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Uyghur Student Convicted After Posting Protests Video on Wechat

By Amy Hawkins, The Guardian, 2023.6.8

A Uyghur student who was detained in Xinjiang in December after posting a video on WeChat of the “white paper” protests has been convicted of “advocating extremism”.

Kamile Wayit, 19, was detained in Atush on 12 December the day after returning home from university in Henan, a province in central China. She has not been heard from since, but last week a spokesperson from China’s ministry for foreign affairs confirmed to the Economist magazine that Wayit had been sentenced on 25 March “for the crime of advocating extremism”. The spokesperson did not confirm the length of the sentence but it can be up to five years.

Wayit is one of dozens of people – many of them young women – who were detained after protests against China’s harsh zero-Covid regime spread across numerous cities in November and December last year. The trigger for the protests was an apartment fire on 24

November in Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital, which killed 10 people. Many blamed the deaths on residents being unable to leave the building because of Covid controls.

In April, four women who had participated in the protests in Beijing were released on bail after being charged with “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”, a catch-all indictment used against any critics of the government. That charge also carries a sentence of up to five years. The women released in April are reportedly still being monitored by police.

Wayit, who is not thought to have attended any of the protests, has been treated more harshly.

Maya Wang, the associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch, said: “Kamile Wayit’s case is unique in that she has been arrested for a particularly severe crime, simply because she is a Uyghur, and simply for sharing a video about the protests.”

Wayit's case showed how in Xinjiang "the state can construe everything a Uyghur does – including many peaceful, lawful behaviours – as extremism and terrorism and arbitrarily detain and imprison them," Wang said.

Wayit's elder brother, Kewser Wayit, is an engineer living in the US who is outspoken on Uyghur rights issues. He previously told Radio Free Asia that the police had called their father after Kamile shared a post about the protests on WeChat. Kewser also noted that his living abroad may have led to increased scrutiny of

Kamile, as is common for Uyghurs living in China.

Wayit had been studying preschool education at the Shangqiu Institute of Technology in Henan. Between 2017 and 2019 she lived alone in Urumqi, and had depression because their father was detained in a "re-education" camp, according to her brother. She had been due to have eye surgery in Beijing this summer, said a source close to Wayit.

China's ministry of foreign affairs did not respond to a request for comment.

US Bans Imports From China-Based Ninestar Over Uyghurs

By Karen Freifeld, Reuters, 2023.6.10

The U.S. on Friday banned imports from China-based printer maker Ninestar Corp (002180.SZ) and a Chinese chemical company over alleged human rights abuses.

Ninestar, whose website says it is the world's fourth-largest laser printer manufacturer, and Xingjiang Zhongtai Chemical, are being kept out of the U.S. supply chain for participating in business practices that target China's Uyghurs and other persecuted groups, the U.S. Homeland Security Department (DHS) said.

The companies could not immediately be reached for comment.

U.N. experts and rights groups estimate that over a million people, mainly Uyghurs and Muslim minorities, have been detained in camps in China's western Xinjiang region in recent years, with many saying they were subject to ideological training and abuse.

China has denied all accusations of abuse.

The chairs of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China - Representative Chris Smith and Senator Jeff Merkley - said the action

"is important because it offers clear guidance to American companies for supply-chain mapping" but said forced labor like "car parts, solar panels, rayon, and garments" continue to enter the U.S. market.

Senator Marco Rubio said "while today's announcement by DHS to punish more bad actors is welcomed, it is just a drop in the bucket and must go further."

He argued "the Biden administration's current case-by-case approach is giving a free pass to many companies still profiting from slave labor."

DHS said the actions were taken as part of the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act (UFLPA), which was signed into law in December 2021. The act prohibits imports into the U.S. that are either produced in Xinjiang or by companies identified on an UFLPA Entity List, unless the importer can prove the goods were not produced with forced labor.

Twenty-two companies are now on the list, and DHS said it has examined over \$1.3 billion worth of goods likely manufactured with forced labor



nearly a year after the UFLPA was implemented. Ninestar and its eight Zhuhai-based subsidiaries, along with Xinjiang Zhongtai Chemical, were added to the list for working with the government

of Xinjiang to recruit, transport, transfer, harbor or receive forced labor of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, or members of other persecuted groups, out of Xinjiang, according to the posting.

Arab League Visits China's Xinjiang Region, Rejects Uyghur Genocide

By Kasim Kashgar, VOA, 2023.6.10

China is using a recent visit by an Arab League delegation to Xinjiang to highlight what it says is support of its policies in the region. Experts, however, say the praise that Beijing has reportedly received from diplomats and officials who took part in the trip is nothing more than "Chinese propaganda" and an attempt to whitewash human rights violations there.

China's treatment of Uyghur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang is a major source of international concern. Western countries have raised allegations of forced labor, religious persecution and some, including the United States, have classified what is happening in Xinjiang as genocide, an accusation Beijing denies.

State media reports and remarks from Chinese officials about the delegation's visit have portrayed the trip as an outright rejection of what it called Western "accusations of ethnic genocide."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that during the Xinjiang visit from May 30-June 2, members of the Arab League delegation expressed their appreciation for China's efforts in Xinjiang and praised the region's development and stability.

"During their trip, the delegation traveled to Urumqi and Kashgar, where they visited mosques, Islamic institutes, local enterprises, old towns and an exhibition on counterterrorism and

de-radicalization, performed prayers in mosques with the locals and got a firsthand experience of their happy life,” Wang said at a press briefing in Beijing earlier this week.

“Arab countries have commended the care that Muslims in Xinjiang and people of other ethnic minority groups have received and expressed their firm support for China’s effort to promote Xinjiang’s development and ensure its stability.”

According to Wang, Arab countries have always held a just position on Xinjiang.

“What the Arab League delegation has seen with their own eyes in Xinjiang once again shows that truth will always prevail, and those who seek to smear China by manipulating Xinjiang-related issues will not have their way,” Wang said.

The Arab League, founded in 1945, is a confederation of 22 Arab nations aiming to improve coordination on common interests. Its charter promotes cooperation, renounces violence, and mediates disputes, but lacks enforcement mechanisms.

Critics point out that the apparent endorsement of China’s policies by the Arab League delegation is at odds with the findings and conclusions of the

U.N. human rights office, which has highlighted serious human rights violations in Xinjiang.

In a post on Twitter, Adrian Zenz, a senior fellow and director in China studies at the Washington-based Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, called the visit a “terrible betrayal.”

Last year, the U.N. human rights office released an assessment of the human rights situation in Xinjiang, concluding that China’s actions against Uyghurs and other minority groups may amount to crimes against humanity.

The assessment highlighted various human rights violations taking place in Xinjiang, including arbitrary detention, forced labor, cultural assimilation, surveillance, and restrictions on religious and linguistic freedoms.

According to Abdulhakim Idris, director of the Washington-based Center for Uyghur Studies, the Arab League delegation’s visit and support of China’s actions in Xinjiang is part of a Chinese propaganda campaign to conceal its mistreatment of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities.

“This visit is the last example of the Chinese Communist Regime’s propaganda efforts to hide the Uyghur Genocide in East Turkistan from





the world public opinion,” Idris told VOA in an email, using the name East Turkistan, Uyghurs’ preferred name for the region.

Chinese media outlets Xinhua and the Global Times reported that the delegation’s visit to Xinjiang contradicted Western media portrayals.

The Chinese reports said that the Arab League delegation praised China’s achievements in Xinjiang in upholding human rights, particularly highlighting China’s “anti-terrorism” efforts in the region.

“The group visited a number of locations in Xinjiang and said that the region does not match what is portrayed by Western media, and it boasts harmony and stability, a rapidly growing economy and a colorful and prosperous culture, with residents living and working in peace and contentment,” Xinhua said.

The visit garnered attention primarily from

Chinese state media outlets such as China Daily, China Central Television, Xinhua and the Global Times. Chinese embassies and diplomats shared excerpts from those reports on Twitter. The Arab League did not mention the visit on its website or social media platforms.

However, Idris said the statements made by the delegation should be considered in the context of economic and diplomatic ties between their countries and China.

“Today, China has made many countries from both the Arab world and the Muslim regions dependent on it, both economically and diplomatically,” Idris said.

These countries are unable to respond as expected in terms of human rights and democracy due to their economic reliance on China. Instead, they favor the explanations provided by the Chinese government, he added.

Uyghur Foreign Travel Vlogs Likely a Feature of Chinese Government Propaganda

By Liam Scott, Polygraph.info, 2023.6.7

Uyghurs have been unable to travel freely for several years

A man slowly meanders through an airport terminal as he talks about his upcoming trip to Istanbul. Sporting a white polo shirt and yellow jacket, he speaks with excitement about visiting his daughter in Turkey. He says he hasn’t seen her since 2019.

It could be any other travel vlog.

But this man is Uyghur, and he’s speaking from a curiously empty Chinese airport.

Few Uyghurs have been able to leave the

northwestern region of Xinjiang, let alone China, for years. The Chinese government stands accused of perpetrating genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other groups in the region.

One element of the campaign has been barring Uyghurs from traveling abroad and persecuting those who have traveled abroad — especially to countries deemed sensitive, like Turkey.

That’s why this recent video and others like it appear to be part of a new propaganda campaign from Beijing in which Uyghurs

vlog about their travels abroad to create the impression that all is well in Xinjiang, experts on the human rights crisis there told VOA.

“This is just another desperate attempt by the Chinese Communist regime to conceal its atrocities against the Uyghurs,” Rushan Abbas, founder of the rights group Campaign for Uyghurs, told VOA. “The Chinese government is using all different kinds of tactics to cover up its very egregious violations, and they try to project an image of normalcy.”

While it’s difficult to definitively confirm whether these videos are a concerted campaign orchestrated by the Chinese government, multiple experts on the Uyghur human rights crisis told VOA it’s nearly impossible that a Uyghur person would be able to travel abroad, especially in such a public way, without official approval.

This particular airport video was posted on May 10 on Kuaishou, a social media app for short videos that is partially owned by the state. The man speaks in the Uyghur language, but the video also includes Chinese subtitles.

The man in question, known by the username Seherdin, has over 34,000 followers on the Kuaishou platform. Since the airport vlog — which has garnered over 23,000 likes — he has posted over 30 more videos documenting his travels abroad.

Seherdin appears to be the most prominent person to make these vlogs to date, but he isn’t alone. In another video, for example, a Uyghur man vlogs about his travels to Japan.

Chinese propaganda about Xinjiang is nothing new. For years, Beijing has disseminated disinformation about the region, which Uyghurs prefer to call the Uyghur Region or East Turkistan. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long claimed that its policies in the region are for counterterrorism purposes.

In a statement emailed to VOA, Liu Pengyu, the spokesperson for China’s Washington embassy, denied reports of genocide in Xinjiang.

Beijing has previously used Uyghur lifestyle YouTubers as part of its propaganda campaign.





Travel vloggers are also key to China's propaganda aimed at covering up rights abuses in Tibet, as a recent Polygraph.info fact check revealed.

But these recent travel vlogs are putting forth a new narrative — that Uyghurs can travel freely. The goal of this narrative, like the rest of the propaganda, is to whitewash Beijing's human rights abuses, according to Zubayra Shamseden, who works at the Uyghur Human Rights Project, or UHRP.

"I was really shocked," Shamseden told VOA, speaking about when she first viewed Seherdin vlogging from the airport about his trip to Turkey. That was mainly because the notion that Uyghurs can freely leave China is completely at odds with reality.

Since 2016, Uyghurs have been increasingly targeted with exit bans, largely through the confiscation and denial of passports, to restrict their travel abroad, according to a report last month from the Safeguard Defenders human rights group. Uyghurs who have traveled abroad, especially to places deemed sensitive like Turkey, are targeted for persecution.

"So how does that square with these people going abroad, vlogging from an airport? It just doesn't," said Peter Irwin, who works with Shamseden at the UHRP.

Liu, the Chinese Embassy spokesperson, told VOA: "Xinjiang has never restricted the freedom of movement of Uyghurs or people of

any other ethnic group."

The spokesperson did not reply to VOA's query about whether Beijing was involved in these recent vlogs.

"We hope that the relevant personnel can let go of their preconceived prejudices and view Xinjiang and China under the principle of truthfulness, objectivity and fairness," Liu said.

Shamseden said China's frequent use of Uyghurs and Uyghur voices to whitewash reported abuses is common — and disturbing.

"To me, it's alarming as well as very painful to hear Uyghurs say that the genocide is not happening to them," Shamseden said.

It's unclear whether the Uyghurs in the videos were forced to create them, Shamseden said. But she added that they were likely coerced.

"Maybe his parents, other relatives, family members are in the concentration camps," she said. Between 1 million and 3 million people, mainly Uyghurs, have been arbitrarily detained in Xinjiang since 2017.

Abbas said this international travel vlog campaign underscores the lengths to which Beijing is going to cover up its abuses in Xinjiang.

"What the CCP is doing right now is they are using numerous tactics to manipulate public opinion and distort the truth and downplay the severity of the genocide and atrocities in our homeland," Abbas said.



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