

Forum: Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee

Issue: Secret reeducation camps in China

Student Officer: Anthi Sotiropoulou-Nassika

Position: Co-Chair

INTRODUCTION

It has recently come to the light of the international community that China has been locking up the Muslim minorities of the autonomous region of Xinjiang in what they like to refer to as "vocational schools" or "reeducation camps". What they really are though, are modern concentration camps. Xinjiang is home to a number of ethnic groups, such as the Uyghurs and the Kazakhs who are Muslims. After years of conflict between the Chinese Han majority and the Muslim minorities due to attempted assimilation by China, the latter turned to extreme measures: the creation of political reeducation camps. Through the installation of mass surveillance in the cities of Xinjiang, they have managed to watch over its people's every step. Metal detectors and surveillance cameras, as well as surveillance through digital devices, have become part of Xinjiang's citizens' daily lives. The reasons for detainment are largely untenable —they range from wearing a hijab in public and having a beard to even contacting someone that lives abroad. Life in those camps is even worse. Released detainees, who have told their stories, mention torture and political indoctrination, while recall even instances where detainees killed themselves or died from not having access to needed medicine or for other various reasons. Uyghurs are forced to renounce their religion and faith, culture and often even their Muslim name. They are forced to praise communist China and its leaders. People are being abducted from their homes, while their families very often ignore what has happened to them. This has led to the disappearance of thousands of Xinjiang's citizens with their loved ones left behind not knowing who to contact or what to do in fear of being the next victims. China has tried to deny the existence of these camps. When evidence became irrefutable, the Chinese used lies telling the international community that the camps are just schools to help people who have fallen victims of religious or political extremists. They pretend that they fight terrorism and extremism. These camps are violating basic human rights and should not exist in our modern day world.

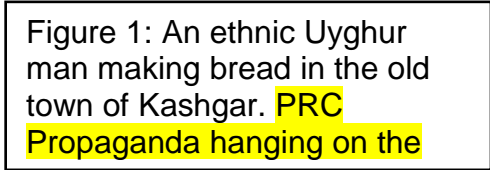


Figure 1: An ethnic Uyghur man making bread in the old town of Kashgar. PRC Propaganda hanging on the

DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

Assimilation

The enforced incorporation of a cultural and ethnic minority into the majority cultural body.

Reeducation Camps

The Muslim concentration camps operated by the People's Republic of China. The camps apparently operate outside the legal system of the country. In these camps, Muslim minorities undergo political indoctrination. China has stated that they serve the purpose of countering extremism and terrorism.

Political Indoctrination

Political indoctrination involves persuading people to adopt certain beliefs, ideas, values, and ideologies related to politics and governance.¹

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In order to fully grasp the relevance, severity and events that led up to the creation of these reeducation camps, it is important to have a look at the complex historical conflicts between China and the Xinjiang's populations.

The Xinjiang conflict

Xinjiang, officially the Xinjiang Autonomous Region (XUAR), is an autonomous region of China located in the Northwest of the country. It is the largest region in China and the

¹ Arthur Asa Berger
In: *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior*

eighth largest country sub-division in the world spanning over 1, 6 million square kilometers. It is bordered by Russia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Tibet autonomous region. Xinjiang's brief period of independence was experienced in the 1940s', but ended shortly after China regained control of it in 1949 following the seizure of power by the communists. It is home to about 10 million Uyghurs (out of total population of 19 million), an ethnic group affiliated with the region of Central and Eastern Asia. They speak their own language, an Asian Turkic language similar to Uzbek, and practice mainly a moderate form of Sunni Islam. Xinjiang's economy has been fueled by its richness in oil and natural resources. This economic advantage led to a large-scale migration of Han-Chinese (China's world's largest ethnic group) sponsored and encouraged by the government. This migration aimed on the one hand, at promoting Chinese cultural unity and on the other, at punishing expressions of Uyghur identity through government policies. This demographic shift, which has often been referred to as "separatist terrorism", led to serious ethnic tensions and conflicts between Uyghurs, state police and Han Chinese. In 2009, for example, there was a series of violent riots, which lasted several days. Acted out by the Uyghur that protested against their treatment by the government and the Han majority, these riots had severe consequences with about 200 dead and 1,721 injured people during the unrest. However, the Chinese government blamed the violent protests and riots on extreme separatist groups with little or no evidence of forming a cohesive separatist movement —with jihadist roots or otherwise— that threatened the Chinese government. Xinjiang plays an important role in the Chinese economy, which means that China has repeatedly tried to draw Xinjiang into its orbit. Following the riots in 2009, China has implemented a series of repressive policies in 2016 and 2017 that have restrained religious freedom and increased surveillance of the Uyghur population, often under the guise of combating terrorism and extremism. This is a justification often used by the Chinese Government when trying to defend its oppression on the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. This crackdown is part of a policy of "de-extremification that has generated repressive practices, which range from the banning of Muslim baby names to torture and political indoctrination in the so called "reeducation camps" where, according to UN statistics, hundreds of thousands have been detained. This has been supervised by Chen Quango, Xinjiang's governor and communist party secretary, an expert in ethnic crackdowns.



Figure2: Ürümqi riots

Figure3: A group of women holding pictures of their loved ones that have fallen victims to the reeducation camps.

The camps

Authorities have labelled them as “transformation-through-education” camps, but mostly refer to them as “reeducation” camps. What they should really be called though, is modern concentration camps, in which people of a specific ethnicity are being imprisoned for having that ethnicity and practicing their religion. Individuals sent to such camps have no right to speak out, as well as no access to any legal process. With Chen Quango taking control of Xinjiang, the security and surveillance systems have taken control of people’s lives. These systems are able to track Xinjiang's citizens on the streets using face recognition, cameras and metal detectors, as well as to watch them inside their homes and even track them through their digital devices. Family members can be detained at any time of day; some even disappear in the middle of the night. There are no distinct criteria for these arrests. The "reasons" range from wearing their Muslim attire and having a certain Muslim name to visiting a family member abroad. Anybody identifying with one of the Islamic ethnic groups is a suspect.

BBC interviewed a number of former detainees and here are some of the reasons they were sent to a camp:

...was detained by the police in Xinjiang in 2014 for reciting an Islamic verse at a funeral.

...ended up in a camp after the police found a picture of a woman wearing a niqab, a face veil, on his mobile phone.

...an old lady was there for having made a pilgrimage to Mecca.

...an old man was detained for not paying his water bill on time.²



Figure 4: Images from Chinese state TV show life inside the "schools". This is a case of sheer propaganda.



² https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/China_hidden_camps

No outsider has been able to enter these camps, which means that the living conditions inside them can only be described by former detainees. From what we know, the detainees undergo a type of assimilation training that includes brainwashing, torture and punishment that hark back to the darkest hours of the Mao-era, when anyone suspected of not being loyal enough to the state or to the Chinese Communist Party could end up in China's notorious labor camps. They are forced to pledge loyalty to the CCP (Communist Party of China) and renounce Islam, as well as sing and chant praises for communism, learn Mandarin, and completely let go of their identity and ethnicity. Some have reported that everything they did was being monitored. Others added having witnessed detainees killing themselves or being victims of torture. Detainees that disobey orders and refuse to carry out what they were asked face harsh punishments ranging from verbal abuse and solitary confinements to food deprivation and tiring stress positions. Women endure sexual abuse and harassment. Many do not survive the stay in the camps —there have been many deaths, the exact number of which cannot be verified, since most of them are being kept secret. A recent report of *Radio Free Asia* says that there have been also cases of teenagers dying.

I recommend watching this video for a detailed report on what the detainees are enduring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmaqJDIWwrs>

Nevertheless, here are some experiences from first hand witnesses:

Each morning, when 29-year-old Ablet Tursun Tohti was woken an hour before sunrise, he and his fellow detainees had one minute to get to the exercise yard.

After lining up, they were made to run.

"There was a special room to punish those who didn't run fast enough," *Ablet* says. "There were two men there, one to beat with a belt, the other just to kick."

"The doors of our dormitories were locked at night," *Ablet* says. "But there were no toilets inside, they just gave us a bowl."

"We sang the song called 'Without the Communist Party There Can Be No New China,'" *Ablet* says.

"And they taught us laws. If you couldn't recite them in the correct way, you'd be beaten."³

...he was hooded, made to wear shackles on his arms and legs and was forced to stand in a fixed position for 12 hours when first detained.⁴

³ Ablet Tursun Tohti, former detainee https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/China_hidden_camps

⁴ Kairat Samarkan, former detainee of a "re-education camp" <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/china-up-to-one-million-detained/>

According to detainees, they were also forced to drink alcohol and eat pork, which are forbidden in Islam.

Families are being torn apart on the daily, children separated from their parents and sent to special state-run day cares or schools. Family members are scared to speak out, especially if they have relatives living abroad, since contacting outside help is a common reason to be detained. The detainees and their families are suffering, but the Chinese authorities are remaining silent.

A Uyghur woman, named Mihrigul Tursun and detained in China, after escaping one of these camps, described details of torture and beatings:

"The authorities put a helmet-like thing on my head, and each time I was electrocuted, my whole body would shake violently and I would feel the pain in my veins," *Tursun said in a statement read by a translator.* "I don't remember the rest. White foam came out of my mouth, and I began to lose consciousness," *Tursun said.* "The last word I heard them saying is that you being a Uyghur is a crime."⁵

She also recalls women dying from pills they were given that led to bleeding or loss of menstruation.

China's perspective

Once information about the existence of these camps reached the media and gained some international recognition, Chinese officials denied it explicitly. In October 2018, officials started referring to them as "vocational training centers" and Xinjiang's governor, Shohrat Zakir, called them "boarding schools" that provide "trainees" with job skills who join them voluntarily and are allowed to leave the camps whenever they wish. But human rights organizations affirm that detainees are prevented from exiting as they please. Chinese officials insist that the main purposes of these camps are to teach Mandarin, Chinese laws, and vocational skills, as well as to prevent citizens from becoming influenced by extremist ideas. They point out that, since 2016, there has been no terrorist attack in Xinjiang, and the camps have been the main reason for the absence of violence. They have prevented any international body from entering these camps arguing that anything happening in Xinjiang is an internal affair that should not concern outside investigators. In short, they deny all the claims that have been made about the camps. In early 2019, the government organized several trips for foreign diplomats to visit Xinjiang and take a look at a center. A US official criticized them as "highly choreographed."

For a detailed investigation report I highly recommend looking at this piece by BBC:

⁵"Woman describes torture, beatings in Chinese detention camp". Associated Press News. Retrieved 27 November 2018.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/China_hidden_camps

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

China

China, officially the People's Republic of China, is the largest Asian country and also the most populous in the world. It is governed by the Communist Party of China, which exercises jurisdiction on all the 22 provinces and five autonomous regions. The government has repeatedly denied the existence of reeducation camps and China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that he "had not heard" of this situation.⁶

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of Xinjiang's neighboring countries and the "Kazakhs" living in Xinjiang have also fallen victims of these camps. Kazakh representatives have visited Xinjiang to meet with its officials, but to everybody's surprise, have not spoken out against this situation.

United States of America

The USA has made efforts to help the situation. Marco Rubio, a US senator, has urged Congress to impose sanctions under the Global Magnitsky Act against Chinese officials who are responsible for human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The US ambassador to China

⁶ "Reeducation Returns to China". Foreign Affairs. Retrieved 20 June 2018.

has launched numerous investigations, and many reports and public statements have been made towards China urging them to stop their actions immediately.

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, a body of human rights experts, has monitored the implementation of its namesake Convention. Gary McDougall, a member of this Committee, said that "In the name of combating religious extremism, China had turned Xinjiang into something resembling a massive internment camp, shrouded in secrecy, a sort of no-rights zone".⁷

Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is a New York-based international non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on human rights.⁸

It has called on the Chinese government to free the hundreds of thousands of Xinjiang people placed in reeducation camps since April 2017 and close them down.

Amnesty International

Amnesty International was founded in London in July 1961; it is a non-governmental organization focused on human rights. Its main mission is to campaign for "a world, in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments."⁹ It has expressed its concerns for the issue stating that, due to the secretive and undocumented way people are being held, it is difficult to trace the whereabouts of the missing people. Amnesty International suggests that "[...] collective action and global pressure could persuade the Chinese government to act and account for those detained."¹⁰

⁷ "UN Expert: China Holds Millions of Ethnic Uighurs in 'Re-Education Camps'". [cnsnews.com](https://www.cnsnews.com). Retrieved 15 August 2018.

⁸ "Frequently Asked Questions". Human Rights Watch. Retrieved 2015-01-21.

⁹ "Amnesty International's Statute". www.amnesty.org.

¹⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/tell-china-to-close-its-secret-reeducation-camps-for-ethnic-minorities/>

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

The OHCHR is a department of the Secretariat of the United Nations, which works towards the promotion and protection of the human rights that are guaranteed under international law and stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. The mere existence of these camps is a breach of the basic Human Rights.

Radio Free Asia

Radio Free Asia (RFA) is a private, nonprofit international broadcasting corporation that broadcasts and publishes online news, information, and commentary to readers and listeners in East Asia. Its self-stated mission is "to provide accurate and timely news and information to Asian countries, whose governments prohibit access to a free press."¹¹

It aims at promoting democratic values and human rights and decrease Chinese Communist control. It is funded by the *US Agency for Global Media* —an independent agency of the United States government. It is highly involved in the Xinjiang Conflict and the consequences the XUAR people had to face. It has been conducting a series of telephone interviews with local judicial and police officials providing firsthand information on the conditions at hand.

Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)

Created in October 2001, this independent agency of the US government monitors human rights and the rule of law developments in the People's Republic of China.

In July of 2018, it released a report claiming that the Muslim minorities in Xinjiang "reeducation" camps constitute the largest mass incarceration of an ethnic minority population in the world today.

¹¹ Radio Free Asia – About Retrieved 10 November 2015

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Make sure the dates are accurate and the descriptions as detailed as necessary.
Please list all relevant events in chronological order.

DATE	DESCRIPTION OF EVENT
5 Jul. 09	Ürümqi riots break out —one of the many violent unrests that mark the Xinjiang Conflict. Carried out by angry Uyghurs as a sign of protest, they escalated to a long-lasting conflict between them and the Chinese government.
10 Sep. 17	Human Rights Watch released a report urging the Chinese government to immediately free people held in unlawful 'political education' centers in Xinjiang and shut them down.
April 2018	US Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Chris Smith sent a letter urging Ambassador to China Terry Branstad to launch an investigation concerning the mass detention of Muslim minority people in the Xinjiang region.
3 Jul. 18	UK parliamentary roundtable on the forced assimilation of the Muslim minorities in Xinjiang. Uyghur singer gives a personal testimony on what is happening to her people and German professor Dr. Adrian Zenz gave evidence of a large scale and sophisticated political reeducation network designed to detain people for long periods of time, the existence of which the Chinese government officially denies.

<p>26 Jul. 18</p>	<p>Vice President of the United States Mike Pence raises the issue of the political reeducation camps at the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom.</p>
<p>9 Sep. 18</p>	<p>Human Rights Watch released a 117-page report, "Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims".</p>
<p>10 Sep. 18</p>	<p>U.N. Human Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet urges China to let observers investigate the situation in Xinjiang. China declined.</p>
<p>11 Sep. 18</p>	<p>High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, raised the reeducation camps issue in European Parliament.</p>
<p>2019</p>	<p>Both the Art Newspaper and the Washington Post publish exposing and hard hitting articles.</p>
<p>Feb. 2019</p>	<p>Turkish government accused China of "violating the fundamental human rights of Uyghur Turks and other Muslim communities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region."</p>
<p>Feb. 2019</p>	<p>Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman defended camps by saying "China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremisation work for its national security" showing no support towards the Muslim community and justifying the excuses used by China concerning the camps' purposes.</p>

RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

Adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 10, 1948 in France, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a document that includes 30 articles “affirming an individual's rights, which, although not legally binding in themselves, have been elaborated in subsequent international treaties, economic transfers, regional human rights instruments, national constitutions, and other laws.”

Human Rights Watch Report “Eradicating Ideological Viruses’: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims”

It accused China of the "systematic mass detention of tens of thousands of ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslims in political reeducation camps without being charged or tried and presented new evidence of the Chinese government's mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment, and the increasingly pervasive controls on daily life".¹²

International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

Adopted on December 20, 2006 by the UN General Assembly, the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance serves as a legally binding instrument against the disappearance of persons. According to article 1 of the convention, "no one shall be subjected to enforced disappearance. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for enforced disappearance. "¹³

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)

This convention urges all contracting states to take all appropriate measures to combat all forms of racial discrimination.

¹² "China: Massive Crackdown in Muslim Region". Human Rights Watch. Retrieved 9 September 2018.

¹³ <https://www.humanrights.ch/en/standards/un-treaties/disappearance/>

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

- Michelle Bachelet, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, urged China to allow monitors into Xinjiang, but China called out to "respect its sovereignty".
- Marco Rubio sent a letter to the US ambassador to China urging him to launch an investigation on the political reeducation camps in Xinjiang.
- The U.S. Embassy & Consulate in China released Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom Statement on China, which addresses the issue of the detainment of hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, in political reeducation camps urging them to immediately release all those arbitrarily detained.
- Several reports of the Human Rights Watch, like the report, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims". The report also urged foreign governments to pursue China for its actions, including "targeted sanctions" against those responsible

Tip: For more previous attempts, look at timeline!

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One of the main reasons countries still hesitate to take intense actions against China is the fact that they may have strategical or economic ties with this country. Nations should put aside these concerns and act to save millions of human beings from modern day concentration camps.

Raising awareness: Chinese were denying the camps' existence for one reason: they do not want the international community to get involved. It is important that everyone in the world knows what is happening, Chinese people included. There are so many ways raising awareness and showing support for the families that have been affected. By doing so, China may be enforced to start telling people the truth of what is happening behind the gates of those "vocational schools"

Raising awareness can lead to:

Legal support from international organizations,

Encouraging diplomatic forces in Xinjiang, and

Monitoring and Investigating Xinjiang: The people in Xinjiang are victims of extreme surveillance and government control. The UN could, with the help of other organizations, find ways of watching over the people and situation in Xinjiang. After all, China is violating basic human rights, and it is their role to intervene. Since the local policemen are the ones detaining the innocents, there should be some other security force in place.

Journalism: Journalists can provide us with stories about the painful experiences of the citizens living under these atrocious conditions in Xinjiang. They can inform the international community and raise awareness.

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