



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX August 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-fifth session

September–October 2020 (TBC)

Agenda item 4

Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China

Society for Threatened Peoples remains deeply concerned about the arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial detentions of ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in the People's Republic of China. We join the 50 UN independent experts from 30 UN Special Procedure Mandate Holders' urgent call for decisive measures against repressive Chinese human rights practices. Since 2017, an estimated 1,5 million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were arbitrarily detained in re-education camps. According to a 2020 report by the "Australian Strategic Policy Institute", over 80,000 Uyghurs were moved out of the XUAR to work in factories across the People's Republic of China. The efforts by the Chinese government to sinicize members of ethnic minorities include only teaching Mandarin (Putonghua) to minority children and stand in contrast to the contents of the Chinese constitution.

Violation of religious freedom

The so-called Qaraqash documents that became public in February of 2020 testify to the cynical meticulousness with which the Chinese authorities record and interpret every little notion of religiosity of Uyghur or Kazakh Muslims – such as their beards, headscarves, visits to mosques, and fasting during Ramadan. The more religious an individual was assumed to be, according to these criteria, the longer they had to remain in the camps against their will. This is not only a violation of international human rights conventions, but also of China's constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion. In the beginning of 2020, international media reported that more than 100 Uyghur cemeteries had been destroyed, in their stead parking slots and playgrounds were erected.

Forced sterilisations and abortions

The Chinese government is apparently trying to lower the Uyghur birth rate. On August 17, "The Diplomat" newspaper reported the case of Qelbinur Sedik, a Uyghur teacher who was forced to teach Chinese in the camps. Sedik talks about torture and cruelty against prisoners, even violence against himself that has left a deep trauma. and the rapes of female inmates. Radio Free Asia reported on the case of Hasiyet Abdulla, an obstetrician with 15 years of experience who now lives in exile in Turkey. She talked about how hospitals in Xinjiang forcibly abort unborn children, some of whom were almost born. Hasiyet Abdulla spoke of babies who were already born being killed if they were less than three years away from their sibling. She said the hospitals destroy the babies' remains and don't even give them to parents for funeral. It is important to note that only independent examination of these and other reports can help the world figure out the scale of the birth policy on the hands of the Chinese government. It would be helpful if the Chinese government issued a standing invitation to UN independent experts to conduct official visits, including to the Xinjiang Autonomous Region.

Separation of Families

According to Radio Free Asia, all kindergartens in the Qaraqash district of the Hotan region of Xinjiang are soon to be converted into state boarding schools by order of the Chinese authorities. The plan provides that Uyghur parents will have to bring their children to school on Monday morning and will not be allowed to pick them up again until Saturday. The boarding schools are supposed to alienate them from the Uyghur traditions, the Uyghur language, and their religion.

It is not yet clear whether the order applies to the entire province of Xinjiang. However, it is part of a series of measures that show a clear direction: China's government wants to forcibly assimilate the Muslim nationalities in the region.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government has established a comprehensive system of forced labor: Many former prisoners have to work in factories for little money after they are released from the camps. A system of total social control has been established, and it becomes even more perfidious when families are separated. If four-year-old Uyghur children are separated from their parents for six days a week, they will almost inevitably be traumatized. Nearly 500,000 school-age children of Muslim nationalities have already been separated from their parents and forcibly sent to boarding schools. The Chinese government is planning to expand the boarding school system.

Silencing of Uyghur intellectuals

The detention of Uyghur intellectuals is also a part of the Chinese government's efforts to subdue Uyghur culture and language. A case in point is the treatment of the Uyghur scholar Mutällip Sidiq Qahiri, who was arrested in 2018. The member of the Chinese Communist Party and editor of the scholarly magazine of the University of Kashgar and professor for the Uyghur language is suffering from a heart condition. Though he was released in the beginning of 2019, he was frequently under house arrest. In February of 2020 it became known that he was sentenced to 30 months in prison under bogus charges. The sentence will be carried out in beginning in 2024. This cruel punishment of a scholar is emblematic of the treatment of Uyghur intellectuals in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Society for Threatened People urges the Human Rights Council to:

- Hold a special session to evaluate the egregious human rights violations being carried out in China including in Tibet Autonomous Region and the adjacent areas where the Tibetans live, Hong Kong SAR, and the Xinjiang Autonomous Region;
- Establish an impartial and independent United Nations mechanism – such as a United Nations Special Rapporteur, a Panel of Experts appointed by the HRC, or a Secretary-General Special Envoy – to closely monitor, analyze and report annually on the human rights situation in China, particularly in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, the Tibet Autonomous Region and the adjacent areas where Tibetans live, and Hong Kong SAR;
- Call on companies to be transparent in their efforts to distance themselves from forced labour.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to call on the People's Republic of China to:

- Dissolve the illegal 're-education' camps and release all Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz detainees;
 - End the persecution of Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectuals;
 - Terminate the forced labour programs;
 - Stop the separation of families;
 - Stop forced sterilisations of Uyghur women;
 - Teach minority languages alongside Mandarin (Putonghua);
 - Ensure the respect of basic human rights for all citizens of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region enshrined in Chinese law and international human rights conventions;
 - Guarantee unfettered access to U.N. human rights experts to XUAR.
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