respond to crisis,” said Summer Lopez, senior director of free expression programs at PEN America. “Writers are trying give vision to how things could be different, and that’s a reason why we have seen a lot of people targeted.”

China led the organization’s rankings of jailed writers with 81. These include at least 33 artists, academics and other cultural figures in Xinjiang, the far-western region that’s the site of sweeping government crackdown on ethnic minorities, including Uyghurs. “This number may be only the tip of the iceberg,” Karin Karlekar, lead author of PEN America’s report, told Today’s WorldView, referring to the difficulty of accurate reporting in the region, where millions of people have been

allegedly swept into detention camps in recent years. “It’s such an information black hole.”

Karlekar also warned of the deteriorating situation in China’s neighbor, India, the site of “continuing attacks on journalists, harassment of dissidents, leftist intellectuals and people who speak out in favor of minority rights.” India was the only recognized democracy in the top 10 countries ranked by PEN America for their role in incarcerating public intellectuals and dissidents.

Belarus, which had zero documented cases in 2019, rocketed up the ranks with 18 in 2020 — a reflection of the role numerous authors, celebrities and academics played in the weeks of protests against long-ruling President Alexander Lukashenko last year.

Myanmar had eight documented cases in 2020, including the members of a satirical poetry troupe known as the Peacock Generation. But those numbers do not reflect those swept up in mass arrests after the Feb. 1 coup launched by the country’s military, which has issued warrants for numerous outspoken writers and celebrities. “The situation in Myanmar was not good already,” said Karlekar, “but we expect it’s going to be the Belarus of 2021.”

By Ishaan Tharoor



UNDER PRESSURE OVER XINJIANG, CHINA TAKES AIM AT OVERSEAS UYGHURS, ACADEMICS

At a crowded press event on Friday in Beijing, Chinese officials aired a video of a thin Uyghur man with a shaved head, wearing an oversized uniform and speaking directly to the camera.

"I will try my best to change myself and receive the leniency of the party and the government," says the man, Erkin Tursun, a former TV producer who, the officials said, is serving a 20-year sentence in Xinjiang on charges of "inciting ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination and covering up crimes".

Tursun, almost unrecognisable from photos shared online before his 2018 arrest, is addressing his son, who now lives abroad and has publicly advocated against Tursun's detention, which he says is arbitrary.

It was one of over half a dozen such segments showing Uyghurs, a mostly Muslim ethnic minority in the western region, plead-

ing with relatives abroad to come home and stop speaking out against China and the ruling Communist Party.

Such press conferences have become a staple of Beijing's widening campaign to defend its Xinjiang policies amid mounting Western criticism, including U.S. sanctions and accusations of genocide, as Beijing prepares to host the 2022 Winter Olympics in February.

China for months has increasingly pushed back against global criticism of its Xinjiang policies, including with explicit attacks on women who have made claims of abuse. [read more](#)

Last month the United States, the European Union, Britain and Canada imposed sanctions on Chinese officials over human rights abuses in Xinjiang. China retaliated with its own sanctions. [read more](#)

Some big Western brands like H&M (HMB. ST), facing boycotts in China over their previous statements on Xinjiang, are struggling to strike a balance between consumers in the

world's second-largest economy and public opinion at home. [read more](#)

Beijing's propaganda campaign, which has included 11 media briefings in the capital since December, has repeatedly included efforts to discredit overseas Uyghurs who speak to media.

China has also conducted overseas press events, including one this week in Canberra, released state media documentaries and a musical movie, invited diplomats from friendly countries including Iran, Malaysia and Russia to visit Xinjiang, and promoted sympathetic foreign YouTubers and news sites.

It has also targeted individual overseas think tank analysts, journalists and academics with sanctions, amplifying critical social media comments and aggressive state media coverage.

Officials in China's Foreign Ministry and the Xinjiang government say the efforts are necessary to counter "lies and slander" released by a network of "anti-China forces" abroad.

'DADDY, WHEN WILL YOU COME BACK?'

Uyghurs living overseas have said videos of relatives, often produced by Chinese state media outlets, are staged.

"The piece is basically pushing a narrative that it is us Uyghurs overseas who suddenly abandoned our families, which is laughable," said Australia-based Mamutjan Abdurehim



on Twitter in March after a Chinese state broadcaster released footage of his family in Kashgar.

On Friday, Chinese officials shared clips of Mamutjan's daughter, sitting beside her grandparents.

"Daddy, when will you come back? We all miss you," she said.

United Nations experts and researchers estimate over a million people, mostly Uyghurs, have been detained in a vast network of camps throughout Xinjiang since 2017. China initially denied the camps existed but has since said they are vocational centres and that all the people who had been there have "graduated".

During Friday's event, officials took aim at databases set up by overseas activists who have documented the names and details of people caught up in China's camp system.

The officials said they had confirmed the identities of 10,708 people listed in the overseas databases but said over 1,300 people on the list were "completely made up," while over 6,000 are living "normal lives."

The officials said 3,244 people listed on one database were serving judicial sentences inside Xinjiang "for crimes of endangering public security in Xinjiang, terrorism and other crimes."

They said 238 had died of illnesses and other causes.

Overseas rights groups and some relatives of people detained in Xinjiang say they have not been given details of their relatives' whereabouts or sentences. Xinjiang courts do not make public the vast majority of rulings or case details.

By Cate Cadell



UYGHUR AUSTRALIAN WOMAN BREAKS HER SILENCE AS HER HUSBAND IS SENTENCED TO 25 YEARS IN A CHINESE JAIL IN XINJIANG

Melbourne woman Mehray Mezensof has been married for five years, but her husband has been absent for most of that time.

Instead, he has been in and out of detention centres and concentration camps multiple times in China's far north-western region of Xinjiang.

Ms Mezensof has never spoken publicly before, fearing it would make an already perilous situation more dangerous for her husband Mirzat Taher.

But she has been pushed to breaking point after receiving devastating news two weeks ago that Mr Taher, an Australian permanent resident, has been sentenced to 25 years in jail for alleged "separatism".

"It's ridiculous, my husband would never do something like that," the 26-year-old nurse told 7.30 in an exclusive interview.

"This isn't something out of a movie, it is happening."

'Loving, caring and kind person'

Ms Mezensof was born and raised by a Uyghur family in Australia — her parents emigrated to Australia from Xinjiang, China 35 years ago.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is home to more than 11 million Uyghurs, an ethnic minority in the region who are mostly Muslims and speak Turkic, a language similar to Turkish.

More than 1 million Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities are believed to have

been targeted, detained and indoctrinated by Chinese authorities since 2017.

Evidence of these abuses include satellite imagery showing the location of concentration camps and witness accounts detailing rape and torture, forced sterilisation and forced labour.

China's foreign ministry and state media have repeatedly denied the allegations saying the camps are "vocational education centres", and accused western media of fabricating stories about Uyghurs and Xinjiang.

But Ms Mezensof knows only one truth — her husband is currently behind bars in China because he is Uyghur.

In 2016, when Ms Mezensof was 22, she travelled to Xinjiang for the first time and met Mr Taher.



"There was like this kind of spark ... it sounds silly and so cliché, but I feel like honestly it was love at first sight," she said.

"From that moment when I first spoke to him, I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him.

"He was just such a loving, caring and kind person."

'People were disappearing'

After marrying in Urumqi, Xinjiang's capital city, Ms Mezensof applied for an Australian visa for Mr Taher. The visa was granted on April 1, 2017.

"It was around this time when we were hearing of some unrest happening in the capital city," she told 7.30.

"We were hearing whispers from people about how people were disappearing in the middle of the night.

"And they were getting detained and taken to places and never be heard of again."

"It never crossed my mind that something like that could be happening."

In early 2017, China's crackdown on Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities was ramping up, with a massive arbitrary detention program.

The reasons behind detention can vary and could be as minor as wearing a headscarf, having a beard, or traveling overseas for vacation.

Mr Taher was on alert and the couple wanted to leave Xinjiang as soon as possible. They booked flights to Melbourne for April 12, but they never made it to the airport.

The couple's worst fears were realised on the night of April 10, when police came knocking.

"They confiscated my husband's passport and one of the first things they asked was, had my husband travelled overseas," Ms Mezensof recalled.

"Prior to us getting married, my husband travelled to Turkey and he lived and worked there for about a year so.

"So hearing that straightaway, they were just like, OK, we have to continue this at the police station, and then they took him out."

He did not return that night. It was the last time Ms Mezensof saw her husband for more than two years.



After being questioned by local police for three days, Mr Taher was taken to a detention centre for 10 months before transferring to a concentration camp.

Short reunion

Mr Taher was unexpectedly released on May 22, 2019, Ms Mezensof said.

Several weeks later, the couple reunited at the Urumqi airport.

“I was at work when I received the call, I was just like screaming,” Ms Mezensof recalled.

“I was so hopeful; I was so sure that this time he was going to come back with me [to Australia].”

Later, Mr Taher told her what had occurred behind the high walls of the concentration camp.

“He said it was constant brainwashing ... it just sounded crazy,” Ms Mezensof said.

“Learning about the Chinese Communist Party, reading books, and memorising speeches.

“After they released him, police officials were still keeping a really close eye on him.

“They pretty much called him whenever they got the chance. It was constant surveillance.”

Ms Mezensof’s six-month Chinese visa was running out, but the couple was unable to retrieve Mr Taher’s passport from Chinese authorities.

After her application for visa extension was rejected, she had to leave Xinjiang, arriving back in Australia at the end of 2019.

‘Taken again’

Ms Mezensof’s plan to return to China was hindered by the coronavirus pandemic. Unable to travel, the couple stayed in contact over the phone.

But on the morning of May 19, 2020, Ms Mezensof noticed something was up: her messages went unanswered for hours.

“I was freaking out ... every time I’d text, he’d always get back to me,” she recalled.

“I was constantly calling him and video calling him, and he just wouldn’t answer.

“Then that was when I found out that [police] had come in and taken him again.”

She said her husband was detained again on that day and allegedly taken to a camp until August 30, 2020.





Mr Taher's Australian permanent residency was granted shortly before his release.

But only weeks later, Mr Taher was detained for a third time.

7.30 has seen a notice of arrest issued by Hami police in Xinjiang on October 23, 2020.

According to the notice, Mr Taher was arrested for the alleged crime of "organising, leading and participating in terrorist organisation" and was detained in Yizhou District's detention centre in Hami, south-east of the capital city Urumqi.

'Extremely harsh sentence'

Ms Mezensof said her husband's court hearing occurred in January, where his family attended a court in Hami.

Two weeks ago, on April 1, he was sentenced to 25 years in prison, Ms Mezensof said.

"My husband had been sentenced to 25 years prison by the [Chinese Communist Party], all because of time that he spent in Turkey," she said.

"In their eyes, what they've convicted him of is separatism. What they've got on him is that when he went to Turkey, [they claim] he basically organised and participated in these kinds of political activities to try and establish an independent country.

"It's just outrageous. The whole reason he went to Turkey was for a holiday, and he ended up really liking it there, so that's why he decided to live and work there for a little bit."

The Chinese embassy in Australia and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to 7.30's questions by deadline.

Ms Mezensof said neither herself nor her husband's family in Xinjiang had received any written court document or notice about her husband's conviction.

7.30 has approached local authorities in Hami multiple times to obtain Mr Taher's verdict and verify his whereabouts — the attempts were unsuccessful.

His name does not appear on China's Judicial Process Information website relating to legal cases.

7.30 has also seen a police clearance issued by the Turkish authorities on January 2017, saying Mr Taher has "no criminal records".

"I remember just sitting and crying and shaking my head," Ms Mezensof said of learning his sentence.

"He's 30 now, if he carries out these 25 years, he's going to be 55 and I'm going to be over 50 ... that can't be true."



Sophie Richardson, the China director of international advocacy group Human Rights Watch (HRW), said the case is “horrificing”.

“Twenty five years is a real outlier. That is an extraordinarily harsh sentence,” she told 7.30.

“One of the pieces of information we uncovered was a Chinese government list of 26 so called sensitive countries ... many of them have Muslim majority populations and Turkey is on that list.

“It’s a very common place for [Uyghur] people to go and study or travel to or have business with, and presumably that was the trigger issue here.”



‘Crimes against humanity’

Human Rights Watch has released a legal assessment today which concludes that the Chinese government has committed and is continuing to commit crimes against humanity in Xinjiang against Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic communities.

Ms Richardson said it is a significant but warranted step for the organisation to use the term “crimes against humanity”.

“It’s a term that refers to widespread systematic concerted crimes committed by authorities against a population and these kinds of abuses can take place in wartime or in peacetime,” she said.

“Crimes against humanity are among some of the most serious violations under international law.”

The new report sets out the evidentiary basis for the use of the term and has uncovered a long and distressing list of crimes against humanity that the Chinese government commits.

They range from mass surveillance, mass arrests, mass arbitrary detention in forced disappearances, sexual violence and forced labour that are targeted at Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

She said governments around the world, including Australia, should respond to the findings accordingly.

“The Chinese government is now so powerful in the international system, that I think there’s a perception that many of the avenues to investigating and prosecuting these crimes are blocked.

“We believe that idea has to be challenged, and that it’s imperative to contemplate investigations on this basis of Chinese government officials.”

Last month, the United Nations secretary-general Antonio Guterres said the UN is holding “serious negotiations” with China to gain unfettered access to Xinjiang for investigation.

Twenty seven countries including Australia and the UK, have formally expressed concern over China’s treatment of Uyghurs.

The US and Canada have both accused China of committing genocide against the Uyghur population, with Chinese officials facing mounting sanctions from the West.



But Chinese ambassador to Australia Cheng Jingye dismissed that allegation by holding a press conference in Canberra two weeks ago alongside high ranking Xinjiang officials, saying the government maintains “ethnic harmony” in Xinjiang while cracking down on terrorism.

HRW stopped short of using the term “genocide” in the latest report, but Ms Richardson said the report does not preclude that finding.

“We’re very clear that if at such time, we are able to show the intent that’s typically required for something like a genocide prosecution, we will have no trouble saying so,” she said.

“The key next step really is for the High Commissioner for Human Rights to say that she will push for an investigation outside the country and move to assemble evidence.

“I think Beijing’s goal is to silence people. It’s to tell us all to stop asking, to stop caring.”

In a statement to 7.30, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) said it “is aware of the specific case but for privacy reasons we cannot provide further detail”.

“The Foreign Minister recently set out the Australian Government’s grave concerns about the growing number of credible reports of severe human rights abuses against Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” the statement said.

“The Australian Government stands ready to provide consular assistance to Australian citizens overseas, but note our bilateral consular agreement with China only allows us access to Australian citizens who have entered China on an Australian passport.

“We are not entitled to provide consular assistance to anyone who is not an Australian citizen in China.”



For Ms Mezensof, all she wants is to be with her husband and have a normal life.

“It feels like I’m telling a story that’s not my own,” she said.

“Growing up in Australia, being born and raised here, and then hearing something like that, it just seems so unreal. But I lived through this.

“My life wasn’t supposed to be like this. I just wanted to have a normal, boring life like everyone else.”

By Grace Tobin and Samuel Yang



CHINA USING PROPAGANDA ADS ON FACEBOOK TO SHOW OPPRESSED MUSLIMS HAPPY

Facebook may be blocked in China but its government is reportedly using the platform to spread propaganda about its Uyghur minority population via advertising.

According to a report from The Wall Street Journal, some Facebook staff are raising red flags on internal message boards and in other employee discussion groups about the propaganda, including sponsored posts from Chinese groups that purportedly show its Muslim ethnic minority Uyghurs prospering in China's Xinjiang region.

The ads come as Beijing comes under intense criticism globally for mass internment and forced sterilizations campaigns toward its Uyghur population, which has led to claims of genocide.

Beijing has denied any human-rights violations in Xinjiang and says that its actions are

necessary to quell terrorist threats in the region.

The advertisements and posts by the Chinese government and state media include videos of people in Xinjiang, including some children, saying on video that their lives have improved and attributing criticisms to Western efforts to destabilize China.

A Facebook rep told The Journal the sponsored posts don't violate its policies and that the company is monitoring reports of the situation in Xinjiang "to help inform our approach and due diligence on this issue."

Still, Facebook is mulling whether to act on its concerns, including by monitoring how international organizations like the United Nations will respond to the situation in Xinjiang, WSJ said, citing anonymous sources. Last week, the UN called on firms conducting Xinjiang-linked business to undertake "meaningful human rights due diligence" on their operations.

A Chinese government spokesperson did not respond to requests seeking comment, regarding its Facebook activity.

Typically, Facebook takes down Beijing's Xinjiang-related ads within a few days, if internal reviews show they are not properly labeled as pertaining to social and political issues. Advertisers are required, when taking out ads, to indicate in Facebook's ad-purchasing interface when they cover such topics.

If those rules are followed, ads are then shown with the name of the group that paid for them. If not, users still see the ads without that information.

For Facebook, China is still a big client, even though the platform has been blocked in the country since 2009. Citing digital research analysis, The Journal said revenue from advertisers in China may exceed \$5 billion a year. This would put China as Facebook's largest revenue source after the US.

Moreover, China's state-controlled media outlets run three of the world's top 20 most-followed Facebook pages, according to online reference library DataReportal. Beijing's international news channel, CGTN, has more than 115 million followers, which is the fourth-most in the world,

Facebook, which doesn't break out revenue by country, has long wrestled with the ethical and logistical issues that come with taking down posts or removing ads. Recently, the company has been criticized for removing

some posts from former president Donald Trump.

In this case, introducing policies to tackle ads of posts from state-controlled media outlets would be tantamount to deciding what governments are allowed to broadcast on the platform.

"These ads provide a vehicle for Beijing's propaganda," a rep for New York-based human-rights group Avaaz told The Journal. "Even if the amounts aren't huge, it's a direct profit stream" for Facebook, he said. "That's what's particularly troubling."

Facebook chief product officer Chris Cox responded earlier this year to an employee post in the social-media giant's internal group for Muslim staff, called Muslim@, that pointed out that the US government had declared Beijing's treatment of Uyghurs a genocide, and that rival Twitter had taken action against the account of China's US Embassy for a tweet about Uyghurs that violated its policies, The Journal said.

"It's time our platform takes action to fight misinformation on the Uyghur genocide," the employee wrote in the post, which they described as a "plea to our leadership."

Cox reportedly replied: "Thanks for looping me in. This is incredibly serious. Let me check with our integrity teams for a status update and circle back personally or with the right POC [point of contact]."

By Alexandra Steigrad





CANADIAN COUPLE WITNESSES TO CHINA'S 'METHODICAL' REPRESSION OF UYGHURS

During the decade they lived in the Chinese region of Xinjiang, Canadians Gary and Andrea Dyck had a front-row seat to Beijing's "very methodical" repression of the Uyghur people, which Canada's parliament and others have declared to be genocide.

"We saw these things starting to happen and we knew this is not going anywhere good," Andrea Dyck said. "We started to see more and more restrictions. Every week there was a new rule or a new development."

Rights groups say up to one million Uyghurs, a mostly Muslim Turkic minority with a culture distinct from China's ethnic Han major-

ity, are now detained in internment camps.

China has strongly denied allegations of human rights violations, saying training programs, work schemes and better education have helped stamp out extremism in the northwest region and raise income.

The Dycks, who are fluent in Uyghur and Mandarin, settled in Xinjiang in 2007 and ran a composting business for agricultural waste.

"We just really enjoyed life, enjoyed being with the Uyghur people and being accepted and welcomed into relationships and the culture, and it was a very special time -- until it wasn't," Andrea told AFP on Friday from their home in Manitoba.

Following violent riots in 2009 that they witnessed, “traditional Uyghur neighborhoods had started to be dismantled, people were moved more and more into apartment buildings, away from their communities,” she said.

Targeting of Uyghur culture that Gary called “very methodical” started with restrictions on Islamic traditions, and expanded later to include rules on food, clothing, and even language.

The couple said some versions of the Koran were banned, and eventually all books in the Turkic language.

“In a prominent market I saw a sign posted that said it’s not allowed to speak Uyghur,” Andrea said.

“Every single thing became mandated in a way, (people are told) it’s permitted, but then in this way only,” she explained.

In 2016, as the crackdown intensified, the couple said they started noticing an increased police presence, with checkpoints set up at every major intersection and closed-circuit security cameras installed all over.

“Suddenly, you had to go through airport-level security just to walk into a grocery store,” Andrea said.

Next came the internment camps.

“As the camps were being built, and people were being taken away months later, there was no pushback, there was no fight because there was so much security and they were overwhelmed as a people,” Gary said.

A detention center -- Beijing has termed them vocational training centers meant to reduce the allure of Islamic extremism in the wake of attacks -- was even built down the road from their home.

Gary said a wall around it was 15 feet high, topped with barbed wire, and monitored by security cameras as well as guard patrols.

“A few of our (then) 15-year-old son’s friends were turning 18 soon, and they were fearful because they would be legal age and they were wondering if they were going to be taken to these camps next, and so they were actually dreading turning 18,” Gary said.

“Where (else) in the world does a 17-year-old dread turning 18,” he lamented.

Many young men started posting photos of themselves smoking or drinking on social media so as “to not appear Muslim.” One family friend took up smoking again for his own safety, after years trying to quit for health reasons.

Tensions were high, with authorities constantly warning of possible attacks.

“We got so used to this pervasive security,” Andrea said, recounting how her five-year-old daughter and her friend made up an imaginary world for their dolls “and the way you got into this world of magic was through a security system.”

The couple left Xinjiang in 2018 amid an exodus of foreigners after visa rules were tightened.

“There were so many restrictions,” said Gary. “We just felt we were living in a huge penitentiary” with 12 million Uyghurs.

“Also we felt we were becoming a liability to Uyghurs around us, those who knew us, that they could be taken into camps for any reason, and knowing us could be one of those,” Gary said.



CHINA LAUNCHES MUSICAL IN BID TO COUNTER UYGHUR ABUSE ALLEGATIONS

Beijing is attempting to draw attention away from reports it is holding at least one million in Xinjiang internment camps.

A new state-produced musical set in Xinjiang inspired by the Hollywood blockbuster "La La Land" has hit China's cinemas, portraying a rural idyll of ethnic cohesion devoid of repression, mass surveillance and even the Islam of its majority Uyghur population.

China is on an elaborate PR offensive to re-brand the north-western region where the United States and other western nationals and human rights groups say genocide has been inflicted on the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

As allegations of slavery and forced labour inside Xinjiang's cotton industry have drawn renewed global attention, including big brands like Nike saying they would no longer source materials from the region, inside China, Beijing has been curating a very different narrative for the troubled region.

Rap songs, photo exhibitions and a musical – "The Wings of Songs" – are leading the cultural reframing of the region, while a legion of celebrities have seemingly unprompted leapt to the defence of Xinjiang's tarnished textile industry.

Beijing denies all allegations of abuse and has instead recast Xinjiang as a haven of social cohesion and economic renewal that has turned its back on years of violent extremism thanks to benevolent state intervention.

The movie, whose release was reportedly delayed by a year, focuses on three men from different ethnic groups dreaming of the big time as they gather musical inspiration across cultures in the snow-capped mountains and deserts of the vast region.

Trailing the movie, state-run Global Times reported that overseas blockbusters such as "La La Land" have "inspired Chinese studios" to produce their own domestic hits.

But the musical omits the surveillance cameras and security checks that blanket Xinjiang. Also noticeably absent are references to

Islam – despite more than half of the population of Xinjiang being Muslim – and there are no mosques or women in veils.

In one scene, a leading character, a well-shaven Uyghur, toasts with a beer in his hand.



At least one million Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim groups have been held in camps in Xinjiang, according to right groups, where authorities are also accused of forcibly sterilising women and imposing forced labour.

That has enraged Beijing, which at first denied the existence of the camps and then defended them as training programmes.

In March, Britain and the EU took joint action with the US and Canada to impose parallel sanctions on senior Chinese officials involved in the mass internment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province in the first such western action against Beijing since Joe Biden took office.

China hit back immediately, blacklisting MEPs, European diplomats and thinktanks.

Last month, China also swiftly closed down the Clubhouse app, an audio platform where uncensored discussions briefly flowered including on Xinjiang, with Uyghurs giving unvarnished accounts of life to attentive Han Chinese guests.

The current PR push on Xinjiang aims at controlling the narrative for internal consumption, says Larry Ong, of US-based consultancy SinoInsider. Beijing “knows that a

lie repeated a thousand times becomes truth”, he said.

To many Chinese, that messaging appears to be working.

“I have been to Xinjiang and the film is very realistic,” one moviegoer told AFP after seeing “The Wings of Songs” in Beijing. “People are happy, free and open,” he said, declining to give his name.

Last week, celebrities, tech brands and state media – whipped up by outrage on China’s tightly controlled social media – piled in on several global fashion brands who have raised concerns over forced labour and refused to source cotton from Xinjiang.

Sweden’s H&M was the worst-hit and on Wednesday attempted to limit the damage in its fourth-largest market.

The clothing giant issued a statement saying it wanted to regain the trust of people in China, but the message was greeted with scorn on the Twitter-like Weibo platform, where 35 million people shared the fashion chain’s comments.

The pushback has taken on a pop culture edge, with a rap released this week castigating “lies” by the “western settlers” about cotton from the region, while state broadcaster CGTN is set to release a documentary on the unrest that prompted the Beijing crackdown.

It is impossible to gain unfettered access to Xinjiang, with foreign media shadowed by authorities on visits and then harassed for their reporting.

This week, BBC journalist John Sudworth hurriedly left China for Taiwan, alleging “intimidation” after reporting on conditions in the cotton farms of Xinjiang.

By Agence France-Presse



CHINA: TWO FORMER UYGHUR OFFICIALS SENTENCED FOR 'SEPARATIST ACTIVITIES'

The former heads of Xinjiang's justice and education departments have been sentenced to death with a reprieve. China continues to reject allegations of rights abuses against the Muslim Uyghur minority.

Authorities in the northwestern Chinese province of Xinjiang have handed out death sentences to two former government officials from the local Uyghur minority group, the Chinese state-run news agency Xinhua reported.

The two men from the Muslim Turkic minority group were sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve on Tuesday for carrying out "separatist activities" as well as accepting bribes.

Reprieve sentences, like those given to the two convicted men, are often commuted to life imprisonment.

Shirzat Bawudun and Sattar Sawut are just the latest Xinjiang former officials from a

minority Muslim group to be sentenced on national security charges.

China said it has been pursuing a campaign against what it calls "two-faced officials" who are supposedly trying to undermine Chinese rule in the region.

The ruling Communist Party has been accused of human rights abuses amid a large-scale crackdown against minority Muslim groups in the region since deadly terror attacks several years ago.

Ex-justice official accused of terror group collusion

Bawudun, the former head of the Xinjiang department of justice, was sentenced for "splitting the country," a statement on the regional government website said on Tuesday.

The court found him guilty of colluding with the terrorist East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) after he met with a key member from the group in 2003, Xinhua reported.

He was charged with illegally providing "information to foreign forces" and carrying out

“illegal religious activities at his daughter’s wedding,” according to Xinhua.

The US removed ETIM from its list of terror groups in November saying there was “no credible evidence that ETIM continues to exist.”

Official targeted over textbooks

Sawut — the former director of the Xinjiang education department — was found guilty of including ethnic separatism, violence, terrorism and religious extremism content in Uyghur language textbooks.

The court connected the textbooks to attacks in the regional capital Urumqi in 2009, which left at least 200 people dead.

“Sawut took advantage of compiling and publishing ethnic language textbooks for primary and secondary schools to split the country, starting in 2002. He instructed others to pick several people with separatist thoughts to join the textbook compilation team, the court found,” Xinhua reported, citing comments by Wang Langtao, the vice president of the court in Xinjiang that handed down the sentence.

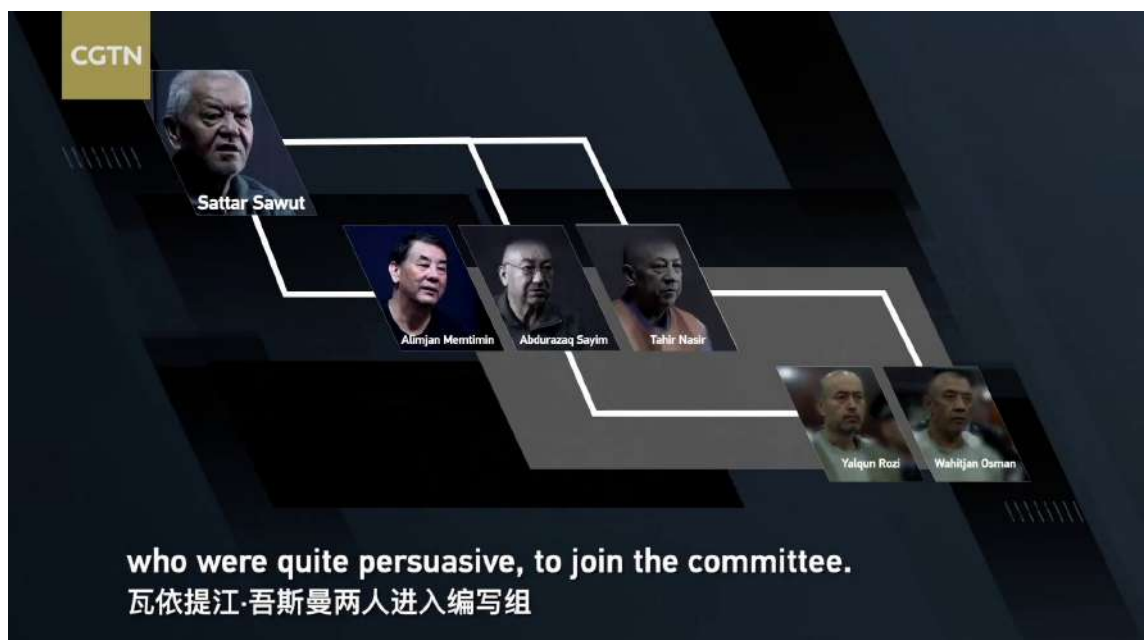
Ongoing crackdown against Muslim minorities

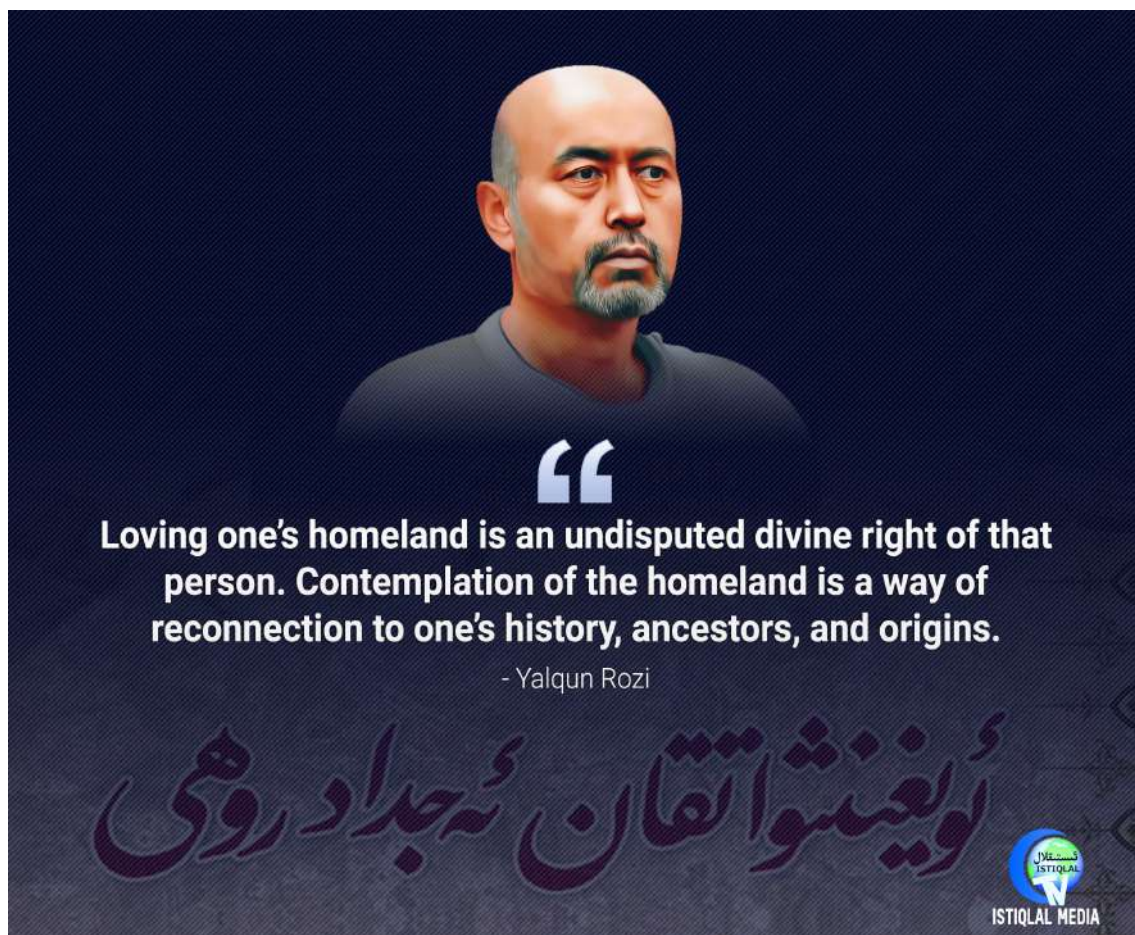
The Chinese government has denied accusations of “genocide” and abuse of the Uyghur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, saying its actions have been necessary to prevent violent extremism.

China has also attacked accusations of forced labor of Uyghurs in factories and cotton fields as well as sanctions imposed by the US on individual officials connected with persecution carried out in Xinjiang.

Rights groups have said that China detained over 1 million people in prison-like reeducation centers where they are told to denounce Islam and traditional culture, learn Mandarin Chinese and swear loyalty to the Communist Party and President Xi Jinping.

Many Uyghur academics have been arrested on charges of separatism.





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