

'It Went on For Four Hours, Just to Film a Single Video': Uyghur Former Camp Instructor

RFA- Radio Free Asia

Reported by Gulchehra Hoja for RFA's Uyghur Service. Translated by the Uyghur Service. Written in English by Joshua Lipis.

2021-01-26



Qelbinur Sidik prepares a lesson in her office in Urumqi, in an undated photo.

Qelbinur Sidik, 51, is one of the few people to relate their experiences working at a facility in the vast network of internment camps in northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where authorities are believed to have held up to 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities since early 2017. A well-respected instructor who began teaching children Mandarin Chinese at the No. 24 Elementary School in the XUAR capital Urumqi in 1990, Sidik was forced to teach the language at a men's camp known as Cang Fanggou between March and Septem-

“
Qelbinur Sidik describes how her ex-husband was forced to smear her testimony about abuses she saw in Xinjiang.
”

ber 2017, as well as at a women's camp at a former nursing home in the city's Tugong district between September and October of that year. Sidik, who now lives in the Netherlands, estimates that the two camps held around 3,000 and 10,000 detainees, respectively.

Sidik recently told RFA's Uyghur Service that at the end of last year, her ex-husband Tursun Ismail said neighborhood-level police officers had forced him to make videos claiming she was never an instructor in a camp and dismissing as "lies" her testimony providing rare insights into the management of the XUAR's camp system. He said he was also coached to dismiss her claims that authorities forcibly inserted an intrauterine device (IUD) and later sterilized her before she was able to obtain permission to leave China for the Netherlands in October 2019. Ismail urged her to turn herself in to the Chinese Embassy and warned her that refusing to do

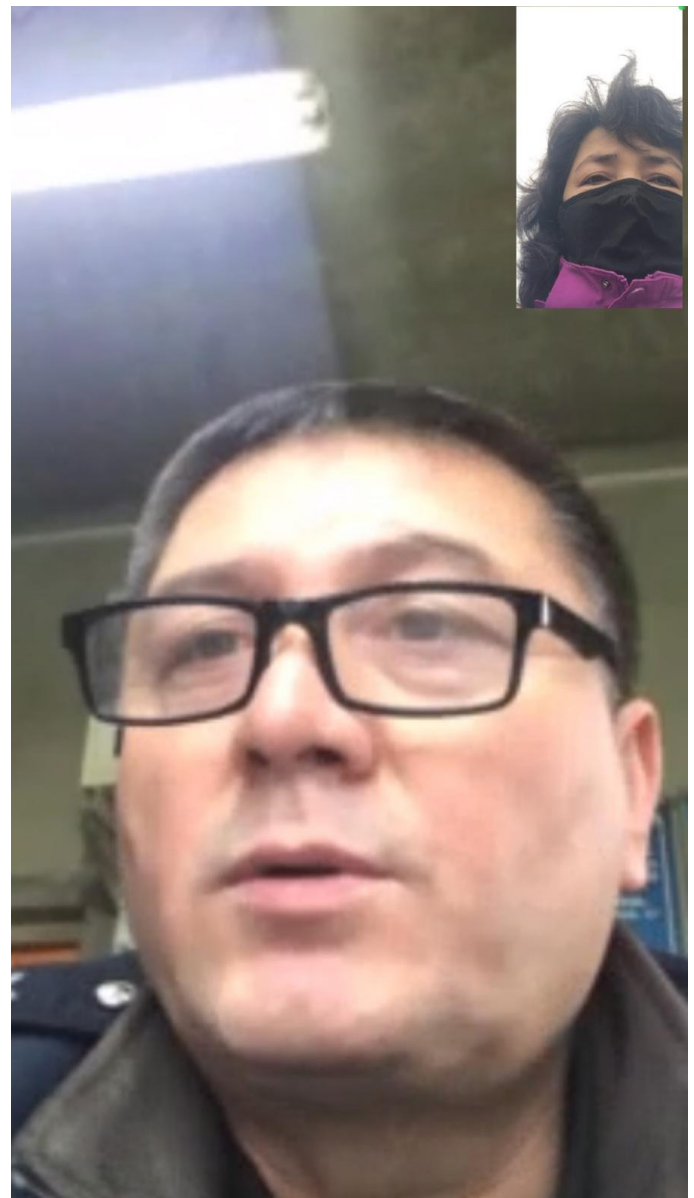
so could have had implications for her family members back home. Sidik told RFA in October last year that she had received a phone call from Ismail eight months earlier requesting a divorce, which she believes he did to save himself from the political fallout from her decision to leave the country.

While the videos her ex-husband claims were made have yet to surface publicly, his experience fits a pattern by authorities in the XUAR who work to discredit those exposing abuses in the camp system. State media routinely films XUAR-based relatives of former camp detainees who have fled abroad in which they dispute the testimonies of their loved ones and rebuke them for their activism overseas. Such testimonies last week led outgoing U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to label China's policies in the region as "genocide" and "crimes against humanity"—a designation which was quickly rejected by Beijing. On Monday, the official Global Times reported that "many residents from Xinjiang began to post videos of themselves telling stories of their own lives to refute Pompeo's 'genocide' claim," while praising the Communist Party for improving their lives and telling Washington to butt out of China's affairs. And on Tuesday, the Associated Press suggested the response had been orchestrated, reporting that a mass text had been sent to XUAR government employees ordering them to "choose a Uyghur employee with good Chinese/Mandarin language skills" who can record a video with a message such as "I firmly oppose Pompeo's anti-Chinese remarks, and I am very angry about them" before stating that they "love the party, the country and Xinjiang." Sidik expressed concern over China's smear campaign but said she would not be swayed from telling the truth about what is happening in the XUAR.

Right before the new year, [my ex-husband] messaged me and said ... that he needed to talk to me immediately. I turned on video chat and asked him what it was he wanted from me, and he told me that the government was visiting him daily. He said if I would go and report myself to the Chinese Embassy, they would then call the authorities [in Urumqi]

and I would be able to safely travel back and forth [between Urumqi and the Netherlands], and that they would stop visiting him.

[He said] the secretaries and directors of the neighborhood police station brought [the videographer] in, a young Uyghur guy. They spent an hour coaching him on what to say. They filmed and started over a number of times, and it went on for four hours, just to film a single video. He said things like, "My name is Tursun Ismail, I work at such-and-such place. My wife is Qelbinur Sidik. She's retired from the No. 24 Elementary School. Our daughter went to the Netherlands to study." He told me exactly what he said. "She went to the Netherlands and wasn't able to



Qelbinur Sidik speaks with her ex-husband Tursun Ismail via video chat in December 2020. Qelbinur Sidik

come back because she got sick. My wife, Qelbinur Sidik, never taught in a camp or 'school.' It's all a lie, because we are living so safely and freely here. There are no such places here to round people up and take them in. My wife, Qelbinur Sidik, never had an IUD forcibly inserted, and she was never forcibly sterilized as a condition for being able to leave for the Netherlands. These are all lies. [The government] protects our daughters and wives so well." He told me very clearly about all of the things he said.

He even told me that if I don't respond, if I don't treat him well, he will go everywhere and talk about me. He told me they want me to come back. And then he told me that in order for him to live in peace, I needed to go report to the embassy, and then go back [to Urumqi] ... He's selling me out to save his own life.

'They're not giving up'

I worry day and night, because I've not spoken with my siblings once since coming [to the Netherlands].

I've seen the videos they've made of other people's relatives ... and I've seen the many actively speaking out here, the way they get quiet [after one of these videos] ... There are so many people who are, tirelessly and without glory, working on behalf of our homeland and our people. There's so much pressure, so many things being said, so many challenges. But even when their relatives are pressured, they're not giving up. These wonderful people continue speaking of the Uyghurs' plight.

If you want to know exactly why I'm trying to get ahead of this, well, the whole world already knows well about what China is doing. The international community knows about all the different things they're doing, but there are still many countries that are staying silent. I'm worried that were a video like this to go public in such a context, people might say, "Well look at what her husband said, he said she's lying" ... I think it's necessary for me to speak out to prevent this. God willing, I will not give up on this.

China seized my sister. Biden must fight for her and all enslaved Uyghurs.

*Opinion by Rushan Abbas is the founder and executive
director of Campaign for Uyghurs.*

Jan. 26, 2021, The Washington Post

On Sept. 11, 2018, the Chinese regime took away my sister, Gulshan Abbas. On Christmas Day in 2020, more than 27 months later, we finally heard news that she was sentenced to 20 years in prison in a sham trial. Gulshan, a medical doctor, has most likely been pressed into forced labor as part of the

Chinese regime's prison system. And so, for the past two years, our entire family has been living in daily torment, constantly reminded that many of the household and clothing items, as well as shoes, that surround us may have been produced by my own sister's enslavement.



A protestor from the Uyghur community living in Turkey holds an anti-China placard during a protest in Istanbul on Oct. 1, 2020. (Emrah Gurel/AP)

It is clear to me that her imprisonment is a direct retaliation for my activism on behalf of the Uyghur people here in the United States. As the brutal reality of state-sponsored concentration camps and extra-judicial detainments make headline after headline, I have never stopped fighting for my sister and the millions of other Uighurs who are living this hellish reality.

Finally, last week, the Trump administration called it what it has always been — a genocide. But what is even more shocking than the Chinese government's abject disregard for human rights and international law is that global companies are knowingly complicit in this genocide. The normalization of slavery in the modern world is happening, and we consumers are enabling it.

Most people remain oblivious to the fact that 20 percent of the world's cotton comes from East Turkestan (referred to as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region by the Chinese authorities). Modern-day slavery

is woven into cotton T-shirts, pillowcases and sneaker laces. The Chinese regime rounded up Uyghurs into concentration camps and forced labor facilities, both in and outside of the region. Some of these facilities and the companies that operate them have been linked to brands from Nike to Zara. Seventy-five years ago, Siemens, BMW and Volkswagen profited from the exploitation of Jewish labor in Nazi Germany. "Never again" seems to be happening all over again. Although U.S. Customs and Border Protection recently announced an order to detain cotton and tomato products from the Uyghur homeland in response to the widespread use of forced and prison labor, this is a drop in the bucket. The Chinese government has shipped Uyghur prisoners to factories across China. And there's virtually no way to guarantee that a cute T-shirt produced there was not made by a woman who was forcibly sterilized and thrown into a concentration camp for refusing to renounce Islam. Global companies may claim that they do due dili-

gence in monitoring their supply chains, but this is preposterous. As Scott Nova, the executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium, explained in his testimony before the House Ways and Means subcommittee on trade, “There is no Uyghur worker whose labor is coerced who can possibly feel safe conveying the truth to an auditor.” As a result, several industry auditing firms have essentially blacklisted the region.

The Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region — a group made up of more than 300 civil society groups — has called on companies to divest entirely from the region. Companies should be confronted with the question of how much my sister’s life is worth to them. How much are millions of Uyghur lives worth? Consumers are increasingly aware of the situation facing the Uyghurs and do not want to purchase products linked to slavery. Companies doing business in such an environment must realize that moral compromises on human rights abuses of this magnitude will have consequences.

As we transition to a new presidential administration, it is essential that the momentum in addressing these human rights atrocities be carried forward. The

proposed Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act shifts the burden of proof that materials are made without forced labor onto brands rather than customs officials. Congress needs to pass this bill as is, and once it is law, the U.S. government must strictly enforce it.

At a bare minimum, I hope the Biden administration ensures the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, which passed with nearly unanimous bipartisan support and imposes sanctions on entities and individuals involved in these human rights abuses, will be enforced to the full extent. The Biden administration must also prioritize Section 307 of the Tariff Act — which outlaws forced labor imports — and ensure that thorough and effective enforcement is applied to every ban on products originating from the Uyghur homeland.

I believe strongly that President Biden and his team have a firm commitment to holding the Chinese regime accountable, along with the businesses that knowingly choose to be complicit in these crimes against humanity. The international community is watching, China is watching, and it is no overstatement that the future of our democratic world and freedom is at stake.

What the West can do about China’s Uyghur labor camps

By Harald Maass, is an award-winning former China correspondent for Der Tagesspiegel and an investigative journalist. From magazine issue: 23 January 2021

Coca-Cola’s most controversial bottling plant is a huge factory located in an industrial zone just outside the city of Urumqi in western China. Logistically, the factory is well situated: the international airport is a short drive away, as is the high-speed train station close to the fashionable Wyndham hotel. But the problem for Coca-Cola — and other western companies such as Volkswagen and BASF, which operate

**In the factories
the Uyghurs are held
under prison like
conditions, with daily
indocrination
sessions**



*Uyghur workers dig irrigation canals for a cotton plantation which belongs to a Han-chinese investor
(photo: Alamy / Joerg Boethling)*

plants in the same region — is the existence of hundreds of facilities not mentioned on any official map. The Cofco Coca-Cola plant, a joint venture with a Chinese state company, is surrounded by prisons and re-education camps in which China suppresses local ethnic minorities, according to human rights experts. Many of those minorities are forced to work for factories or farms making products also sold in the UK. Xinjiang, a huge area of remote deserts and rich mineral resources, is the centre of what world religious leaders, including five Church of England bishops, have named as ‘one of the most egregious human tragedies since the Holocaust’. In the past three years, China has put an estimated one million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Muslim minorities — more than one-tenth of the adult population — in re-education camps. In the camps, they are forced to renounce their religious belief and praise the Communist party,

and are subjected to brainwashing. Inmates often try to kill themselves.

Evidence shows that China is now shifting from mass internment to forced labor to control the local population. According to a study by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, a think tank established by the Australian government, more than 80,000 Uyghurs were transferred out of Xinjiang to work in factories in other parts of China between 2017 and 2019 ‘under conditions that strongly suggest forced labor’. Some had been sent directly from detention camps to production lines. In the factories, the Uyghurs are held under prison-like conditions, with long working hours and daily indoctrination sessions, according to online evidence and witness reports. The workers are not allowed to leave, even if they work close to their homes.

'After being released [from a camp], you need to work according to their policies,' Muhamet Qyzyrbek told the New York Times. His 31-year-old wife, Amanzhol Qisa, had spent a year in a re-education camp in Xinjiang and was then sent to work at a clothing factory for three months. She was paid less than half of minimum wage. Gulsira Auelchan was trained to use a sewing machine when she was held in a camp in 2017 and 2018. After her release, she was pressured to sew gloves at a factory near the camp. 'I don't know how many hours per day I worked. There was no clock,' she told the German weekly Die Zeit. 'We left the dormitory in the dark and came back in the dark.'

In the past two years, these programmes have been significantly enlarged. According to China's official statistics, 2.6 million 'surplus rural workers' in Xinjiang were 'relocated' within one year — an increase of 46 per cent. Beijing strictly denies any forced labour and justifies its policy, perversely, as a 'poverty elimination programme'. But experts and foreign governments are alarmed. 'Evidence of forced Uyghur labor within Xinjiang, and in other parts of China, is credible, it is growing and deeply troubling to the UK government,' Foreign Office Minister Nigel Adams told parliament last month. Last week, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced plans to outlaw Chinese imports with links to human rights abuse. The UK will introduce fines and possible sanctions against companies which are connected to slave labour. The US government has already imposed sanctions and restrictions against 48 Chinese companies suspected of using forced labour or providing technical assistance to the suppression system in Xinjiang. Among these companies are suppliers of well-known international brands such as Nike, H&M and Apple. The Coca-Cola factory in Urumqi is in the middle of Xinjiang's system of detention camps and re-education facilities, described by the US Congress as the 'largest mass incarceration of a minority population in the world'. Within 30km of the plant, there are 25 prisons and internment camps, according to ASPI, which used satellite technology and witness reports

to identify these secret facilities. In the whole of Xinjiang, there are at least 380 incarceration camps, some of them huge structures with watchtowers, barbed wire and thousands of inmates.

Coca-Cola opened its plant as part of a 210 million yuan (£23 million today) investment 12 years ago, but the factory is run by the Chinese majority stakeholder Cofco. Can Coca-Cola's managers be sure that — possibly without their knowledge — forced labour isn't happening in their factory or among their suppliers? In a statement, Coca-Cola says its company policies 'strictly prohibit forced labour' and that it uses third-party agencies to oversee compliance. But travel and administration restrictions in Xinjiang make it nearly impossible to monitor labour standards. As a result, at least three major monitoring organisations have stopped doing human rights assessments in the region.

It is not just detention and labour camps that China uses to control Xinjiang's estimated 14 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. The region's party secretary, Chen Quanguo, is praised by state media as the inventor of 'convenience police stations', a grid system with thousands of hi-tech checkpoints. From the stations, which are as little as 300 metres from each other, all parts of daily life are digitally monitored, from private internet usage to the commute to work. Cars have to be fitted with GPS sensors and drivers need a face scan to buy petrol, so the authorities can always track their movement. Surveillance cameras monitor all streets and are sometimes even installed inside private houses. The result is a new form of technology-driven authoritarian rule that is



unparalleled in the world. When I visited Xinjiang undercover in 2018, I spoke to people whose family members had been sent to camps for using WhatsApp, for praying and even for buying too much petrol at the fuel station.

For Volkswagen, which produces Santana sedans and Tharu SUVs in Urumqi, its presence in Xinjiang is political. Economically, the factory in Xinjiang hardly makes sense; parts have to be transported thousands of kilometres from the coastal regions, and instead of the planned 50,000 cars per year, it produces fewer than 20,000. The 2013 factory was a political present to China's government, which wanted to show its success in the region. Closing the factory today would risk Volkswagen's entire China business, which brings in billions in profits. Every second VW worldwide is sold in the People's Republic. Stephan Wöllenstein, the company's China chief, says that Volkswagen is 'concerned' about the situation in Xinjiang, but adds: 'I don't think that to steal away from the region would solve the political problems.'

Even for companies that do not have factories in Xinjiang, it is difficult not to get tangled in China's Muslim clampdown. Apple has been criticised for doing business with a company named O-film, a major supplier of technical parts for iPhones, which is accused of using several hundred Uyghur workers transferred from Xinjiang in its factories. The US Department of Commerce put O-film on its sanction list for suspected human rights violations. The US food company Kraft Heinz has business relations with Cofco Tunhe, China's largest tomato processor, which is also suspected of participating in Uyghur labor programmes.

All mentioned companies denied any involvement or knowledge of forced labor.

The textile industry is under special scrutiny. Xinjiang is a major producer of cotton, which is mainly being picked by hand. China has started to substitute Han-Chinese workers in the fields with Uyghurs and other minorities, using propaganda campaigns and strong pressure, according to researchers. Adrian Zenz, senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and a leading expert on Xinjiang, estimates that most of today's cotton in Xinjiang is picked under forced labour conditions and with minimal payment. 'More than half a million Uyghurs — probably whether they want to or not — are being sent by the state to the fields for three months,' he says.

For the fashion industry, it is nearly impossible to avoid the issue. Brands including Hugo Boss, Adidas, Muji, Uniqlo, Costco, Caterpillar, Lacoste, Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger have been named in reports tying them to Xinjiang factories or materials. One in five cotton products worldwide is made with Xinjiang cotton, though Marks & Spencer last week signed a call to action regarding Xinjiang and pledged to stop using any cotton from the region.

But in the end, it is us as consumers who will influence the fate of the millions of people in Xinjiang. For many in the West it has become normal to boycott products that violate animal rights or destroy our environment. It is time that we apply the same standards to slave labour and gross human rights violations when we are about to buy a product labelled 'Made in China'.

Detained Uyghur girl cries "mom"

A Uyghur girl in a Chinese child detention center in East Turkistan, crying and shouting to her mother, who had longed for her and was forcibly separated from her because of the Chinese authorities.

Her shouting broke our hearts and our pain.

Know that this is what Uyghur children suffer, and even more so than we imagine.



Chinese Labor Camps in East Turkistan

According to international reports and testimonies of camp witnesses fleeing Chinese persecution, it was found that Uyghurs in East Turkistan are being forced to work in various fields in Chinese factories.

According to the video clip taken from Chinese social media, more than 500 Uyghurs are shown at the Chinese factory baking bread in a giant factory in a city in East Turkistan, while the Chinese watch them from the top floor.

Observers expect that China exports products of forced labor to foreign markets, as well as exports bread produced in the huge factory to the Chinese provinces.

The Chinese Communist Party, which has looted farmer s' lands in East Turkistan since 2017, is forcing landowners in East Turkistan into forced labor as slaves on their lands.

Chinese officials insist that these facilities and facto-



ries are the so-called vocational training centers for Uyghurs.



Gamaa
Mubaraka

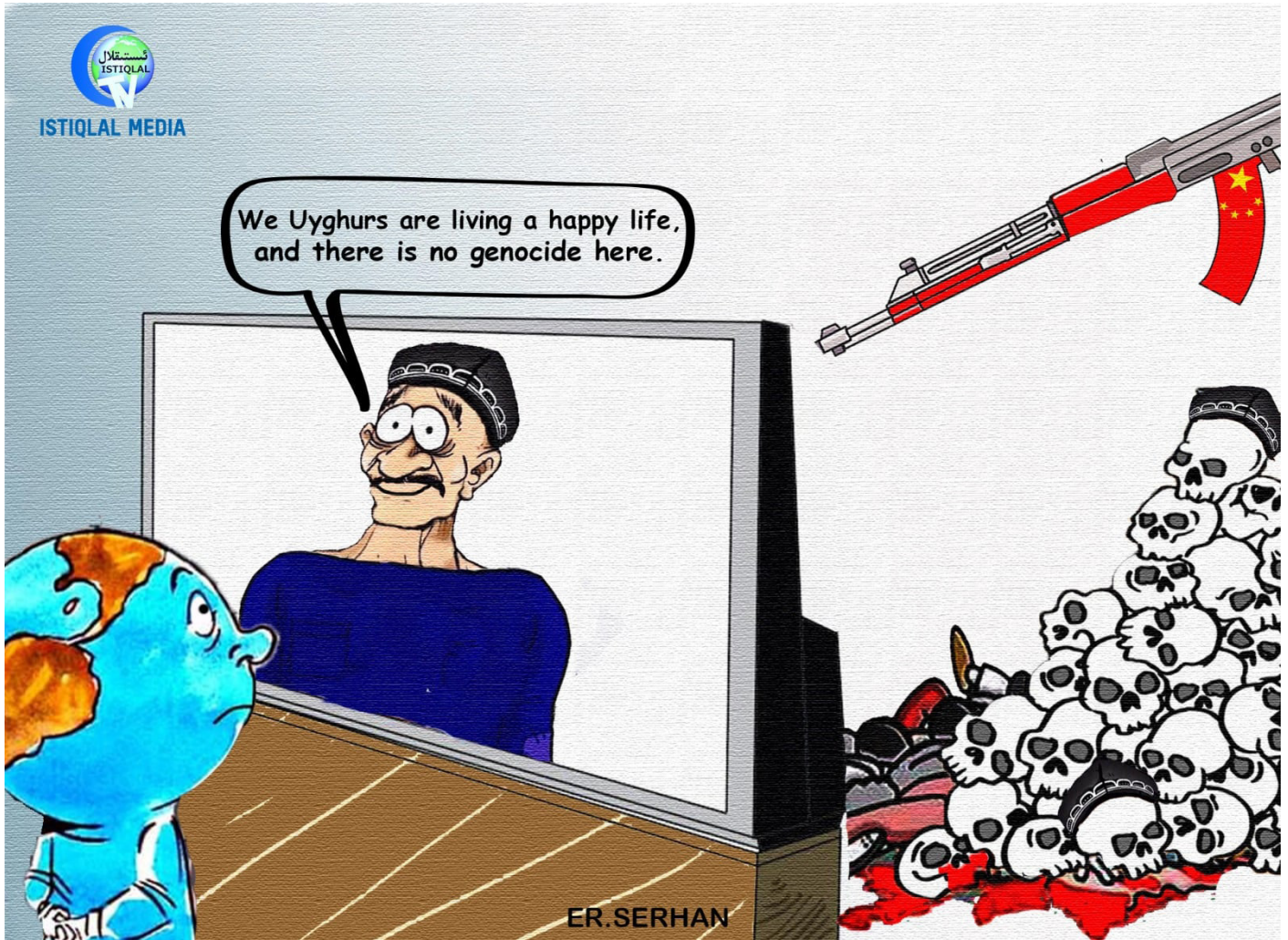
EAST TURKISTAN
NEWS AGENCY

According to the clip, hundreds of Uyghur women and men gathered in East Turkistan in a hall in one of the regions of East Turkistan, as they sang a communist song that strengthened the Chinese army.

According to the information, the Uyghurs in this huge hall are allegedly receiving political education, while other videos show that those Uyghurs who are forced to work as slaves in Chinese factories are forced to



show affection and respect for the Communist Party.



Besides forced labor, forced sterilization forced assimilation... another China's "patent" is forcing people to give false testimony.



EAST TURKISTAN PRESS AND MEDIA ASSOCIATION
شەرقىي تۈركىستان ئاخبارات ۋە مەدېيا جەمئىيىتى

Contact Us:

Adres: Kartaltepe Mah. Geçit Sok. No: 6 Dükkan: 2
Küçükçekmece / İSTANBUL

Tel: +90 212 540 31 15 Gsm: +90 553 895 19 33
+90 541 797 77 00 info@turkistanmedia.com