

# China's Treatment of Uyghurs May Be Crime Against Humanity, Says UN Human Rights Chief

*By Julian Borger, The guardian, 2022-09-01*



The outgoing UN human rights commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, has said that China had committed “serious human rights violations” against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province which may amount to crimes against humanity.

Bachelet’s damning report was published with only 11 minutes to go before her term came to an end at midnight Geneva time. Publication was delayed by the eleventh-hour delivery of an official Chinese response that contained names and pictures of individuals that had to be blacked out by the UN commissioner’s office for privacy and safety reasons.

The Chinese government, which attempted until the last moment to stop the publication of the report, rejected it as an anti-China smear, while Uyghur human rights groups hailed it as a turning point in the in-

ternational response to the programme of mass incarceration.

The 45-page report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) concluded: “The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups, pursuant to law and policy, in context of restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.”

Beijing, which attempted until the last moment to stop the publication of the report, said in an official response that it was “based on the disinformation and lies fabricated by anti-China forces” and that it “wantonly smears and slanders” China and interfered in the country’s internal affairs.

The Chinese response was accompanied by a 121-page counter-report, emphasising the threat of terrorism and the stability that the state programme of “de-radicalisation” and “vocational education and training centres” has brought to Xinjiang.

Human rights organisations welcomed Bachelet’s report. Omer Kanat, the executive director of the Uyghur Human Rights Project pressure group said it was “a game-changer for the international response to the Uyghur crisis”.

“Despite the Chinese government’s strenuous denials, the UN has now officially recognized that horrific crimes are occurring,” Kanat said.

Over the past five years, China swept an estimated million Uyghurs and other minority groups into internment camps which it termed training centres. Some of the centres have since been closed but there are still thought to be hundreds of thousands still incarcerated. In several hundred cases families had no idea about the fate of relatives who had been detained.

Out of 26 former inmates interviewed by UN investigators, two-thirds “reported having been subjected to treatment that would amount to torture and/or other forms of ill-treatment”.

The abuses described included beatings with electric batons while being strapped in a “tiger chair” (to which inmates are strapped by their hands and feet), extended solitary confinement, as well as what appeared to be a form of waterboarding, “being subjected to interrogation with water being poured in their faces”.

The US and some other countries have said the mass incarceration of Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang, the destruction of mosques and communities and forced abortion and sterilisation, amount to

genocide. The UN report does not mention genocide but says allegations of torture, including force medical procedures, as well as sexual violence were all “credible”.

It said that the authorities had deemed violations of the three-child official limit on family size to be an indicator of “extremism”, leading to internment.

“Several women interviewed by OHCHR raised allegations of forced birth control, in particular forced IUD [intrauterine device] placements and possible forced sterilisations with respect to Uyghur and ethnic Kazakh women. Some women spoke of the risk of harsh punishments including “internment” or “imprisonment” for violations of the family planning policy,” the report said.

“Among these, OHCHR interviewed some women who said they were forced to have abortions or forced to have IUDs inserted, after having reached the permitted number of children under the family planning policy. These first-hand accounts, although limited in number, are considered credible.”

In the report, Bachelet, a former Chilean president, noted that the average rate of sterilisation per 100,000 inhabitants in China as a whole was just over 32. In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region it was 243.

“Serious human rights violations have been committed in [the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region] in the context of the government’s application of counter-terrorism and counter-‘extremism’ strategies,” the report said. “These patterns of restrictions are characterized by a discriminatory component, as the underlying acts often directly or indirectly affect Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim communities.”

The report calls on the Chinese government to “take prompt steps to release all individuals arbitrarily deprived of their

liberty” in Xinjiang and “urgently clarify the whereabouts of individuals whose families have been seeking information about their loved ones”.

The Uyghur question had overshadowed Bachelet’s four year term She was heavily criticised for a visit to China, including Xinjiang, in May, when she became the first UN high commissioner for human rights to visit the country in 17 years. She was derided for saying, after a visit to a prison in Kashgar, that the authorities had been “pretty open, pretty transparent”. During a long delay in publication of her report, she was accused to bowing to pressure from Beijing.

In an interview with UN News before her departure, Bachelet described running OHCHR as a “sometimes contradictory mandate”, saying the office had to be “the voice of the voiceless”, while staying engaged with sometimes unsympathetic UN member states. But she insisted: “I always felt free to say, or not to say, what I thought it was necessary to do.”



OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the  
Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China

31 August 2022

## Uyghur Advocate Warns of ‘Same Fate’

*By Taipei Times, 2022-08-31*

A visiting Uyghur-American advocate yesterday called on Taiwan to “study” the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) atrocities targeting Uyghurs in Xinjiang, saying a similar fate could befall Taiwanese.

US Commission on International Religious Freedom Chair Nury Turkel made the remarks during his keynote address at the two-day Regional Religious Freedom Forum in Taipei that opened yesterday.

As the CCP continues to pose a threat to democracies, people must understand what has happened to Uyghurs, Turkel said.

He cited US government estimates that about 2 million to 3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in China have been placed in “re-education” or “concentration” camps.

China has said that mass “vocational education and training” are necessary in the region to counter terrorism and alleviate poverty.

“You must know that if you fail to protect Taiwan, a similar fate awaits the Taiwanese people,” Turkel said.





He cited a remark Chinese Ambassador to France Lu Shaye made during a TV interview in Paris that Beijing would “re-educate” Taiwanese after the nation’s “reunification” with China.

This is a “crystal-clear example” showing that China is planning to do to Taiwanese what it has been doing to Uyghurs, he said.

“Let me tell you what re-education really means for the CCP... These classes, where history is rewritten to dictate a reality that never existed, [forces people to renounce] any religious belief or political dissent and then replaces these ideas with [Chinese President] Xi Jinping thought, forcing you to recognize that everything you have in life is due to the party,” Turkel said.

“Taiwan must study the Uyghur genocide. You must learn from these horrors and atrocities carried out in broad daylight. You must not wait and see, and hope ... that you will be spared from the same fate,” he said.

Turkel also accused the international community of operating under a “naive belief” for decades that the CCP would reform.

“The West has carried out business as usual, empowering the CCP to become more assertive and more belligerent to commit human rights abuses with impunity,” he said.

For instance, China continues to profit from forced labor in Xinjiang, he said.

US President Joe Biden in December last year

signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act to prevent goods produced in Xinjiang from entering US markets.

Turkel said Taiwan and other liberal democracies should learn from the US example to play a bigger role “to clean up the global supply chain that has been tainted by slave-made consumer products.”

President Tsai Ing-wen and American Institute in Taiwan Director Sandra Oudkirk also attended the forum’s opening ceremony.

US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Rashad Hussain made remarks through a prerecorded video, in which he praised Taiwan as one of the US’ “strongest partners on religious freedom and stands tall as a regional and global model approach promoting freedom of religion or belief for all as a key part.”

“Taiwan is home to followers of numerous religions and beliefs, who peacefully practice their faith in whatever way their conscience leads,” he said.

However, the other side of the Taiwan Strait serves as a sharp contrast in terms of religious freedom, he said.

“The People’s Republic of China [has] pervasive and pernicious transnational repression, including members of ethnic and religious minority groups, [which] presents a real and growing threat to the values people hold dear and to the integrity of the rules-based international order,” he said.

“In short, every time the PRC reaches across borders and [commits] an act of repression, it seeks to demonstrate that no one is safe from [its] clutches. We must all recognize this critical threat and combat it with the attention, seriousness and resources it deserves,” he added.

Turkel was born in a re-education camp at the height of China’s Cultural Revolution and spent the first several months of his life in detention with his mother.

He traveled to the US in 1995 as a student and was later granted asylum by the US government. In September 2020, Turkel was named one of Time magazine’s 100 Most Influential People in the World.

This is the second time the forum is being held in Taipei following its first iteration in 2019.

## **A Uyghur’s Story: What It’s Like Inside a Xinjiang Reeducation Facility**

*By Xiao Yu, Voice of America, 2022-09-01*

Gulbahar Haitiwaji says she experiences nightmares almost weekly in which she relives her time inside a Xinjiang detention facility.

«I always have that thought,» Haitiwaji, 55,

told VOA. «We’re locked in there, cut off from the world. I’m always worried that they’re going to kill us.»

The U.N. high commissioner for human rights released a report late Wednesday that



found «serious human rights violations» in Xinjiang. International human rights organizations have described China's treatment of its predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region as crimes against humanity and genocide, an accusation Beijing has long denied.

In a high-rise apartment on the outskirts of Paris, Haitiwaji, a Uyghur memoirist whose experiences have been published in multiple languages — the English version, *How I Survived a Chinese «Reeducation» Camp*, was released earlier this year — recently sat down with VOA's Mandarin Service to recount the horrors of three years in detention.

### **Hopelessness, fear**

«The first word I can think of is «hopeless» because we never know how long these

days will be; and «fear» because we are so worried about the days ahead,» she recalled as her eldest daughter, Gulihumar Haitiwaji, translated.

Originally from Xinjiang, Haitiwaji was an engineer in China before moving to France with her daughters in 2006 to join her husband, who had moved there four years earlier. She said she received a call in November 2016. The person on the phone claimed to be an accountant of the Xinjiang Oilfield Company and asked her to go back to Karamay for administrative retirement procedures.

«I had no doubts because I never did anything against China in France,» she recalled. «But when I went, I realized it was a trap. Ten minutes after I got to the company, three police officers took me to the police

station.»

The police questioned Haitiwaji and showed her a photo of her daughter attending a Uyghur rights rally in Paris.

Haitiwaji was allowed to leave temporarily that night, but police confiscated her passport.

Two months later, police asked her to go to a police station in Karamay to retrieve the passport. When Haitiwaji arrived, she was arrested.

Haitiwaji was placed in a cell designed to hold nine people; she said there were nine beds placed next to each other to make one big bed. She remembered 35 detainees crowded on that bed space, with metal rings on one side of the bed. Those punished would be shackled and tied to the metal rings.

«I was tied up for 20 days,» she said. «The longest one was tied up for three months.»

Haitiwaji didn't know why she was being punished.

«I couldn't have a bowel movement for 10 days when I was tied to the bed, when I was tied like a dog — and the first time I did it in front of people, I cried,» she said.

The charges against her varied, but the central theme was terrorism.

«In the end, they said that my husband and daughter were terrorists, and [I'd failed to] report it,» Haitiwaji said. «As a Chinese citizen, I should report to the Chinese government.»

## Life at «school»

After being detained for four months and seven days, Haitiwaji was transferred to a «school» in Xinjiang.

«Each of us was assigned a prison number. I was No. 9. I never knew the names of the people I was locked up with,» Haitiwaji recounted.

She said fellow «students» had to march in unison back and forth under a portrait of Chinese President Xi Jinping. There were classes on Mandarin, literature, math, history and geography.

«We [were] like robots: getting up early every day, taking 11-hour classes, studying the curriculum set by the Chinese government — history, law, Chinese. ... Every week we have to learn a red [Communist] song,» said Haitiwaji, recalling the names of the songs, including one called, «Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China.»

Every Friday was exam day, and the students were told they had to pass the exam or stay there forever.

## China's response

In a 2021 press conference, Yalkun Yakup, deputy director of the Public Security Department in Xinjiang, called Haitiwaji by the name of Gulibahar Maihamutijan. He described her as a “separatist and terrorist” and accused her of lying. He said she was in China several times and “attempted to kindle riots” against the country, citing examples of her participation in various pro-Uyghur events.

In a 2021 article published by state news agency Xinhua, China described facilities in



Xinjiang as vocational education and training centers that “fully guaranteed the trainees’ personal freedom and dignity.” The centers aimed to deradicalize those who were there, and all trainees had graduated by October 2019, according to the article.

### Forced labor, abuse

«They’re still building more camps, putting more supplies into those constructions, and they’re just deceiving the world,» Haitiwaji told VOA.

Some scholars and human rights activists describe the facilities as internment camps, where anywhere from 1 million to more

stitute identified more than 380 suspected detention facilities in Xinjiang.

An independent expert appointed by the United Nations concluded in a recent report that forced labor is taking place in Xinjiang.

A European Parliament resolution in June described Uyghurs in China as “systematically oppressed by brutal measures” and warned about “serious risk of genocide.»

Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said the European Parliament’s warning was a «deliberate smear campaign» and a «gross interference in China’s internal affairs.” He said Beijing’s national security policies in



than 2 million ethnic Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities are arbitrarily detained.

In 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy In-

Xinjing are directed at fighting “terrorism” and separatism.

The U.S. accuses China of forced labor and committing genocide. In June, U.S. officials



started enforcing the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, banning imported goods from the Xinjiang region unless there is “clear and convincing evidence» that no forced labor is involved.

Beijing continues to dismiss the accusations as disinformation.

“Some forces manipulate Xinjiang-related issues and fabricated the disinformation on <forced labor in Xinjiang>» said Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin at a press conference in August. «In essence, they are using human rights as a pretext to undermine Xinjiang’s prosperity and stability and contain China’s development and revitalization. Their scheme will never succeed.”

### Life after detention

In August 2019, through the efforts of her family and the French government, Haitiwaji was released and returned to Paris. She said she still thinks of the women she left behind in Xinjiang.

«They live in real prisons, and even when they are released, they are in open-air prisons because they have never had freedom of speech, freedom of criticism, freedom of thought and expression,» Haitiwaji said.

On the title page of her memoir, it says “to all those who didn’t make it out.”



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