

**Forum:** Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Committee (GA3)

**Issue:** Tackling the question of the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China

**Student Officer:** Grace Konidari

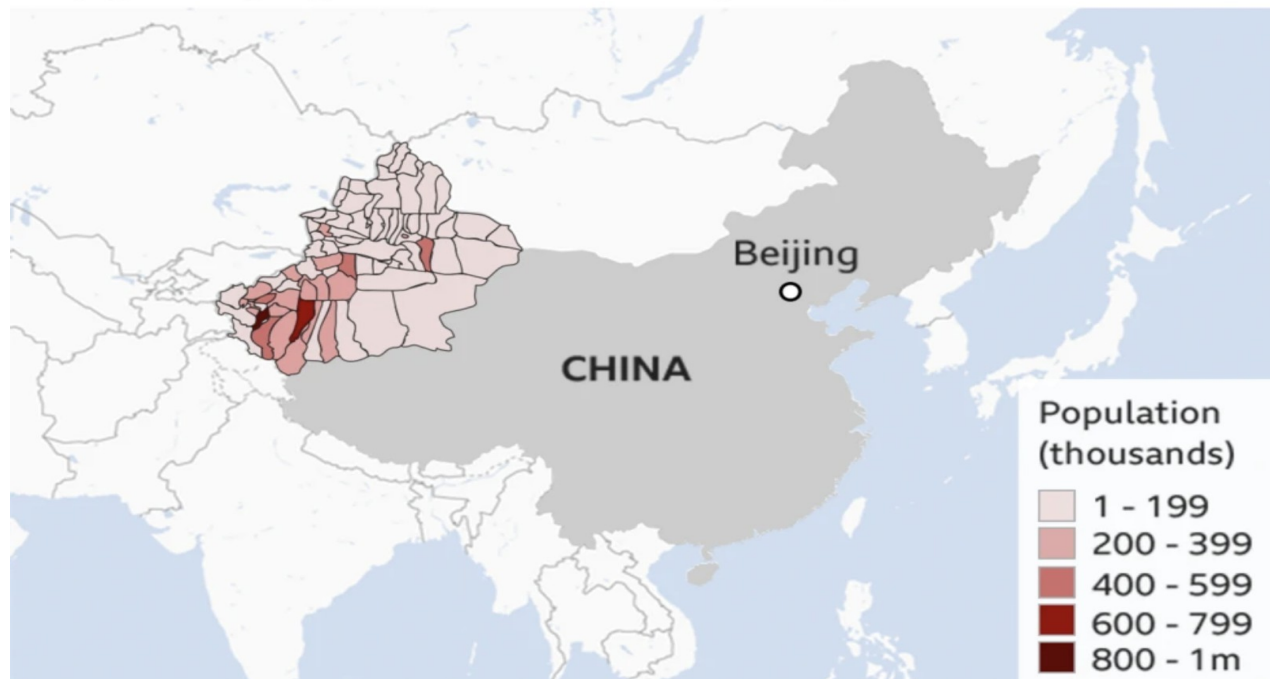
**Position:** Co-Chair

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## INTRODUCTION

Xinjiang is the largest region in China, taking up the north-western part of the country. It is an autonomous region, hence it has a certain degree of self-governance. However, in reality, the central government imposes significant restrictions such as intense surveillance, forced labor, and involuntary sterilizations, among other rights abuses. There are about 12 million Uyghurs, mostly Muslim, living in Xinjiang, which is officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).<sup>1</sup> The Uyghur community has their own language, similar to Turkish, and consider their ethnicity and their culture close to Central Asian nations. Overall, they comprise less than half of the Xinjiang population.

## Uyghur population in Xinjiang



<sup>1</sup> BBC. "Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*, 24 May 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037).

## Figure 1: Uyghur population in Xinjiang<sup>2</sup>

Since 2017, when President Xi Jinping issued an order mandating that all religions in China should align with Chinese socialist values and traditional culture, there have been further crackdowns.<sup>3</sup> This promoted campaigners to believe that China is attempting to eradicate Uyghur culture, even accusing the government of targeting Muslim religious figures, banning religious practices in the region, and destroying tombs and mosques.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the Chinese government has reportedly detained more than a million Muslims in reeducation camps since 2017<sup>5</sup>, with the majority being Uyghurs. Apart from the detentions, Uyghurs in Xinjiang are facing forced labour, constant surveillance and the involuntary sterilization of Uyghur women, in an attempt to suppress the population and break the cultural traditions of the group. These are all indicative of abuse of human rights, thus triggering global concern for the treatment of this minority group of the Xinjiang population.

Multiple foreign governments regard China's actions in Xinjiang as "genocide", whereas the United Nations Human Rights Office (UNHRO) deemed that these violations against Uyghurs could amount to crimes against humanity.<sup>6</sup> Agnès Callamard, the secretary general of Amnesty International, accused Chinese authorities of creating "a dystopian hellscape on a staggering scale". She also accused the UN Secretary General António Guterres of "failing to act according to his mandate".<sup>7</sup>

As the abuses on the Uyghur population are gaining global acknowledgment and condemnation, Chinese officials and state-controlled media are trying to discredit reports on Xinjiang through a variety of tactics, such as spreading misinformation and harassing activists. They use propaganda, creating a narrative of "anti-China forces" in the West that are spreading "vicious lies".<sup>8</sup> After the United Nations Human Rights Office (UNHRO) released its report on Uyghurs in Xinjiang, Chinese officials have denied claims on attempting to reduce the Uyghur

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<sup>2</sup> BBC. "Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*, 24 May 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037).

<sup>3</sup> BBC. "Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*, 24 May 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037).

<sup>4</sup> BBC. "Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*, 24 May 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037).

<sup>5</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>6</sup> Gunter, Joel. "China Has Created a Dystopian Hellscape in Xinjiang, Amnesty Report Says." *BBC News*, 10 June 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57386625](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57386625).

<sup>7</sup> Gunter, Joel. "China Has Created a Dystopian Hellscape in Xinjiang, Amnesty Report Says." *BBC News*, 10 June 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57386625](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57386625).

<sup>8</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

population through mass sterilisations, describing the statement as baseless, and assert that allegations of forced labour are completely fabricated.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, it is vital for the international community to take action and not allow this continuous violation of human rights in Xinjiang. Although certain countries have formally condemned China's actions and imposed sanctions, more sustained pressure is needed to hold the Chinese government accountable and protect the Uyghur community. Inaction threatens global human rights standards and could thus lead to the normalisation of genocide.

## DEFINITION OF KEY-TERMS

### **Genocide**

Genocide is defined as any act committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. These actions could include killing members of a group, causing them serious bodily or mental harm, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group and even forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>10</sup>

### **Uyghurs**

Uyghur, Turkic-speaking people of inner Asia. Uyghurs live primarily in northwestern China, in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, where they have been subject to a government crackdown since 2017. A small number of Uyghurs also live in the Central Asian republics. The Uyghur language is part of the Turkic family of Altaic languages.<sup>11</sup>

### **Autonomous State**

An autonomous country, organization, or group governs or controls itself rather than being controlled by anyone else. A state's ability to practice diplomacy is what defines and characterises an autonomous state.<sup>12</sup>

### **Surveillance**

The careful watching of a person or place, especially by the police or army, because of a crime that has happened or is expected to take place by said person or in said place.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022,

[www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations. "Definitions of Genocide and Related Crimes | United Nations." *United Nations*, 2025, [www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition](http://www.un.org/en/genocide-prevention/definition).

<sup>11</sup> The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Uyghur | History, Language, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023, [www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur).

<sup>12</sup> Collins Dictionary. "Definition of Autonomous State." *Collinsdictionary.com*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 30 June 2025, [www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/autonomous-state](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/autonomous-state).

<sup>13</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. "SURVEILLANCE | Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge.org*, 2019, [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surveillance](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/surveillance).

## **Sterilisation**

In medicine, sterilisation is a surgical procedure for the permanent prevention of conception by removing or interrupting the anatomical pathways through which gametes travel.<sup>14</sup>

## **Forced Labour**

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), forced or compulsory labour is all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered themselves voluntarily.<sup>15</sup>

# **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

## **Historical Context**

### Origins of the Uyghur People

Uyghurs belong to the family of Turkic nationalities and have a long cultural history. As an ethnic minority in China, Uyghurs were prohibited from writing their own history; therefore, a Uyghur national narrative was developed mainly outside China, particularly by Soviet historians who researched main principles of Uyghur national history.<sup>16</sup>

The origins of the Uyghur people are debated among scholars. The term "Uyghur" first appeared in reference to a nomadic group that founded the Uyghur khanate (historic polities ruled over by a khan) in the 8th century along the Orkhon River, in what is now north-central Mongolia. This khanate fell in 840 following an attack by the Kyrgyz on its capital, Karabalghasun, located about 200 miles (320 km) west of present-day Ulaanbaatar.<sup>17</sup> After the city's fall, the Uyghurs migrated southwest toward the Tien (Tian) Shan mountains in the Xinjiang region, where they established a new kingdom during the Turfan Depression. This kingdom lasted until the 13th century as the region was later conquered by the Mongol Empire. Many historians consider this migration and kingdom as the foundation of the modern Uyghur population, suggesting they settled in Xinjiang between the 9th and 13th centuries.

However, other scholars believe that today's Uyghurs descend primarily from earlier nomadic people who inhabited Xinjiang long before the Uyghur khanate. Scholars have proposed a number of groups known from Chinese records between the 17th century BCE and the 3rd century CE as the ancestors of the Uyghurs.<sup>18</sup> These early groups, namely the Xiongnu,

<sup>14</sup> Britannica. "Sterilization | Birth Control & Methods." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, [www.britannica.com/science/sterilization-medicine](http://www.britannica.com/science/sterilization-medicine).

<sup>15</sup> International Labour Organization. "What Is Forced Labour? | International Labour Organization." *Www.ilo.org*, 28 Jan. 2024, [www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/what-forced-labour](http://www.ilo.org/topics/forced-labour-modern-slavery-and-trafficking-persons/what-forced-labour).

<sup>16</sup> Oxford Research Encyclopaedias. "JavaScript is Disabled." [oxfordre.com/asianhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-637](http://oxfordre.com/asianhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277727-e-637).

<sup>17</sup> The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Uyghur | History, Language, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023, [www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur).

<sup>18</sup> The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Uyghur | History, Language, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023, [www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur).

Yuezhi, Saka, Wusun, Tocharians, Di-Qiang and Gaoche, represent a complex mix of Indo-European and Turkic people that passed through or settled in Xinjiang. Some even argue that the roots of the Uyghurs may trace back to prehistoric people identified through archaeological evidence in the region.<sup>19</sup>

The Uyghur name (but not the script or language) virtually disappeared for approximately 500 years. Inhabitants of this oasis region, now known as China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, referred to themselves by local or regional affiliation: "Turfanlik", "Kashgarlik," "Aqsulik," "Yarkandlik," and "Khotanlik," among others. Alternately, they were known by occupation: "Taranchi" or "Sart". In 1881 the czarist government annexed the Ili region along the Sino-Russian border from the weakened Qing government. A decade later, when the Ili region was returned to China, thousands of inhabitants of Eastern Turkistan migrated across the Russian border. The czarist government offered them citizenship, land, and a ten-year exemption from taxes. In 1921, during the establishment of the multinational Soviet state, the Uyghur name was revived to unite Kashgarlik, Taranchi, and other groups into a single ethnic identity.<sup>20</sup>

### Xinjiang's Incorporation into Modern China

Xinjiang was once again incorporated into the Chinese empire when it was conquered by the Mongol leader Genghis (Chinggis) Khan in the 13th century.<sup>21</sup> The Qing (Manchu) dynasty successfully imposed total control over the Xinjiang region, defeating the resistance of tribes in the north and sending loyal Muslims from Gansu to settle in northern Xinjiang in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Following the Chinese Revolution of 1911–1912, Yang Zengxin, a Han Chinese military leader who commanded local Turkic forces, took control of Xinjiang and was later officially appointed governor by the central government in Beijing. He remained in power until his assassination in 1928. After his death, the region experienced political instability, with a succession of leaders, particularly under the rule of Jin Shuren and Sheng Shicai. After the Communist takeover in 1949, the central government implemented relatively moderate policies toward ethnic minorities. These policies included official recognition of minority languages as well as representation of minority groups in local government. As part of these efforts, Xinjiang was granted autonomy in 1955.

### Past Conflicts and Autonomy Movements

Xinjiang has experienced various conflicts throughout its modern history, stemming mainly from ethnic tensions due to their different cultural identities. These conflicts include periods of rebellion and violence, particularly against the Uyghur population. The region's

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<sup>19</sup> The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Uyghur | History, Language, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023, [www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur).

<sup>20</sup> Eitzen, Hilda C. Culture Summary: Uyghur. Human Relations Area Files, 2023, <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/cultures/ai04/documents/000>.

<sup>21</sup> Falkenheim, Victor. "Xinjiang - History | Britannica." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2020, [www.britannica.com/place/Xinjiang/History](http://www.britannica.com/place/Xinjiang/History).

incorporation into China in 1949 and subsequent policies have been major factors contributing to ongoing tensions.<sup>22</sup>

The First East Turkestan Republic was established in 1933, in the city of Kashgar, by Uyghurs who were seeking independence from Chinese rule. The East Turkistan Republic was the primary product of an independence movement led by the Uyghur and other Turkic people living in East Turkistan, and was Turkic in character.<sup>23</sup> During the time of the Nationalist government, central authority was weakened, which facilitated the emergence of the republic. Even though it aimed to create an Islamic state in Xinjiang, the republic had limited international recognition and faced military opposition. It was abolished in 1934, yet it signified an early expression of Uyghur desire for independence.

In 1944, with support from the Soviet Union, the Second East Turkestan Republic was established in the Ili Valley in northern Xinjiang. It is believed that the East Turkestan Republic was a satellite state of the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> This autonomy movement took advantage of the dissatisfaction caused by the Han Chinese dominance and the harsh rule of the nationalist governor Sheng Shicai. The republic advocated for self-governance and Islamic practices. It lasted until 1949, until the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) entered Xinjiang and the republic was integrated into the People's Republic of China, hence, dissolving the republic.

On April 5th 1990, an armed uprising took place in Baren Township near Kashgar, led by Uyghur separatists opposing government policies restricting religious freedoms and women's reproductive rights.<sup>25</sup> Chinese security forces swiftly suppressed the revolt, resulting in numerous casualties. The Baren uprising is considered one of the first major violent incidents in modern Xinjiang's separatist movement. It marked a turning point for the Uyghur national movement. China ended the relatively tolerant policies of the 1980s on Uyghur religious and cultural activities, and resumed public trials and executions, intensifying repression in the region.<sup>26</sup>

### **Religion and cultural identity**

The Uyghurs of Xinjiang are Sunni Muslims.<sup>27</sup> Sunni Muslims regard their denomination as the mainstream and traditionalist branch of Islam, as distinguished from the minority

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<sup>22</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022,

[www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>23</sup> EAST TURKISTAN GOVERNMENT. "First East Turkistan Republic (1933-1934) | East Turkistan Government in Exile." *East Turkistan Government in Exile*, 4 Mar. 2021, [east-turkistan.net/first-east-turkistan-republic-1933-1934/](http://east-turkistan.net/first-east-turkistan-republic-1933-1934/).

<sup>24</sup> Wikipedia Contributors. "Second East Turkestan Republic." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 23 June 2025, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second\\_East\\_Turkestan\\_Republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_East_Turkestan_Republic).

<sup>25</sup> UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT. "UHRP Commemorates 35th Anniversary of the Barin Uprising - Uyghur Human Rights Project." Uyghur Human Rights Project, 3 Apr. 2025, [uhrp.org/statement/uhrp-commemorates-35th-anniversary-of-the-barin-uprising/](http://uhrp.org/statement/uhrp-commemorates-35th-anniversary-of-the-barin-uprising/).

<sup>26</sup> UYGHUR HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT. "UHRP Commemorates 35th Anniversary of the Barin Uprising - Uyghur Human Rights Project." Uyghur Human Rights Project, 3 Apr. 2025, [uhrp.org/statement/uhrp-commemorates-35th-anniversary-of-the-barin-uprising/](http://uhrp.org/statement/uhrp-commemorates-35th-anniversary-of-the-barin-uprising/).

<sup>27</sup> The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Uyghur | History, Language, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2023, [www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Uyghur).

denomination, the Shi'ah.<sup>28</sup> The spread of Islam into this region started in the 10th century with the conversion of the rulers of the Turkic Qarakhanid dynasty and their conquest of neighboring Buddhist kingdoms.<sup>29</sup>

The Uyghur were an ancient confederation of Turkic tribes that united in the sixth century, establishing a khanate south of Mongolia. It maintained political and military alliances with the Tang dynasty in neighboring China. Subsequently, the original Uyghur population dispersed south and west, often mixing with local populations. Even as Uyghur political power declined, art, music, and religion flourished. The Uyghur established a new script based on the Sogdian writing system (an old Iranian dialect). Buddhism was adopted, along with Nestorian Christianity and Zoroastrianism, but the original state religion of Manicheanism was maintained.<sup>30</sup>

## ***Allegations***

### Re-education Camps

The Chinese government claims the training provided in these re-education camps includes written and spoken Mandarin, labour skills and "knowledge of urban life". China has long insisted that mass "vocational education and training" is necessary in far-western Xinjiang to counter terrorism and alleviate poverty.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. "Sunni | Definition, Beliefs, & Practices." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, [www.britannica.com/topic/Sunni](http://www.britannica.com/topic/Sunni).

<sup>29</sup> Kachmar, Oleh. "Uyghur Heritage and the Charge of Cultural Genocide in Xinjiang." *New Lines Institute*, 24 Sept. 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/rules-based-international-order/genocide/uyghur-heritage-and-the-charge-of-cultural-genocide-in-xinjiang/>.

<sup>30</sup> Eitzen, Hilda C. Culture Summary: Uyghur. Human Relations Area Files, 2023, <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/cultures/ai04/documents/000>.

<sup>31</sup> BBC. "China Defends Xinjiang "Education" Camps." *BBC News*, 17 Sept. 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54195325](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54195325).



*Figure 2: Satellite images show rapid construction of camps in Xinjiang, like this one near Dabancheng<sup>32</sup>*

Most people detained in the reeducation camps were never charged with crimes and had no legal avenues to challenge their detentions. The detainees seem to have been targeted for a variety of reasons, often due to their religious beliefs. Information on what happened in the camps remains limited, but many detainees who have since fled China described harsh conditions.<sup>33</sup>

The UN Human Rights Office released a report in 2022, with evidence from detained people, that found patterns of torture or other forms of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in the camps.<sup>34</sup> Uyghurs detained in these education camps were forced to work in factories under oppressive conditions. They receive little pay, are prohibited from leaving, and their communication with family members is limited. Even when allowed, family visits are heavily monitored and can be cut short. To add, the Uyghurs, when not working, must learn Mandarin, which aims at ideological indoctrination.

<sup>32</sup> BBC. "Who Are the Uyghurs and Why Is China Being Accused of Genocide?" *BBC News*, 24 May 2022, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037).

<sup>33</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." Council on Foreign Relations, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>34</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

Moreover, numerous past-detainees shared that they were forced to pledge loyalty to the CCP and renounce Islam, as well as sing praises for communism. Others said they were tortured and subjected to sleep deprivation during interrogations. Female ex-detainees have even shared stories of sexual abuse, including rape.<sup>35</sup>

### Surveillance and Technological Control

The mass surveillance apparatus that targets Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities has vastly expanded, with technology having enabled it to become more targeted and effective.<sup>36</sup> Some people reported prison-like conditions, with cameras and microphones monitoring their every move and utterance.

A means of surveillance in Xinjiang is facial recognition. The region is filled with cameras equipped with AI facial recognition which can be seen at mosques, public spaces, transport hubs, and even in homes. It is the first known example of a government using artificial intelligence for racial profiling.<sup>37</sup> There is evidence of how the AI system is trained to detect and analyse even minute changes in facial expressions and skin pores.<sup>38</sup> This technological development is different from generic surveillance as it is capable of identifying people based on their facial features, which gives the government the opportunity to specifically target Uyghurs. Authorities also position 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.

Additionally, 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.<sup>39</sup> The majority of the data is stored into a system named the Integrated Joint Operations Platform, which the Human Rights Watch claims provides supposedly suspicious behaviour.<sup>40</sup> This suspicious behavior refers to different kinds of legal behaviours, such as whether people were going out the back door instead of the front door or whether they were putting gas in a car that didn't belong to them.

These national-level surveillance initiatives aim to create a fully monitored society by integrating technology with social controls. Social control goes back to authoritarian China under

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<sup>35</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgroundunder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>36</sup> Bhuiyan, Johana. "'There's Cameras Everywhere': Testimonies Detail Far-Reaching Surveillance of Uyghurs in China." *The Guardian*, 30 Sept. 2021, [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/30/uyghur-tribunal-testimony-surveillance-china](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/30/uyghur-tribunal-testimony-surveillance-china).

<sup>37</sup> Mozur, Paul. "One Month, 500,000 Face Scans: How China Is Using A.I. To Profile a Minority." *The New York Times*, 14 Apr. 2019, [www.nytimes.com/2019/04/14/technology/china-surveillance-artificial-intelligence-racial-profiling.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/14/technology/china-surveillance-artificial-intelligence-racial-profiling.html).

<sup>38</sup> Wakefield, Jane. "AI Emotion-Detection Software Tested on Uyghurs." *BBC News*, 25 May 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248).

<sup>39</sup> Wakefield, Jane. "AI Emotion-Detection Software Tested on Uyghurs." *BBC News*, 25 May 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248).

<sup>40</sup> Wakefield, Jane. "AI Emotion-Detection Software Tested on Uyghurs." *BBC News*, 25 May 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248).

the control of Mao Zedong who wrote “The people have sharp eyes”. This phrase motivated people to spy on their neighbors and loved ones for any suspicious behavior. This way Sharp Eyes was formed, an aggressive government surveillance program designed to reinforce the social monitoring that eased after economic liberalization eroded traditional means of control.<sup>41</sup> The Sharp Eyes program is an attempt to combine advanced surveillance technologies with methods of crowd-sourced monitoring, aiming to reduce dissent. Programs such as Sharp Eyes have been adopted by public security bureaus in Xinjiang to create the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), a mass surveillance app used by police in Xinjiang.<sup>42</sup>

### Reports of Forced Labour

Detentions in education camps put Uyghurs through a series of hardships and one of them includes the reports on forced labour. In one internment camp in Kashgar, Xinjiang, Uyghur detainees work as forced laborers to produce textiles, with Uyghur workers at a factory in Quanzhou facing similar abuses.<sup>43</sup> They are obliged to live in different dormitories from Han workers, separated and isolated by an iron gate and security cameras and they often work for longer hours than their Han co-workers. Uyghur workers at this factory are not allowed to leave the premises and even if they could leave the local police have confiscated their identification materials. Detention also disrupted families as children whose parents were sent to the camps were often forced to stay in state-run orphanages.

In response to serious human and labor rights abuses committed by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) –a central entity used by the Chinese Communist Party to implement its system of forced labor, forced cultural assimilation, and society-wide control,<sup>44</sup> against ethnic minorities- the United States government issued sanctions against the group and members of its leadership in 2020.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Swedish clothing giant H&M said it was severing ties with a Chinese yarn producer amid accusations that the company was using “slave labour” from Xinjiang.<sup>46</sup>

### **Socioeconomic Impact**

#### Economic Policies in Xinjiang

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<sup>41</sup> Friedland, Alex. “Sharp Eyes Surveillance Program Expands Dramatically | Center for Security and Emerging Technology.” Center for Security and Emerging Technology, 30 Oct. 2020, [cset.georgetown.edu/article/sharp-eyes-surveillance-program-expands-dramatically/](https://cset.georgetown.edu/article/sharp-eyes-surveillance-program-expands-dramatically/).

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch . “Interview: China’s “Big Brother” App.” *Human Rights Watch*, 1 May 2019, [www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/01/interview-chinas-big-brother-app#](https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/01/interview-chinas-big-brother-app#).

<sup>43</sup> Bureau of International Labor Affairs. “Against Their Will: The Situation in Xinjiang.” *U.S. Department of Labor*, 2021, [www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/against-their-will-the-situation-in-xinjiang](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/against-their-will-the-situation-in-xinjiang).

<sup>44</sup> Bureau of International Labor Affairs. “Against Their Will: The Situation in Xinjiang.” *U.S. Department of Labor*, 2021, [www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/against-their-will-the-situation-in-xinjiang](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/against-their-will-the-situation-in-xinjiang).

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury . “Treasury Sanctions Chinese Entity and Officials pursuant to Global Magnitsky Human Rights Executive Order.” *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, [home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1073](https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1073). <sup>46</sup> BBC. “China Defends Xinjiang “Education” Camps.” *BBC News*, 17 Sept. 2020, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54195325](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-54195325).

Xinjiang is an important link in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive development plan stretching through Asia and Europe. It isn't unreasonable to assume that Beijing hopes to eradicate any possibility of separatist activity to continue its development in Xinjiang, which is home to China's largest coal and natural gas reserves. However, human rights organizations have observed that the economic benefits of resource extraction and development are mostly taken advantage of by the Han Chinese community, and Uyghur people are increasingly marginalized.<sup>47</sup>

The strategic importance of the BRI project has driven the CCP to intensify its repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Through the BRI projects Xinjiang's connectivity with countries in Central Asia and the Middle East will be enhanced, and that means the Muslim population in Xinjiang will be more exposed to external influences or even from those regions.<sup>48</sup> The Uyghur community could be exposed to diverse religious beliefs and values which could fire dissidents. The government is reasonably worried about this possible increased connectivity, as in 2014, the East Turkistan Islamic Party threatened to conduct a jihad in China, just a year after Beijing announced the launch of the BRI projects.<sup>49</sup> In the same year, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also threatened to seize the region of Xinjiang, identifying it as a legitimate piece of Islamic Central Asia.<sup>50</sup> These threats confirmed the CCP's concerns about terrorism and separatism in Xinjiang and thus Beijing focused on "re-educating" the Muslim minorities so China could launch the BRI project, while having eradicated the possibility of the population being influenced by external influences and forming opposition against the government.

Moreover, the BRI projects facilitate the repression of the Uyghurs by creating permissive conditions in world politics.<sup>51</sup> It is deemed that numerous countries are inclined to support China in global affairs on the grounds that they benefit from billions of dollars in Chinese investments through the BRI program. Muslim countries are no exception,<sup>52</sup> and they seem to refrain from taking a stance on the religious and cultural oppressions in Xinjiang, due to the financial benefits included.

### Impact on Education and Language

The impact of education and language policies on Uyghurs in Xinjiang has been significant, leading to the marginalization of the Uyghur language and culture within the educational system. While China officially promotes bilingual education in their re-education

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<sup>47</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>48</sup> Air University . "The Economics of Repression: The Belt and Road Initiative, COVID-19, and the Repression Of." *Air University (AU)*, 9 Dec. 2020, [www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2441685/the-economics-of-repression-the-belt-and-road-initiative-covid-19-and-the-repre/#\\_edn3](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2441685/the-economics-of-repression-the-belt-and-road-initiative-covid-19-and-the-repre/#_edn3).

<sup>49</sup> Beina Xu, Holly Fletcher, and Jayshree Bajoria, "The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)," Backgrounder, Council for Foreign Relations. 4 September 2014, <https://www.cfr.org/>.

<sup>50</sup> Gary Sands, "China and the ISIS Threat," *The Diplomat*, 26 September 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/>.

<sup>51</sup> Air University . "The Economics of Repression: The Belt and Road Initiative, COVID-19, and the Repression Of." *Air University (AU)*, 9 Dec. 2020, [www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2441685/the-economics-of-repression-the-belt-and-road-initiative-covid-19-and-the-repre/#\\_edn3](http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2441685/the-economics-of-repression-the-belt-and-road-initiative-covid-19-and-the-repre/#_edn3).

<sup>52</sup> Nick Cohen, "Why do Muslim states stay silent over China's abuse of the Uighurs?," *The Guardian*, 4 July 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

camps, it reinforces the use of Mandarin Chinese, hindering the development of Uyghur language proficiency.

## MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

### **China**

The government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has raised concerns within the international community ever since the 2014 allegations of committing a series of human rights abuses against the Uyghur and other Turkic Muslim minorities in the region of Xinjiang.<sup>53</sup> Ever since then, human rights activists and organizations have characterized these actions as "persecution" or "genocide".<sup>54</sup>

China has defended its controversial policies in the Xinjiang region with a new document stating that millions of workers have benefited from education and vocational training.<sup>55</sup> In a further attempt to counter these allegations, the Chinese government has implemented sanctions on Chinese politicians who were allegedly involved and blocked certain exports which were accused of being made with forced labour. Additionally, another Chinese government white paper claims that vocational training in the education camps is increasing job opportunities and combating poverty. Beijing also continues to argue that surveillance is necessary in the region on the grounds that separatists who want to set up their own state have killed hundreds of people in terror attacks.<sup>56</sup>

### **United States of America (USA)**

In July 2020, under the Global Magnitsky Act, the U.S. imposed asset freezes and sanctions extended to the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). On March 22 2021, the U.S. implemented export controls and visa bans.<sup>57</sup> In January 2021, the State Department formally declared that "ongoing genocide" and crimes against humanity are being committed in Xinjiang<sup>58</sup> U.S. policy measures also include the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (dec. 2021),<sup>59</sup> which aims to combat forced labor in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous

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<sup>53</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022,

[www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>54</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022,

[www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>55</sup> Wakefield, Jane. "AI Emotion-Detection Software Tested on Uyghurs." *BBC News*, 25 May 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248).

<sup>56</sup> Wakefield, Jane. "AI Emotion-Detection Software Tested on Uyghurs." *BBC News*, 25 May 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248](http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-57101248).

<sup>57</sup> Nahal Toosi. "U.S., Allies Announce Sanctions on China over Uyghur "Genocide."" *POLITICO*, Politico, 22 Mar. 2021,

[www.politico.com/news/2021/03/22/us-allies-sanctions-china-uyghers-genocide-477434?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/22/us-allies-sanctions-china-uyghers-genocide-477434?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>58</sup> "International Responses to the Uyghur Crisis - Uyghur Human Rights Project." *Uyghur Human Rights Project*, 16 Aug. 2023, [uhrp.org/responses/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://uhrp.org/responses/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act." *U.S. Customs and Border Protection*, 25 Oct. 2022, [www.cbp.gov/trade/forced-labor/UFLPA](http://www.cbp.gov/trade/forced-labor/UFLPA).

Region. The Act establishes a "rebuttable presumption" that all goods made wholly or partly in Xinjiang are produced with forced labor and are therefore banned from entering the U.S. unless they can provide clear and convincing evidence that the products were not made with forced labor.

### **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR)**

The UN human rights office has urged China to not only release people who have been arbitrarily detained, but also disclose the whereabouts of those who are missing. The UNHCR also recommends to the government of China that it urgently clarifies the whereabouts of individuals, whose families have been seeking information about their loved ones, by providing details of their exact locations and establishing safe channels of communication and travel, enabling families to reunite.<sup>60</sup> It also encourages the CCP to undertake a full review of the legal framework for national security, counter-terrorism and minority rights in Xinjiang to ensure their compliance with binding international human rights law.

### **European Union**

The European Union (EU) also sanctioned Chinese officials in 2021, marking the first time the bloc placed restrictions on China since 1989.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, on 17 December 2020, Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution condemning systemic abuses in Xinjiang, calling them crimes against humanity and demanding immediate action. Later, on 9 June 2022, lawmakers declared evidence points to a "serious risk of genocide," reinforcing calls to end forced labor and sterilization campaigns.<sup>62</sup> The EU also approved legislation banning the sale, import, and export of goods from Xinjiang made with forced labor.

## **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF EVENT</b>
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<sup>60</sup> United Nations. "Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment." OHCHR, United Nations, 10 Dec. 1984, [www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading](http://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-against-torture-and-other-cruel-inhuman-or-degrading).

<sup>61</sup> Maizland, Lindsay. "China's Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 22 Sept. 2022, [www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights](http://www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights).

<sup>62</sup> Gerin, Roseanne. "EU Lawmakers Find "Serious Risk of Genocide" in China's Repression of Uyghurs." *Radio Free Asia*, 9 June 2022, [www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/eu-parliament-resolution-06092022175519.html?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/eu-parliament-resolution-06092022175519.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

10 October 1911 - 12 February 1912	The Chinese Revolution was a nationalist democratic revolt that overthrew the Qing dynasty in 1912 and created a republic.
1933-1934	The First East Turkestan Republic was established in 1933 and abolished in 1934.
1944-1949	The Second East Turkestan Republic was established in 1944 and abolished in 1949 when the Chinese Communist Party entered the region of Xinjiang.
1 October 1949	On October 1, 1949, Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong declared the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). This ended the costly full-scale civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (KMT). <sup>63</sup>
October 1955	In October 1955, Xinjiang became classified as an autonomous region of the People's Republic of China. However, the Chinese government claims that Xinjiang had been an inseparable part of the multi-ethnic Chinese nation since the Western Han Dynasty.
1989	The European Union has placed restrictions on China.
5 April 1990	An armed uprising took place in Baren Township near Kashgar, led by Uyghur separatists opposed to government policies
09 July 2020	Under the Global Magnitsky Act, the United States imposes sanctions and asset freezes on Chinese officials and institutions, including the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC).

<sup>63</sup> Office of the Historian. "The Chinese Revolution of 1949." *State.gov*, United States Department of State, 2016, [history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/chinese-rev](https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/chinese-rev).

17 December 2020	Parliament adopted a powerful non-binding resolution condemning systemic abuses in Xinjiang
19 January 2021	The U.S. Department of State formally declares that “genocide and crimes against humanity” are being committed in Xinjiang.
22 March 2021	Sanctions imposed by United States and United Kingdom and the European Union on Chinese officials.
23 December 2021	The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act is signed into law by the United States, blocking imports from Xinjiang unless businesses can prove products were not made using forced labor.
31 August 2022	The UN Human Rights Office releases a report detailing abuses in Xinjiang. It urges China to release arbitrarily detained individuals and reveal the fate of missing persons.
12 September-7 October 2022	The Human Rights Council debates on the situation of human rights for Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region.

## RELEVANT UN RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

### [A/HRC/51/L.6](#) 12 September-7 October 2022

The Human Rights Council Debate on the situation of human rights in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region.<sup>64</sup>

### [E/623/ADD.1](#) 26 June 1947

Convention against genocide. This convention is relevant to the situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang because it establishes universal human rights standards against genocide which China, as a member of the UN is expected to uphold.

### [A/CHR/ADD.3](#) 10 December 1984

The Convention against Torture studies the issue of torture and any necessary steps for ensuring the effective observance of the Torture Declaration.

## **PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

### ***Diplomatic Pressure and Sanctions***

Multiple nations, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and the members of the European Union, have imposed sanctions on Chinese exported goods. While these actions raised global awareness and led to sanctions on Chinese officials and bans on products linked to forced labor, they have not succeeded in stopping China's policies in Xinjiang. Beijing continues to deny all allegations and frames the criticism as politically motivated. Thus, while diplomatic pressure has significant economic impacts, it has not yet achieved change for the Uyghur community in Xinjiang.

### ***United Nations Involvement***

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) along with the help of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) released a document named "Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China".<sup>65</sup> The act recognised the abuses of human rights committed against the Uyghur community and urged both China and the business community to implement policies to combat the allegations and ensure safety. The report was a significant step in legitimizing international concerns, but it faced strong backlash from China. Attempts to debate the findings at the UN Human Rights Council in October 2022 failed, as member states narrowly voted against holding a discussion. Thus, the assessment did not lead to binding UN action.

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<sup>64</sup> United Nations . "Official Document System - UN." *Un.org*, 2025, [documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=A/HRC/51/L.6&i=A/HRC/51/L.6\\_5143701](https://documents.un.org/symbol-explorer?s=A/HRC/51/L.6&i=A/HRC/51/L.6_5143701).

<sup>65</sup> United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. "OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China." United Nations <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

## **NGO Reports**

Amnesty International released detailed investigative reports documenting internment camps, forced labor, family separations, and mass surveillance. The human rights organisation has thus concluded that China is committing crimes against humanity in Xinjiang.<sup>66</sup> The report describes hundreds of thousands being detained arbitrarily in camp systems, often for mundane reasons. It also emphasises systematic torture and abuse, including beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation, stress-inducing positions, solitary confinement, and collective punishment for minor infractions.<sup>67</sup> The report boosted global recognition of the Uyghur crisis, however, its impact has been limited. China continues to deny all findings and to restrict independent access to Xinjiang. No international investigation or legal action has taken place in response to this.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

### ***Legal and Human Rights Mechanisms***

One of the ways the situation in the Xinjiang region can be tackled is by pursuing cases in international courts, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ), for crimes against humanity or genocide. This way, the actors that have committed the aforementioned crimes can be held accountable, while also providing international recognition to the human rights abuses of Uyghurs. Supporting independent UN missions to gain access to the region is another way for relevant organizations to gather evidence on the situation. Aside from these efforts, binding documents should be implemented and debated upon in UN bodies, aiming to establish international legal frameworks protecting the human rights of the Uyghur community in Xinjiang and ensuring that all signatories are abiding by these frameworks.

### ***Economic Measures***

Import bans on products made with forced labor from Xinjiang, such as cotton or solar panels, and requiring supply chain transparency from companies operating in the region could supply pressure onto Chinese production initiatives and the XPCC, resulting in bettering work conditions for Uyghur workers. Moreover, it would be wise for nations to advocate for the creation of a UN-funded body, which can evaluate the goods exported from China on whether they were made from forced labour or not.

### ***Refugee and Asylum Support***

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<sup>66</sup> Gunter, Joel. "China Has Created a Dystopian Hellscape in Xinjiang, Amnesty Report Says." *BBC News*, 10 June 2021, [www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57386625](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57386625).

<sup>67</sup> Amnesty International . "China: "Crimes against Humanity" Being Committed against Muslims in Xinjiang - New Report." @AmnestyUK, 2021, [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/china-crimes-against-humanity-being-committed-xinjiang-new-report?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/china-crimes-against-humanity-being-committed-xinjiang-new-report?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

Providing legal aid and protection for Uyghur asylum seekers in host countries is a vital step towards supporting and protecting the rights and lives of Uyghurs while also supporting the Uyghur diaspora's cultural and political advocacy efforts abroad. Member nations should also discuss taking measures to support Uyghurs seeking refuge from the human rights abuses they are subjected to in Xinjiang with international bodies, such as the International Organization for Migration of the UNHCR.

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