

China Seeks to Stop UN Rights Chief From Releasing Xinjiang Report - Document

By Emma Farge, Reuters, 2022-07-20



China is asking the United Nations human rights chief to bury a highly-anticipated report on human rights violations in Xinjiang, according to a Chinese letter seen by Reuters and confirmed by diplomats from three countries who received it.

United Nations High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet has faced severe criticism from civil society for being too soft on China during a May visit and has since said she will refrain from seeking a second term for personal reasons

But before she leaves at the end of August, she has pledged to publish a report into the western Chinese region of Xinjiang. Rights

groups accuse Beijing of abuses against Xinjiang's Uyghur inhabitants, including the mass use of forced labour in internment camps. China has vigorously denied the allegations.

The letter authored by China expressed «grave concern» about the Xinjiang report and aims to halt its release, said four sources - the three diplomats and a rights expert who all spoke on condition of anonymity. They said China began circulating it among diplomatic missions in Geneva from late June and asked countries to sign it to show their support.

«The assessment (on Xinjiang), if published,

will intensify politicisation and bloc confrontation in the area of human rights, undermine the credibility of the OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights), and harm the cooperation between OHCHR and member states,» the letter said, referring to Bachelet's office.

«We strongly urge Madame High Commissioner not to publish such an assessment.»

Liu Yuyin, a spokesperson for China's diplomatic mission in Geneva, did not say whether the letter had been sent or respond to questions about its contents.

Liu said that nearly 100 countries had recently expressed their support to China on Xinjiang-related issues «and their objection to interference in China's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights».

This support was voiced through public statements at the last U.N. Human Rights Council session, which ended on July 8, and through the «joint letter», Liu added, using a term denoting China and the other signatories.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson told Reuters that Bachelet would have witnessed a «real Xinjiang with a safe and stable society» when she visited the region during her May trip to China.

The spokesperson said attempts by some countries to «smear China's image» using the Xinjiang issue would not succeed.

It was not clear whether Bachelet had received the letter, and an OHCHR spokesperson declined to comment on the matter.

The Xinjiang report is being finalised prior to public release, he added, saying this includes



the standard practice of sharing a copy with China for its comments.

The report is set to address China's treatment of its Uyghur minority. A team of rights experts began gathering evidence for it more than three years ago but its release has been delayed for months for unclear reasons.

Reuters was not able to establish how many signatures the letter received. One of the four sources, a Geneva-based diplomat, replied to the letter positively giving his country's support.

Another version of the letter also seen by Reuters was more critical of Bachelet's actions, saying that the Xinjiang report was done «without mandate and in serious breach of OHCHR duties», and would undermine her personal credibility.

It was not clear who edited it or why. The diplomat who signed the letter said the softer version was the final one.

DIRECT LOBBYING

China, like other countries, sometimes seeks to drum up support for its political statements within the Geneva-based rights council through diplomatic memos which others are asked to support.

These can sometimes influence decisions at the 47-member Council, whose actions are not legally binding but can authorise investigations into suspected violations.

Two of the Geneva diplomats said China's letter represents a rare example of evidence of Beijing seeking to lobby Bachelet directly. Sometimes, they say, countries find it hard to say no to China on human rights issues, given close economic ties.

The memo comes at a critical juncture for the U.N. rights body in the last few weeks of Bachelet's term, with no successor yet nominated. Bachelet, 70, is due to leave office on Aug. 31.

China's Information Operations are Silencing and Influencing Global Audiences on Xinjiang

By Albert Zhang and Tilla Hoja, ASPI, 2022-07-20

The Chinese Communist Party is using social media and disinformation campaigns to project its preferred narratives about Xinjiang and influence unwitting audiences around the globe. Instead of improving its treatment of Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities, the CCP is responding to critiques of its human rights record by coordinating

its state propaganda apparatus, security agencies and public relations industry to influence and even silence governments, businesses and civil society at home and abroad.

For our new ASPI report, *Assessing the impact of CCP information operations related to Xinjiang*, we collected and analysed a vast

amount of multi-language data, including Chinese government documents and speeches, government statements made to the UN Human Rights Council, corporate responses to Chinese state-affiliated consumer backlashes (regarding Xinjiang-

minority residents apparently waving and cheering the draconian policies they have been forced to live under.

Our research reveals that CCP information operations are successfully silencing



related forced labour), 613,301 Facebook posts, 6,780,809 tweets and retweets, and 494,710 media articles.

The findings come on the back of President Xi Jinping's recent visit to Xinjiang—his first since 2014. Despite almost a decade of repressive and discriminatory policies, including the arbitrary detention, mass sterilisation and cultural degradation of minorities in Xinjiang, reporting from Xi's visit showed Uyghurs and other Muslim

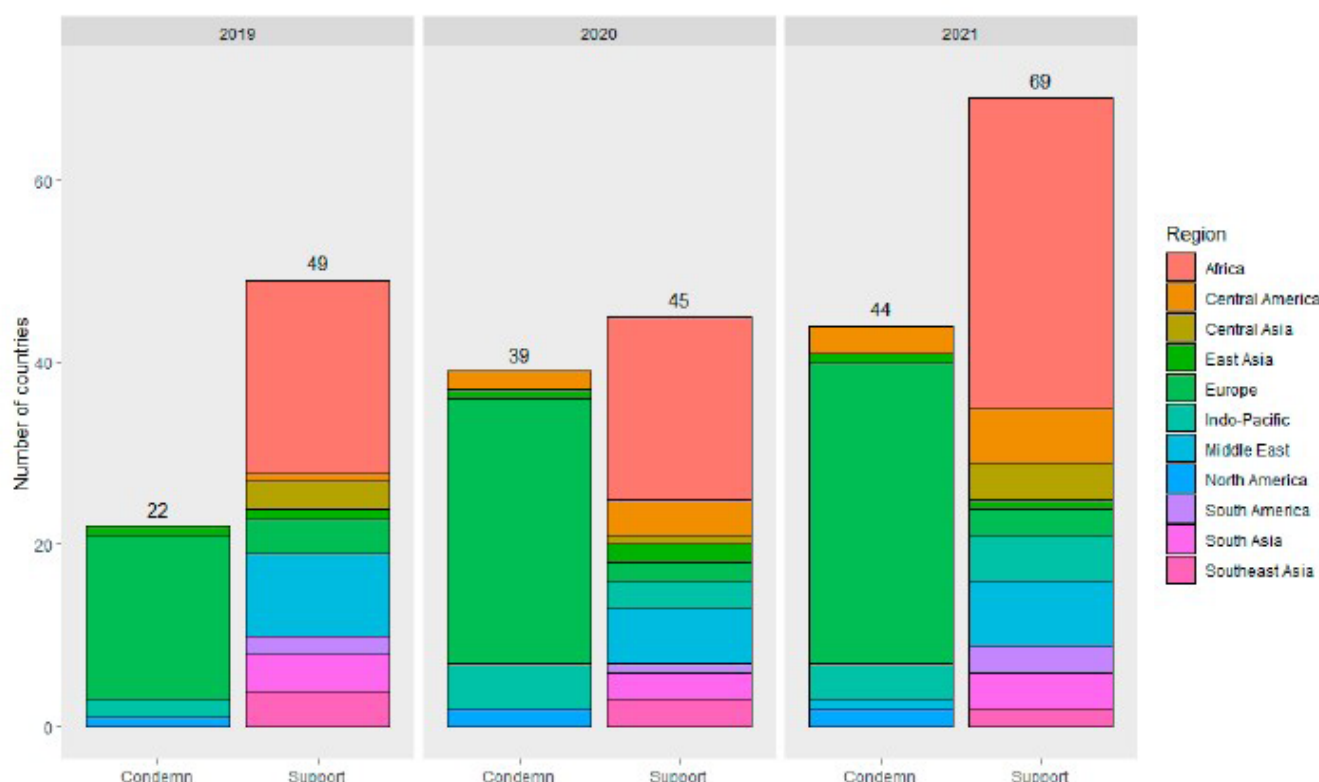
governments, businesses and civil society organisations globally and deterring them from criticising the CCP's human rights record and actions. CCP online information operations deny, distract and deter voices critical of CCP policies by flooding social media with positive depictions of Xinjiang and whitewashing evidence of human rights abuses. These activities are coordinated with other coercive tactics such as state-affiliated trolling campaigns, cyber surveillance

operations and offline harassment.

Xinjiang-focused CCP propaganda and information operations were more effective on Facebook than on other platforms such as Twitter. For example, of the top 400 Facebook posts with the most interactions (including reactions and shares), 60.3% were posted by Chinese state media and diplomats. Of the top 1,000 tweets with the most interactions (including likes and retweets), only 5.5% were posted by Chinese state media and diplomats, and 4% were from accounts suspended by Twitter for platform manipulation.

Social media data collected in this report

also confirmed that the CCP and state-affiliated entities are likely deploying coordinated inauthentic accounts to amplify their online public diplomacy and disseminate disinformation. In the top 400 Facebook posts mentioning Xinjiang, there was a statistically significant difference in the number of comments posted by non-CCP Facebook accounts compared to posts from CCP-affiliated accounts with similar numbers of total interactions. Facebook posts by CCP-affiliated accounts tended to have fewer comments than posts by other accounts with a similar number of interactions. One explanation for this could



Countries supporting or condemning CCP human rights abuses in East Turkistan at UNHRC sessions, 2019 to 2021

be that CCP-affiliated accounts (such as those of Chinese diplomats and state media) are being inauthentically amplified.

News articles in different languages varied significantly in the tone of their reporting about Xinjiang and reflected differences in global public opinion about the CCP's policies in the region. Of 494,710 articles analysed in more than 65 languages, Chinese-language articles were more likely to convey positive assessments of Chinese state policy and action in Xinjiang. Statistically similar results came from analyses of articles published in Urdu, Japanese, Thai and Turkish.

Our analysis of government statements at UNHRC sessions that found most countries that have supported CCP policies were based in Africa or the Middle East, which are emerging markets for US-based social media companies, while countries that have condemned CCP policies were mostly democratic nations in Europe and elsewhere. Most notable is the silence of governments in Muslim-majority and non-Western countries. Of the 57 member states forming the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, only Albania and, more recently, Turkey have condemned the CCP for its policies in Xinjiang.

The impact of these operations isn't widely understood, and the international community—including governments and

social media platforms—have failed to adequately respond to the global challenges posed by the CCP's rapidly evolving propaganda and disinformation operations. The CCP's public diplomacy is bolstered by covert and coercive campaigns that impose costs and seek to constrain international entities—be they states, corporations or individuals—from offering evidence-based critiques of the party-state's record on human rights in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and other sensitive issues.

CCP information operations—including those targeting Xinjiang narratives and human rights abuses—should be countered now to mitigate the party's global campaign of transnational repression and information warfare. Achieving that will require governments and civil society to work more closely with social media platforms and broadcasters to deter and expose propaganda organisations and operatives.

Governments must lead this policymaking process in coordination with allies and partners with shared interests. We recommend expanding economic sanctions regimes that target the perpetrators of serious human rights violations and abuses to include the distributors of disinformation and foreign propaganda who silence, intimidate and continue the abuse.

Morocco: Uyghur Activist at Risk of Extradition

By Human Rights Watch, 2022-07-19



One year after his arrest at Casablanca airport, Yidiresi Aishan, also known as Idris Hasan, a Uyghur activist, remains under threat of extradition from Morocco to China, where there are substantial grounds to believe that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture, 45 human rights organizations said today.

After arriving in Morocco on a flight from Turkey, where he had been living with his family since 2012, Aishan was arrested on the night of July 19, 2021, on the basis of what is known as a red notice issued by Interpol at China's request, "for belonging to a terrorist organization." In recent years, China has increasingly used the Interpol red notice system to stifle dissent.

On July 20, 2021, Aishan was brought before

the prosecutor at the Court of First Instance in Casablanca, who ordered that he be remanded in custody in Tiflet prison, pending the decision of the Court of Cassation. Since then, he has remained detained in that same prison.

On December 15, 2021, the Court of Cassation in Rabat issued a favorable opinion on the extradition request, despite Interpol's August 2021 cancellation of the red notice issued against Aishan, on the grounds that it violated its statutes and Aishan's filing of an application for refugee status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Since that decision, the issuance of an extradition decree by the Moroccan prime minister is the only step separating Aishan from extradition.

The issuance of such a decree would contradict Morocco's international obligations, including the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which states in article 3 that "no State Party shall expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture."

When living in Turkey, Aishan reportedly provided translation assistance to other Uyghurs in exile and helped collect

testimonies on human rights violations in Xinjiang. As a member of the Uyghur community and given his activism, Aishan would face real risks of torture and other ill-treatment as well as prolonged arbitrary detention if forcibly returned to China.

Uyghurs are increasingly experiencing persecution and large-scale human rights violations in Xinjiang. Members of the diaspora who are not firmly settled in third countries are facing a real risk of detention and refoulement.

Multiple international bodies have thus called on Morocco not to extradite Aishan to China in accordance with the fundamental principle of nonrefoulement.

On August 11, 2021, several UN Special Procedures mandate holders sent an urgent appeal to Morocco, recalling the absolute and non-derogable prohibition against returning a person to a place where they would be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

The experts reiterated their call in a statement on December 16, 2021, highlighting the risk

of “serious human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment” that Aishan could face if returned to China.

At the request of MENA Rights Group and Safeguard Defenders, the UN Committee against Torture (CAT) sent a request for interim measures to the Moroccan authorities on December 20, 2021. In order to prevent irreparable harm to Aishan, the Moroccan authorities were instructed “not to extradite the complainant [Aishan] to China while his request is under consideration by the Committee.” Aishan’s case remains pending before the Committee, which has yet to issue a final decision.

In light of the above, Moroccan authorities should cancel the extradition proceedings against Aishan and release him from his year-long detention, which, in the absence of periodic judicial review, individual assessment, and credible grounds, may amount to arbitrary detention, the groups said.

US Hits out at Russia, China in Annual Human Trafficking Report

By Al Jazeera, 2022-07-19

The United States has hit out against Russia and China, accusing the two countries of enabling human trafficking in a US Department of State annual report on the subject.

The 634-page document, released on

Tuesday, covers policies on human trafficking around the world, including in the United States. Both Russia and China are mentioned throughout the report as two of the worst offenders.

Russia is listed as one of 11 countries with



a “‘policy or pattern’ of human trafficking, trafficking in government-funded programs, forced labor in government-affiliated medical services or other sectors, sexual slavery in government camps, or the employment or recruitment of child soldiers”.

Other countries on the list include Afghanistan, Myanmar (Burma), Cuba, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Russia, South Sudan, Syria, Turkmenistan and Yemen.

Russia had appeared on the same list in last year’s report. But this year, there was an added emphasis on the invasion of Ukraine on making Ukrainians vulnerable to human trafficking.

“Russia’s senseless continued invasion of Ukraine and its devastating attacks across that country have inflicted unfathomable pain and suffering and forced millions of Ukrainian citizens and others to flee seeking safety,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in the preface of the report.

“We are deeply concerned about the risks of human trafficking faced by individuals internally displaced by the war, as well as

those fleeing Ukraine, an estimated 90 percent of whom are women and children. The food insecurity and other broader effects of Russia’s war exacerbate trafficking risks around the globe.”

The document also names Kateryna Cherepakha, the head of La Strada Ukraine, an NGO established in 1997 that set up a hotline to assist victims, as one of six “heroes” combatting trafficking.

“Since the start of Russia’s war against Ukraine, the telephone and online hotline has seen a manifold increase in calls for assistance,” Tuesday’s report reads. “It has remained open under her leadership and as a result, thousands of Ukrainians have been able to access crucial information, advice, and assistance to keep themselves safe from trafficking and exploitation.”

The Russian embassy in Washington did not immediately return Al Jazeera’s request for comment.

Another country that features frequently in the report is China. The annual document accuses Beijing of “government policy or pattern of widespread forced labor, including through the continued mass arbitrary detention of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, ethnic Kyrgyz, and members of other Turkic and/or Muslim minority groups in the Xinjiang”.

Washington has accused Beijing of carrying out a “genocide” in Xinjiang, a charge that China has vehemently rejected.

This year’s Department of State report on human trafficking has an entire section

dedicated to the Chinese-led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of infrastructure projects around the world.

“PRC [People’s Republic of China] and host country nationals employed in some BRI construction projects, mining operations, and factories in African, European, Middle Eastern, Asian, Pacific, Latin American, and Caribbean countries experience deceptive recruitment into debt bondage, arbitrary wage garnishing or withholding, contract irregularities, confiscation of travel and identity documentation, forced overtime, and resignation penalties,” the report said.

Workers also faced “intimidation and threats, physical violence, denial of access to urgent medical care, poor working and living

conditions, restricted freedom of movement and communication, and retaliation for reported abuses”, it added.

A spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in Washington rejected the report as a US attempt to “make unwarranted accusations against other countries”.

“The Chinese government has achieved universally recognized progress in combating human trafficking while the US has a notorious record on this issue,” Liu Pengyu told Al Jazeera in an email.

“If the US wants to call out countries that engage in human trafficking, it should firstly point fingers at itself,” he added.



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