

Beijing 2022 Olympics: ‘If genocide isn’t our red line for a full boycott, then I really don’t know what is’

DW/ Jun 25, 2021

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Allegations of human rights abuses by China against the Uyghur Muslim minority have galvanized a global movement, which is now pushing for a full boycott of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.

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From Lausanne to London, Brisbane to Buenos Aires, this week saw a day of protests against Beijing’s hosting of the 2022 Winter Olympics, in what was called a Global Day of Action, using the hashtag #NoBeijing2022.

The protests popped up in more than 50 cities around the world. Representatives from Tibet, the Uyghur minority, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan and Southern Mongolia and allies sought to apply pressure on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) at a time when momentum is growing for a full boycott the 2022 Beijing Winter Games, due to start in February.

Earlier this month, Amnesty International described the Xinjiang region of China as a “dystopian hellscape” for hundreds of thousands of Muslims —



‘Reeducation’ camps, imprisonment and torture are the reality facing Uyghurs and other minority groups in China

predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities — some of whom are subjected to mass imprisonment, torture, surveillance and exploitation.

“The Chinese authorities have created a dystopian hellscape on a staggering scale in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,” said Agnes Callamard, secretary general of Amnesty International.

"It should shock the conscience of humanity that massive numbers of people have been subjected to brainwashing, torture and other degrading treatment in internment camps, while millions more live in fear amid a vast surveillance apparatus."

The message of the Global Day of Action — held on June 23 to coincide with International Olympic Day — was clear: China must not be allowed to sports wash the "genocide" of the Uyghur people and the escalating repression of others.

"Sports washing" refers to the widely held view that some regimes seek to use the hosting of major international sporting events to improve their reputations.

Is IOC monitoring human rights?

"If genocide isn't our red line for a full boycott, then I really don't know what is," Zumretay Arkin told DW as she prepared to coordinate the Global Day of Action.

Arkin is a human rights advocate at the Munich-based World Uyghur Congress (WUC). A Uyghur herself, Arkin has co-led the campaign to boycott the Games and has met with the IOC twice to gain assurances that they are keeping China to its word about upholding human rights — but the plan wasn't always to boycott.

"When we first met in October last year, we wanted some concrete assurances that China would uphold basic standards on human rights,

including the use of forced labor to manufacture merchandise for the Olympics," she said. "We wanted to test them on how seriously they were taking human rights issues." Arkin and her team wanted a concrete commitment in writing that Beijing was keeping its word on the promises it had made to the IOC about human rights, and that the IOC would ensure the safety of athletes and the media during the Games.

"I asked the IOC how they are planning to conduct due diligence during the Olympics about human rights. What is the strategy? Do you have one? If so,



Berlin

Yesterday on the Global Day of Action, we demonstrated jointly for [#NoBeijing2022!](#)

Many thanks to: [@MargareteBause](#) (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), [@PeterHeidtFDP](#) and Michael Brand (CDU).



1:01 PM · Jun 24, 2021

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can you share it with us so that there's transparency and we can monitor what you're doing commercially," said Arkin.

"We went into the meeting very optimistic, but left very defeated. The IOC's answers were vague and broad and didn't answer the questions. They agreed to share the assurances with us in writing, but after many follow-ups, they never did."

Escalation to a full boycott

It was after this first meeting that the idea of a Beijing 2022 boycott gathered momentum. The WUC had moved from a position of diplomacy to a full strike, as have other campaign groups. It was a decision that wasn't taken lightly, with campaigners aware that boycotts aren't easy to pull off, are deeply unpopular with athletes, and in the case of China, have the potential for serious political ramifications.

"We started with a diplomatic boycott because we were aware of the sensitivities around boycotts and the fact that they penalize the athletes," said Arkin. "That was before our second meeting with the IOC."

The IOC continued to ignore the request for written assurances but did invite them for a second meeting in March. This meeting — attended by Arkin and two other colleagues — opened with the question: "Are you going to report this to the media again?" It was a question that surprised Arkin.

"Right off the bat they tried to give us a lesson in Olympic boycotts and the history of how they've failed. It was very condescending. If we call for a boycott, that's our problem," she said.

A political balancing act

Arkin and her team have found support for a diplomatic boycott — whereby heads of states do not attend the Games — in the shape



Beijing was awarded the 2022 Winter Games in Kuala Lumpur in July 2015

of US Senator Mitt Romney and Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the US House of Representatives.

"We cannot proceed as if nothing is wrong about the Olympics going to China," Pelosi told Congress' Human Rights Commission last month, even if the US has stopped short of backing a full boycott.

There was a further boost to the chances of a diplomatic boycott earlier this month when the US Senate passed a bipartisan bill aimed at tackling Chinese foreign policy and economic influence.

However, Arkin and her colleagues are angling towards something bigger. She believes that the only way to hold Beijing responsible is by isolating China from the international community — and that includes not sending athletes to Beijing.

"I think we have a good chance of achieving a diplomatic boycott," she said. "The severity of the abuses happening across China have been widely reported but we still would like to see a full boycott. It's a popular idea."

IOC takes responsibility 'very seriously'

In a statement to DW, the IOC defended its position claiming that it takes its responsibilities seriously but is unable to affect the laws of individual countries.

“At all times, the IOC recognises and upholds human rights enshrined in both the Fundamental Principles of the Olympic Charter and in its Code of Ethics,” the statement read. “We are responsible for ensuring the respect of the Olympic Charter with regard to the Olympic Games and take this responsibility very seriously.

“At the same time, the IOC has neither the mandate nor the capability to change the laws or the political system of a sovereign country. This must rightfully remain the legitimate role of governments and respective inter-governmental organisations.”

But as the IOC continues to be judged on its actions rather than its words, the momen-



In Sydney, a protester wore a mask depicting the silencing of East Turkistan by China

tum behind a full boycott of Beijing 2022 could be at a tipping point.

Canada leads call on China to allow Xinjiang access - statement

REUTERS, Stephanie Nebehay, June 22, 2021

Demonstrators, including Aziz Sulayman, hold a protest in front of the U.S. State Department to commemorate Uyghur Doppa Day and to urge the U.S. and the international community to take action against China's treatment of the Uyghur people in the East Turkistan (Xinjiang) region, in Washington, U.S. May 5, 2021. REUTERS/ Leah Millis



GENEVA, June 22 (Reuters) - More than 40 countries urged China on Tuesday to allow the U.N. human rights chief immediate access to Xinjiang to look into reports that more than a million people have been unlawfully detained there, some subjected to torture or forced labour.

The joint statement on China was read out by Canadian Ambassador Leslie Norton on behalf of countries including Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the United States to the U.N. Human Rights Council. Beijing denies all allegations of abuse of Uyghurs and describes the camps as vocational training facilities to combat religious extremism.

"Credible reports indicate that over a million people have been arbitrarily detained in Xinjiang and that there is widespread surveillance disproportionately targeting Uyghurs and members of other minorities and restrictions on fundamental freedoms and Uyghur culture," the joint statement said.

"We urge China to allow immediate, meaningful and unfettered access to Xinjiang for independent observers, including the High Commissioner," it added, referring to Michelle Bachelet.

Bachelet told the council on Monday that she hoped to agree on terms for a visit this year to China, including Xinjiang, to examine

reports of serious violations against Muslim Uyghurs. [read more](#)

Her office has been negotiating access since September 2018.

Jiang Yingfeng, a senior diplomat at China's mission to the United Nations in Geneva, rejected the statement on Tuesday as interference driven by "political motives".

"We welcome the visit by the High Commissioner to China, to Xinjiang. This visit is for promoting exchanges and cooperation rather than an investigation based on so-called presumption of guilt," he told the council without giving a timeline.

The Canadian-led statement cited reports of torture, forced sterilisation, sexual violence and forced separation of children from their parents.

It decried a law imposed a year ago in Hong Kong against what China deems secession and terrorism. The first trials are due to begin this week of people arrested under the legislation.

"We continue to be deeply concerned about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong under the National Security Law and about the human rights situation in Tibet," it said.

Jiang said: "Since the national security law, Hong Kong has witnessed change from chaos to rule of law."

China's ambition to dominate the world through the "One Belt, One Road" project has been spoiled.



China fails to meet promises on missing Xinjiang children

BBC, 22 Jun 2021

Over the past two years, the Chinese authorities have repeatedly promised to help trace any children reported to be missing in Xinjiang, to prove that they haven't been forcibly separated from their parents. Those promises have not been met, reports John Sudworth.

The first time China made a public promise to help find Kalbinur Tursan's children was in 2019.

"If you have people who have lost their children, you give me the names," China's then-ambassador to the UK, Liu Xiaoming, told the BBC in a live television interview in July that year.

Mr Liu denied that China's policies in its far-western region of Xinjiang could be leading to the large-scale separation of children from their parents but, he said, if we had any such evidence, he would investigate.

"We'll try to locate them and let you know who they are, what they're doing," he said.

Kalbinur - a member of Xinjiang's largest Turkic ethnic group, the Uyghurs - now lives in Turkey, working late into the night in her tiny one-room apartment sewing clothes to support what is left of her shattered family.

She arrived in 2016, eight months pregnant with her seventh child, Merziye, conceived in violation of China's family-planning laws.

"If the Chinese authorities had known I was pregnant they would probably have forced me to abort my baby," she told me.



Kalbinur, pictured with Merziye, sews clothes to support what is left of her shattered family

"So, I prepared my body by wrapping my belly to hide the bump for two hours every day and we managed to pass the border control like that."

Although Kalbinur had applied for passports for all of her children, China's tough restrictions on travel for Xinjiang's ethnic groups meant that only one - for her two-year-old son Muhammed - was granted.

With time running out, she had little choice but to leave the others behind, hoping they could follow with her husband once they'd been given their documents.

As she boarded her flight, she had no idea that she wouldn't see them again.

Out of sight, sweeping silently across China's vast western region, a campaign of mass-incarceration had already begun with a rapidly expanding network of what were, at first, highly secretive "re-education" camps.

A parallel network of boarding schools was also being built with the same aim; the forced-assimilation of Xinjiang's Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other minority groups whose identity, culture and Islamic traditions were now seen as a threat by the ruling Communist Party.

One policy paper, published the year after Kalbinur's departure, made clear that the purpose of such boarding schools was to "break the influence of the religious atmosphere" on children living at home.

A few weeks after her departure, her husband was detained and - like so many thousands of other members of the Uyghur diaspora watching their family members disappear from afar - she found herself in exile.

Almost overnight, even calling relatives became impossible because, for those still in Xinjiang, any overseas communication was seen as a potential sign of radicalisation and a key reason for being sent to a camp.

Facing almost certain detention if she returned to Xinjiang, and with her children now parentless, she's had no contact with them at all - except for one shocking discovery.

Searching online in 2018, she came across a video of her daughter, Ayse, now two years older than when she'd last seen her, in a school more than 500 kilometres from the family home.

With her hair shaved short, she was with a group of children being led in a game by a teacher speaking not in Uyghur - her mother tongue - but in Chinese.

For Kalbinur, the video brought both relief - a tangible link to at least one of her lost children - and deep anguish, as a painful, visual reminder of the guilt and grief that have never left her.

"Knowing she was in a different city made me think it's impossible to find my children, even if I do go back," she told me.



Kalbinur has had almost no news about her missing children in years

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"Knowing she was in a different city made me think it's impossible to find my children, even if I do go back," she told me.

"To my children, I want them to know that I didn't abandon them, I had no choice but to leave them behind, because if I had stayed their new-born sister wouldn't have lived."

Kalbinur's story is just one of a large number of similar accounts of missing children gathered by the BBC from members of Xinjiang's Uyghur and Kazakh diasporas in Turkey and Kazakhstan.

Having first sought their permission, we sent Ambassador Liu Xiaoming the details of six of our interviewees, and attached copies of passports, Chinese ID cards and last-known addresses.

Three of the cases involved parents who had reason to believe their children were now in the care of the Chinese state.

Although his 2019 TV-appearance marked China's first public promise to investigate, similar assurances had already been given in private a few months earlier, when the BBC was taken on a government-organised tour of the camps in Xinjiang.

The initial secrecy had given way to a new strategy, with China insisting that the camps were, in fact, vocational schools in which those under the influence of separatist or extremist ideology willingly had their thoughts "transformed".

The Deputy Director of Xinjiang's Publicity

Department, Xu Guixiang, denied that a generation of Uyghur and Kazakh children were being effectively orphaned as whole extended families - including all adult caregivers - were detained or stranded overseas.

"If all family members have been sent to education training centres, that family must have a severe problem," he told me.

"I've never seen such a case."

But when we passed on the details of some of our cases - again, with their prior permission - the officials promised to look into it.

One of the cases - handed to the officials in Xinjiang and sent to Ambassador Liu - involved not only missing children, but 14 missing grandchildren.

Originally from the village of Bestobe in the county of Kunes in northern Xinjiang, 66-year-old Khalida Akytkankyzy - like many ethnic Kazakhs - had family ties across the border in Kazakhstan.

In 2006 she and her husband, along with their youngest son, decided to emigrate, leaving her other three sons - already married and with children of their own - in Xinjiang.

But in early 2018, the relentless machinery of mass internment caught up with them too.

Khalida received news that her three sons and their wives had all been detained "for political education".

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Khalida's protests are often blocked by police

political education”.

She tried desperately to get information, including calling the Communist Party official in her old village, but no one would tell her who was looking after her grandchildren.

By 2019, when China began claiming that the camps had been successful in combating separatism and terrorism and that almost everyone had “graduated”, for Khalida the news only got worse.

With the massive, parallel increase in Xinjiang’s formal prison population continuing unabated, her two eldest sons, Satybaldy and Orazjan, were sentenced to 22 years each, and her third son, Akhmetjan, to 10 years.

The village official told her they’d been convicted for “praying”.

If there were other reasons for their imprisonment then the authorities have provided no details.

China’s UK embassy confirmed receipt of the letter and documents we’d addressed to Ambassador Liu but, although we sent follow-up emails in November 2019 and again in February 2020, our questions remained unanswered.

The officials in Xinjiang told us there was a “discrepancy” in the information we’d handed to them, and advised us to tell our interviewees to contact their nearest Chinese embassies instead.

In July 2020, Ambassador Liu appeared again on the same, live television programme, and was asked what had happened to his promise of a year earlier.

“I never received any names since our last show,” he told the interviewer, Andrew Marr. “I hope that you can give me the names, we certainly will get back to you.”

He went on to suggest that his counterparts in Xinjiang would be able to facilitate such requests with ease - “they respond to us very



Kalbinur organised a 400km walk from Istanbul to Ankara in a bid to break the silence of the Chinese authorities

quickly,” he added.

So, we followed up again, sending emails in August and September 2020 and in January 2021.

“Chase-up email received,” reads the latest response from an official at the embassy. “I regret no progress has been made so far.”

Nowadays, Khalida wakes early and takes a number of interconnecting buses to the Chinese consulate in the city of Almaty, just as the officials had advised us to tell her to do.

Carrying photographs of her three sons, however, she finds her daily attempts to seek answers blocked by a line of police.

“It’s not just to me,” she said in a video interview from her home.

“I’m often there with 10-15 other people and the Chinese consulate doesn’t give any information to anyone.”

In Turkey, Kalbinur is also still fighting for information about her husband, Abdurehim Rozi, and her five missing children, Abduhalik, Subinur, Abdulsalam, Ayse and Abdullah. She recently took part in a 400km walk from Istanbul to Ankara with other Uyghur mothers, in a bid to break the silence of the Chinese authorities about their relatives.

Her campaigning has at least prompted a limited response, in a press conference - chaired by Xinjiang’s deputy propaganda chief, Xu Guixiang - denying that her daughter is in

a boarding school and insisting instead that the children are being looked after by a relative.

But Kalbinur is still unable to contact them and so China's claims are impossible to verify. "I want the authorities to let me see my child-

ren," she told me over a video call as she took a break from her protest walk at the side of a busy highway.

"In this information age, why can't I contact my children?"

Twelve years ago, more than 50 Uyghur youth (including women) were brutally killed by racist Han Chinese at the Xuri toy factory in Shaoguan city.



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