

Long-Awaited Uyghur Human Rights Report Due This Month

By Asim Kashgarian, VOA, 2022-08-11



August is a significant month for international human rights organizations and the Uyghur diaspora, who have been anticipating a long-promised report on Xinjiang from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

«As we have said, the high commissioner has committed to publishing the report before her term finishes at the end of the month,» OHCHR spokesperson Liz Throssell told VOA.

Ahead of High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet's departure from her office and her planned release of OHCHR's human rights assessment in Xinjiang, China in recent weeks has ramped up its pressure on

Bachelet to bury the Xinjiang human rights report through letter and email campaigns.

Pressure from China

Last week, the state-run publication China Daily reported that Uyghurs in Xinjiang sent emails to Bachelet, sharing their «personal stories and expressing anger» at learning about how the region is portrayed by «anti-China forces.»

«Many witnesses and families of the victims of terrorism hope that Bachelet can learn more about the impact of the brutal attacks by reading their emails,» the China Daily wrote, referencing a report by Chinese state news agency Xinhua. «From 1990 to 2016,

separatists, extremists and terrorists plotted and carried out thousands of terror attacks in Xinjiang.»

The China Daily said Beijing's solution to fighting terrorism is to set up «vocational education and training centers to help those who may be influenced by terrorism and extremism.»

«[O]ur office receives a lot of emails, both from individuals and also more organized email campaigns, and we don't comment on such correspondence,» Throssell told VOA when asked about the emails.

Last month, Reuters reported that Beijing sent a letter to the U.N. rights chief asking her not to release the assessment on the human rights situation in Xinjiang out of «grave concern» that if published it would further politicize human rights in China.

Human rights organizations

International human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as well as countries including the U.S. accuse China of human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. The accusations include mass arbitrary incarceration of Muslims in internment camps, forced labor, forced sterilization of women, and forced separation of school-aged children from their parents. Beijing has repeatedly denied the accusations as «fabrication» by forces hostile to China.

After years of negotiations for «unfettered access» to the Uyghur region of Xinjiang, Bachelet finally traveled in May to China,

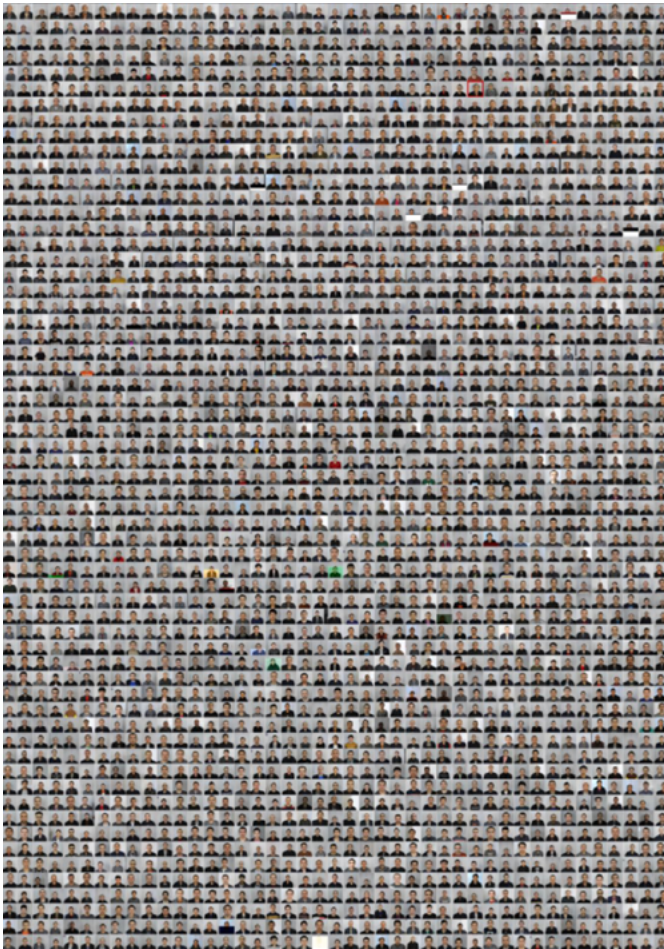
including Xinjiang, where Beijing is accused of the mass incarceration of nearly 2 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim populations.

During her visit, international rights groups accused Bachelet of being soft on China and urged her to «publicly acknowledge the scale and gravity of human rights violations being committed by the Chinese government,» Agnes Callamard, Amnesty International's secretary-general, said on the organization's website.

While in China, critics said, Bachelet referred to Xinjiang detention centers as «vocational and educational training centers,» using China's own terminology, and asked the Beijing government to review counterterrorism measures. Bachelet also praised China's achievements in poverty alleviation and health care. She did not publicly denounce the widely reported accusations of human rights abuses faced by Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang since 2016, causing a firestorm on social media.

The U.S. State Department also raised concerns that Bachelet and her team's visit to China was restricted and manipulated by China.

«We are further troubled by reports that residents of Xinjiang were warned not to complain or speak openly about conditions in the region, that no insight was provided into the whereabouts of hundreds of missing Uyghurs and conditions for over a million individuals in detention,» according to a State Department press statement.



Xinjiang human rights assessment

According to Bachelet's office, Beijing will be given an opportunity to comment on the final U.N. human rights assessment on Xinjiang before it is released.

«As with all reports by OHCHR, once it is final,

the report will be shared with the authorities for factual comments before publication. The report will need to be updated with our interactions and observations from the visit,» Throssell wrote to VOA in an email.

She told VOA Bachelet's «access was limited» and pointed out that the trip was not intended to be an investigation into the alleged rights violations in Xinjiang.

Last Friday, Republican Senator Marco Rubio called on Bachelet to «immediately release» the report and «reject» the pressure from the Chinese government.

«As you approach your departure as high commissioner on August 31, the report remains buried while CCP diplomats reportedly conduct a flurry of confidential lobbying to halt its release,» Rubio said in a statement on his website. «Do not let the CCP further taint your tenure as commissioner by withholding the report a minute longer.»

After her China visit, Bachelet told reporters in June that she would release the report before she stepped down at the end of her four-year term.

COVID-19 Infections Rise in Xinjiang, Said to be Spread by Chinese Tourists

By Shohret Hoshur, RFA, 2022-08-09

Authorities in Xinjiang are implementing new lockdowns in response to a coronavirus outbreak thought to have originated with Chinese tourists who visited the western

region's Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, local officials said.

After Chinese media reported that the number of COVID-19 infections in the



Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region had begun to rise, authorities in Ghulja (in Chinese, Yining) and other urban areas ordered residents to quarantine, the sources said.

The number of infected people in Xinjiang rose to 274 from July 31 to the end of the first week of August, according to an Aug. 7 report on Tengritagh (Tianshan), the official website of the Xinjiang government. The new variant of the virus was first detected in the Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture, where Ghulja is located, and spread widely from there.

Because of the COVID-19 outbreak,

authorities have divided Xinjiang into 45 high-risk areas, 34 medium-risk areas and nine low-risk areas, and implemented quarantine measures at different levels, the report said. Those areas include the cities of Urumqi (in Chinese, Wulumuqi), Ghulja (Yining), Aksu (Akesu), Kumul (Hami), Chochek (Tacheng), Bortala (Bole), and Kashgar (Kashi).

Chinese government officials told reporters at a press conference in Urumqi on Aug. 8 that there were 34 infected people in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, which is in the northern part of Xinjiang, but they did not say how and where they caught the

highly contagious respiratory virus.

A community official said that the new infections were thought to have been brought by Chinese tourists from Gansu province, and the first viral outbreak in Ghulja was found in Uchon Dungan village.

A Chinese government official in Samyuzi village told RFA that quarantine measures have been implemented in his village, and that residents are prohibited from going outside.

A security official in Ghulja's Mazar village said the epidemic in Ghulja was first detected in Mai village, also known as the Uchon Dungan village, and that the virus was spread by Chinese tourists from Gansu province.

The official, who declined to give his name for safety reasons, also said that he and others now were busy with quarantine-related work and that there were five infected residents in the village, who ate in one of the same restaurants where the Chinese tourists ate.

"They are being treated now," he said. "They got infected while they were eating with some Chinese tourists from China proper. They got the virus from those tourists. The ones who got infected were [ethnic] Hui and Dungan [Chinese Muslims]."

"The government checked all the people who went to eat in that restaurant and also

where those Chinese tourists went while they were traveling here," he said. "We heard that the Chinese tourists came from Gansu province."

The village security officer also said there were two infected people in Borichi hamlet of Yengitam village, who ate in the same restaurant where the Chinese tourists dined.

He told RFA that he learned about the local COVID-19 infections from other community officials on the Chinese instant-messaging platform WeChat, but that he did not know where or how the infected people were being handled because information was not passed on to lower-level officials like him.

"They also went to the same restaurant with those Chinese tourists," he said.

Two of the infected residents of Uchon Dungan village had been renovating their houses and bought some construction materials in Chinese provinces, he added.

Uchon Dungan village residents have not been allowed outside for several days and are performing COVID-19 tests at home, the village security official said.

When COVID-19 first sprang up in Wuhan, China, in late 2019, Uyghur and Kazakh residents in Xinjiang were increasingly being confined to "re-education" camps. They have since been subjected to lockdowns during local coronavirus outbreaks.

At that time, residents said that authorities were testing unknown drugs on them, according to an earlier RFA report.

Ghulja city was also locked down due to a rising number of COVID-19 cases in late 2021. Desperate residents short of food were forced to complain to authorities despite official warnings to keep quiet, sources told RFA at the time.

In late January, Chinese government health officials issued a statement about new COVID-19 infections in Qorghas (Huocheng) county, located between Ghulja and the border to Kazakhstan, in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, and said a lockdown had been implemented as a measure to curb the spread of virus.

COVID cases in Tibet

Meanwhile, neighboring Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) reported four COVID-19 infections on Aug. 7, the first sign of the virus in the region since a single case was found at the start of the pandemic in January 2020.

Asymptomatic infections were detected in four travelers between the ages of 47 and 61 from Ngari prefecture, according to local Chinese health authorities.

Also on Aug. 7, 18 people tested positive for the coronavirus in Tibet's capital Lhasa — the youngest being 3 years old and the oldest 76 — though only two people in the group were symptomatic, the TAR government's report said. They all had traveled from Shigatse to Lhasa by train earlier this month.



The members of the group and people who had contact with them are in quarantine for observation.

“COVID has spread to Lhasa now, and there are 18 [people] who have tested positive for it,” said a Tibetan source who declined to be identified. “There has been a lot of commotion in the city since yesterday as the number of COVID cases rises. Stores are crowded with panicked shoppers trying to buy essential goods and facemasks.”

The source said he believed the actual number of infections in the area to be higher than what Chinese health officials reported.

“The number is likely to rise in the coming days,” he said.

After the cases emerged, officials in Shigatse, Tibet’s second-largest city with a population of about 800,000 people, imposed three days of restrictions, during which people were banned from entering or leaving the city and various public venues, group events were canceled, and a traditional sports event scheduled to take place on Aug. 8 was postponed.

Areas are being locked down, and mass testing is under way in Lhasa and other cities, and authorities have sent notices to some offices and parents of schoolchildren not to travel.

The TAR People’s Hospital in Lhasa has stopped seeing out-patients because of the rising number of COVID-19 cases, the report said.

Religious activities and related gatherings and pilgrimages to Tibetan Buddhist sites have been suspended, according to an advisory issued by the Lhasa Buddhist Association on Aug. 8.

Additionally, Lhasa residents were directed to minimize their circumambulations around the Bharkor and Potala Palace to avoid huge crowds.

“The Chinese government has started imposing COVID-related restrictions in Lhasa and prompting people to get COVID tests,” said a Tibetan who declined to be named so as to speak freely.

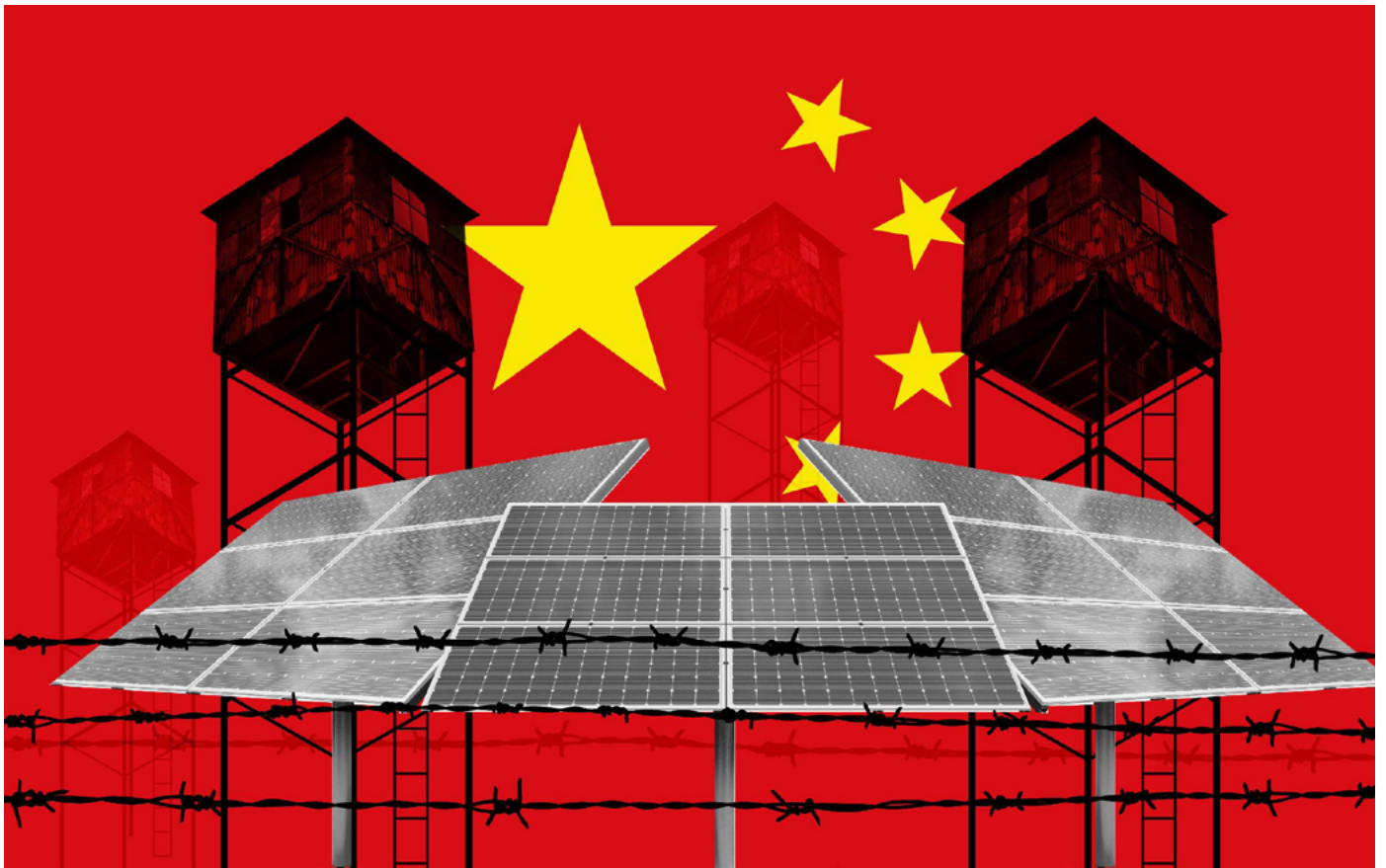
Tourists and visitors to pilgrimage sites also were being restricted, the source added.

Chinese Solar Panels Seized at US Border Over Possible Human Rights Abuses

By Lisa Martine Jenkins, Protocol , 2022-08-09

The U.S. has begun cracking down on imported goods from China that may have been made with Uyghur forced labor. That

includes solar panels, which have been detained at the border or shipped back to China in recent weeks.



The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act took effect in late June and requires companies to provide evidence that forced labor wasn't used to make imported goods. But despite months to prepare, the volume of documentation needed as proof has caught many in the solar industry flat-footed, according to reporting by The Wall Street Journal.

Companies that have had their solar panels turned away include Longi Green Energy Technology Co., Jinko Solar Co. and Trina Solar Co., which are among the biggest solar panel suppliers in the world. According to the Journal's reporting and sources, Longi has even temporarily paused operations at a Vietnam factory that manufactures panels

bound for the U.S. as a consequence.

Xinjiang has historically been a major player in the solar industry, with roughly 41% of the global manufacturing capacity for the crucial panel component polysilicon, according to Clean Energy Associates. Human rights groups and numerous governments have pinpointed the northwestern region as the site of ongoing forced labor violations by the Chinese government, specifically against Uyghurs, an ethnic minority. They allege that China has undertaken an assimilation campaign, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to live in internment camps. Following the announcement of the UFLPA, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement that enforcing it is part

of the U.S. government's commitment to ending forced labor, including «genocide and crimes against humanity [that] are ongoing» in Xinjiang.

The UFLPA is based on the assumption that all goods originating in Xinjiang are made using forced labor, and thus restricts them from entering the U.S. unless suppliers can prove they are not.

The solar sector has had plenty of notice of the law. In light of the snowballing allegations of forced labor in Xinjiang, the trade group representing the U.S. solar industry told its members in October 2020 to walk back sourcing of materials from the region as a whole. The Biden administration then issued a business advisory in July 2021 warning businesses to cut supply chain ties with the region.

Last summer, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said that the administration's clean energy objectives "will not be achieved on the backs of human beings in a forced labor environment."

This sentiment was echoed by the Solar Energy Industries Association itself. When the law passed in December 2021, SEIA president and CEO Abigail Ross Hopper said in a statement that its member companies had moved their supply chains out of the region, and many were using third-party audits as added verification.

"The risks of forced labor in the region are just too high," she said at the time.

An ongoing Commerce Department probe caused widespread concerns about the potential for solar material tariffs, adding additional challenges for the industry. Rising critical mineral prices and supply chain issues have added additional wrinkles as well.

Efforts to stamp out forced labor in Xinjiang underscore a growing issue as the world pivots to building out more clean energy infrastructure. Lithium and critical mineral mining's impact on both human rights and the environment in other regions of the world are also a growing concern.



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