

Italian Parliament Condemns CCP's Crimes Against Uyghurs

05/27/2021, MARCO RESPINTI



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On May 26, 2021 the Italian Parliament voted unanimously to condemn Chinese atrocities against Uyghurs and other Turkic people, most of whom Muslim, in the Xinjiang Uyghur Region, which its non-Han inhabitants call East Turkestan.

After a debate which lasted for months, the House of Representatives approved, with no contrary vote, a unified text, condensing different resolutions presented by MPs Paolo Formentini, Andrea Delmastro, Lia Quartapelle, Iolanda Di Stasio, and Valentino Valentini, representing a wide bipartisan consensus.

The text adopts a strong language, focusing on illegal birth control practices, repression of religious freedom, forced labor, internment camps, arbitrary detention, and massive digital surveillance.

"The Italian parliament sent a clear message," commented Formentini, who is the vice president of the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Italian House of Representatives and has been a major force behind the resolution. "Regarding human rights, Italy, which is an integral part of the West, never retreats," he said. Personally, Formentini did use the word "genocide" in describing the CCP's crimes.

The approved text quotes evidence of PRC's crimes brought forth by such institutions as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and the China Tribunal, as well as personalities such as French Foreign Minister Yves Le Drian, and World Uyghur Congress president, Dolkun Isa. On October 1, 2020, Isa had testified before the Italian House of Representatives' III Commission, which is responsible for Foreign and EU Affairs, and adopted the unified text on crimes against Uyghurs.

The text points also at precedents including the U.S. December 3, 2020 decision to inhibit import of cotton produced through forced labor in East Turkistan; the U.S. State Depart-

ment condemnation of China under both the Trump and the Biden administration, calling "genocide" the PRC's Uyghur policy; the April 22, 2021 UK House of Commons bipartisan motion recognizing the Uyghur genocide; the December 17, 2020 European Parliament's resolution to condemn the PRC's treatment of Uyghurs, and the March 22, 2021 Council of European Union's sanctions against CCP representatives, on the basis of similar action upheld by the US, Canada, and the UK.

The motion also reacts against PRC's sanctions against five MEPs, 3 MPs of EU countries, two academics, four European institutions and two research centers for denouncing the PRC's misdeeds on human rights.

The adopted motion asks the Italian government to follow with similar condemnations of the PRC at international level, taking seriously testimonies from East Turkistan and helping the victims. It also calls for a ban on trade of goods that may be connected to forced labor. And it asks the PRC to allow free access in East Turkistan to UNHCR officials as well as independent observers, researchers, and parliamentarians.

In the text, the word "genocide" appears three times: with reference to both the Trump's and Biden Administrations' State Department indictment of the "genocidal nature" of the PRC's crimes against Uyghurs under the 1948



UN Genocide Convention. and to the UK Parliament's recognition of such an abominable crime in East Turkistan.

The Italian motion, however, doesn't use the term "genocide" in itself, and stops short of calling for a recognition of the CCP crimes in East Turkistan as "genocide."

In fact, several MPs were against defining what China is doing in East Turkistan as "genocide," and avoiding the word in the text made its unanimous approval possible. Perhaps we may consider it as a first step towards the acknowledgment by Italy that the CCP's crimes are, indeed, a genocide.

The conclusion of the initial CAI negotiations last December was said to be helped by German chancellor Angela Merkel. The Chinese market is especially important to German carmakers and manufacturers who have a large presence in the country.

German economy minister Peter Altmaier maintained his defence of the investment deal. He said that China is the EU's largest trading partner and plays an important role in the global economy. "We want to reach results with China that are in the interest of both sides," he added.

But Yu Jie of London's Chatham House said that it will now become "increasingly difficult" to push the deal through after Merkel's departure in September. In the meantime, the mood in Brussels is changing, too, with the talk of "strategic autonomy" becoming a main part of Brussels's foreign policy discourse.

"Any chance of salvaging the CAI will now take a major political willingness on both sides, but neither seems to be willing to speak soft at this stage."

AI emotion-detection software tested on Uyghurs

By Jane Wakefield, 27, 5, 2021

A camera system that uses AI and facial recognition intended to reveal states of emotion has been tested on Uyghurs in East Turkistan, the BBC has been told. A software engineer claimed to have installed such systems in police stations in the province.

A human rights advocate who was shown the evidence described it as shocking. The Chinese embassy in London has not responded directly to the claims but says political and social rights in all ethnic groups are guaranteed.



A gate of what is officially known as a “vocational skills education centre” in East Turkistan

East Turkistan is home to 12 million ethnic minority Uyghurs, most of whom are Muslim. Citizens in the province are under daily surveillance. The area is also home to highly controversial “re-education centres”, called high security detention camps by human rights groups, where it is estimated that more than a million people have been held.

Beijing has always argued that surveillance is necessary in the region because it says separatists who want to set up their own state have killed hundreds of people in terror attacks.

The software engineer agreed to talk to the BBC’s Panorama programme under condition of anonymity, because he fears for his safety. The company he worked for is also not being revealed.

But he showed Panorama five photographs of Uyghur detainees who he claimed had had the emotion recognition system tested on them. “The Chinese government use Uyghurs as test subjects for various experiments just like rats are used in laboratories,” he said.

And he outlined his role in installing the cameras in police stations in the province: “We placed the emotion detection camera 3m from the subject. It is similar to a lie detector but far more advanced technology.”

He said officers used “restraint chairs” which are widely installed in police stations across China.

“Your wrists are locked in place by metal restraints, and [the] same applies to your ankles.”

He provided evidence of how the AI system is trained to detect and analyse even minute changes in facial expressions and skin pores. According to his claims, the software creates a pie chart, with the red segment representing a negative or anxious state of mind.

He claimed the software was intended for “pre-judgement without any credible evidence”.

The Chinese embassy in London did not respond to questions about the use of emotional recognition software in the province but said: “The political, economic, and social rights and freedom of religious belief in all ethnic groups in East Turkistan are fully guaranteed. “People live in harmony regardless of their ethnic backgrounds and enjoy a stable and peaceful life with no restriction to personal freedom.”

The evidence was shown to Sophie Richardson, China director of Human Rights Watch.

“It is shocking material. It’s not just that people are being reduced to a pie chart, it’s people who are in highly coercive circumstances, un



Xinjiang is believed to be one of the most surveilled areas in the world

der enormous pressure, being understandably nervous and that's taken as an indication of guilt, and I think, that's deeply problematic."

Suspicious behaviour

According to Darren Byler, from the University of Colorado, Uyghurs routinely have to provide DNA samples to local officials, undergo digital scans and most have to download a government phone app, which gathers data including contact lists and text messages.

"Uyghur life is now about generating data," he said.

"Everyone knows that the smartphone is something you have to carry with you, and if you don't carry it you can be detained, they know that you're being tracked by it. And they feel like there's no escape," he said.

Most of the data is fed into a computer system called the Integrated Joint Operations Platform, which Human Rights Watch claims flags up supposedly suspicious behaviour.

"The system is gathering information about dozens of different kinds of perfectly legal behaviours including things like whether people were going out the back door instead of the front door, whether they were putting gas in a car that didn't belong to them," said Ms Richardson.

"Authorities now place QR codes outside the doors of people's homes so that they can easily know who's supposed to be there and who's not."

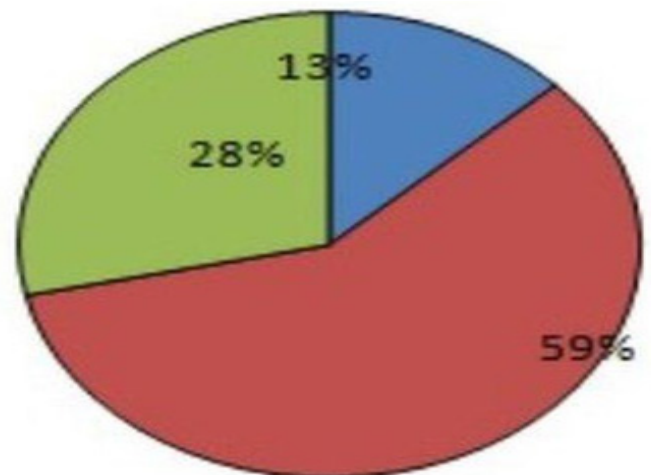
Orwellian?

There has long been debate about how closely tied Chinese technology firms are to the state. US-based research group IPVM claims to have uncovered evidence in patents filed by such companies that suggest facial recognition products were specifically designed to identify Uyghur people.

A patent filed in July 2018 by Huawei and the China Academy of Sciences describes a face recognition product that is capable of identifying people on the basis of their ethnicity. Huawei said in response that it did "not condone the use of technology to discriminate or oppress members of any community" and that it was "independent of government" wherever it operated.

The group has also found a document which appears to suggest the firm was developing technology for a so-called One Person, One File system.

"For each person the government would store their personal information, their political activities, relationships... anything that might give you insight into how that person would behave and what kind of a threat they might pose," said IPVM's Conor Healy.



Data from the system purports to indicate a person's state of mind, with red suggesting a negative or anxious state of mind

"It makes any kind of dissidence potentially impossible and creates true predictability for the government in the behaviour of their citizens. I don't think that [George] Orwell would ever have imagined that a government could be capable of this kind of analysis."

Huawei did not specifically address questions about its involvement in developing technology for the One Person, One File system but said: "Huawei opposes discrimination of all types, including the use of technology to carry out ethnic discrimination."

"As a privately-held company, Huawei is independent of government wherever we operate. We do not condone the use of technology to discriminate against or oppress members of any community."

The Chinese embassy in London said it had "no knowledge" of these programmes.

IPVM also claimed to have found marketing material from Chinese firm Hikvision advertising a Uyghur-detecting AI camera, and a patent for software developed by Dahua, another tech giant, which could also identify Uyghurs.

Dahua said its patent referred to all 56 recognised ethnicities in China and did not deliberately target any one of them.

It added that it provided "products and services that aim to help keep people safe" and complied "with the laws and regulations of every market" in which it operates, including the UK.

Hikvision said the details on its website were incorrect and "uploaded online without appropriate review", adding that it did not sell or have in its product range "a minority recognition function or analytics technology".

Dr Lan Xue, chairman of China's National committee on AI governance, said he was not aware of the patents.

"Outside China there are a lot of those sorts of charges. Many are not accurate and not true," he told the BBC.

"I think that East Turkistan local government had the responsibility to really protect the East Turkistan people... if technology is used in those contexts, that's quite understandable," he said.

The UK's Chinese embassy had a more robust defence, telling the BBC: "There is no so-called facial recognition technology featuring Uyghur analytics whatsoever."

Daily surveillance

China is estimated to be home to half of the world's almost 800 million surveillance cameras.

It also has a large number of smart cities, such as Chongqing, where AI is built into the foundations of the urban environment.

Chongqing-based investigative journalist Hu Liu told Panorama of his own experience: "Once you leave home and step into the lift, you are captured by a camera. There are cameras everywhere."

"When I leave home to go somewhere, I call a taxi, the taxi company uploads the data to the government. I may then go to a cafe to meet a few friends and the authorities know my location through the camera in the cafe.

"There have been occasions when I have met some friends and soon after someone from the government contacts me. They warned me, 'Don't see that person, don't do this and that.'

"With artificial intelligence we have nowhere to hide," he said.



Hikvision makes a range of products including cameras

An Old Chinese man married with Uyghur teenage girl



Uyghur Canadian activist Rukiya Turdush said on Twitter: An old Chinese man married Uyghur teenager girl, many sources said: "This is not the exceptional issue, raping kids in concentration camps could be common, we don't know how many of them were taken as a wife.

Any Chinese can take Uyghur kids from crowded kids concentration camps".

Niece of Prominent Uyghur Scholar Confirmed to Have Died in East Turkistan Internment Camp

RFA, 2021-05-25

Mihray Erkin was forced to return to the region in 2019 and died in detention the following year.



Abduweli Ayup (R) with his wife and daughter while studying in the U.S., in a file photo.

The niece of prominent Uyghur scholar and linguist-in-exile Abduweli Ayup has been confirmed to have died while being investigated by state security police in Kashgar (in Chinese, Kashi) Prefecture in East Turkistan, according to official sources.

Mihray Erkin, a graduate of Shanghai's Jiao Tong University with a degree in plant biotechnology who had gone on to complete a related master's degree in Tokyo University before becoming a researcher at Japan's Nara Institute of Science and Technology, returned to the East Turkistan in August 2019 after authorities in Kashgar put her parents under pressure to call her home.

In late 2020, RFA's Uyghur Service reported that Erkin was believed to have died while in detention in one of the East Turkistan's vast network of internment camps, where authorities in the region are believed to have held up to 1.8 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities since early 2017. The report could not be independently confirmed at the time.

After denying the camps' existence initially, China in 2019 changed tack and began describing the facilities as residential training centers that provide vocational training for Uyghurs, discourage radicalization, and help protect the country from terrorism.

But reporting by RFA and other media outlets indicate that those in the camps are detained against their will and subjected to political indoctrination, routinely face rough treatment at the hands of their overseers and endure poor diets and unhygienic conditions in the often-o-

vercrowded facilities.

Former detainees have also described being subjected to torture, rape, sterilization, and other abuses while in custody.

Parliaments in Canada, The Netherlands, the U.K. and Lithuania, and the U.S. State Department, have described China's actions in the region as "genocide," while the New York-based group Human Rights Watch (HRW) says they constitute crimes against humanity.

Family threatened

While few details of Erkin's status were available when RFA learned of her reported death last year, a source from her hometown of Toqquzaq (Tuokezhake), in Kashgar's Kona Sheher (Shufu) county, recently confirmed the reports and said police had since made threats to her family.

"Mihray died in November 2020 while in detention and after she died, authorities told the family members to remain silent about it," said the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity citing fear of reprisal.

"Reports of her death came out on Dec. 20—the same day she was buried while under surveillance by local police. Three family members participated the burial." According to the source, the day after Erkin's burial, police told family members that if they spoke out about the death, they would be "imprisoned" for "disclosing state secrets" and "defaming the

police.”

The source said that police in charge of Erkin’s case had attributed her death to “a disease” that her family had “hidden” from them and added a falsified medical record to the official report as proof, which he said he had seen a copy of.

He said police forced family members to record a video testimony confirming that Erkin suffered from a ‘disease’ and had ‘died at home,’ although the video was never released for reasons that remain unknown.

The source said Erkin had died while being detained and investigated by members of the Kashgar Public Security Bureau at the Kashgar Yanbulak Detention Center, suggesting that her death may have been the result of interrogation.

RFA spoke with a national security officer in Toqquzaq who said that while he was not among the people who handled Erkin’s case, his colleagues told him she had died in the Yanbulak Detention Center. He said he was unaware of the exact date of her death.

Another official confirmed that she had been detained “for some time” at the detention center before her death.

Detention as leverage

Erkin’s detention is seen by members of the Uyghur diaspora as part of a bid by China’s government to exert leverage over her uncle, Abduweli Ayup, who has sought to protect the Uyghur language through grassroots initiatives in response to policies of cultural assimilation in East Turkistan, and who relocated to Norway after fleeing the region in August 2015.

Ayup, who had sought to set up “mother tongue-based” schools to promote the Uyghur language, was ordered jailed 18 months for “illegal fundraising” in August 2014 by the Tengritagh (in Chinese, Tianshan) district

court in East Turkistan capital Urumqi after being detained for a year, but was released three months later when his partners appealed their cases.

Uyghurs in exile say that the charges against Ayup and his partners were politically motivated, after the U.S.-educated linguist’s essays and lectures on maintaining the Uyghur language in schools drew widespread support in China’s Uyghur community.

A few months prior to her return to East Turkistan, Erkin had repeatedly urged her uncle to cease his activism. In response, Ayup suggested that the request was “out of character” for his niece and her upbringing, and said it was likely she made it as a result of Chinese police pressure on family members, including Erkin’s mother.

“I think they forced her mother to say that, because she was the only one from my family outside of East Turkistan, so the authority kept pressuring her through her mother,” Ayup told RFA. “Mihray was under a lot of pressure at that time.”

‘Roses will mark my grave’

RFA’s source from Toqquzaq said that Erkin had conveyed the reasons for her return to East Turkistan to a friend via text message at the Tokyo airport shortly before her departure, saying that she was morally bound to repay her debt to her parents by staying by their side.

But the source suggested that the reasons she gave were in part to comfort herself while in a state of hesitation and panic.

The same message said that if she were to die, “a bouquet of roses will mark my grave,” which the source took to mean that she knew her life was at risk and feared a death without proper burial.

The position of the Chinese regime, which is committing genocide in East Turkistan, on Palestinian-Israeli conflict, has once again exposed its hypocrisy.



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