

**Committee:** Human Rights Council

**Issue:** The Violation of the Rights of the Uyghur People

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## INTRODUCTION

The issue of the violation of the rights of the Uyghur people, a Muslim Turkish minority, originating from and culturally affiliated with, the general region of Central and East Asia and primarily residing in China, is one that has intensified through the existence of the so-called “Re-Education” camps. These camps which have existed in the autonomous Uyghur region of Xinjiang since 2014 and have greatly increased since Chen Quanguo started being responsible for the region.

The Chinese government, by the existence of these camps, is operating illegally and going against international law. Through making the Uyghur people suffer the way they do, they are ignoring their fundamental rights, as set by the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly stipulated in article 2 that *“everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”*. The estimated number of the Uyghur people, who are currently residing in the camps, is more than a million and they only increase as China denies the very existence of the camps, and claims that they are vocational centers, through which, they attempt to combat terrorism.

In these camps, as an attempt to “correct their thoughts”, the Uyghur people are forced into an unwanted lifestyle, while their cultural habits are suppressed. Survivors of those camps state that they have had to endure physical and mental torture, and have been made to eat pork and consume alcohol, which goes against Islamic principles.

Thus far, the international community has failed to act in a manner that will sufficiently pressure the Chinese government. Multiple countries have decided to remain neutral, and have denied the opportunity to visit the camps to examine the situation. Some countries which have been affected, having had their officials detained in these camps, have expressed their disapproval, but have yet to actually affect the situation.

A smaller number has even approved of the Chinese government's actions and consider them a way to combat the rising of extremism and terrorism worldwide.

To sum up, through these camps multiple Uyghur people are being stripped away of their rights daily, and have been subjected to cruel and inhumane treatment. It is therefore of utmost importance that action is taken in order to prevent any further violations of their rights.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **The Uyghur people**

The Uyghur, or sometimes the Uighur, people are a Muslim minority whose vast majority of residues is in the autonomous region of Xinjiang in China. From a cultural perspective, they are quite similar to most Central Asian nations, while still maintaining a multitude of Islamic variations, in accordance with their faith.

### **Re-education camps**

Re-Education Camps are facilities which exist throughout Xinjiang. There are public records which state that about 108 million US dollars have been spent with the intention of financing the construction of detention centers, which are to be used as Re-Education camps. Through satellite pictures, more than 34 camps with the overall capacity of about a million have been detected, both in the construction, but also in the final stage. The aim of the camp is to provide people with the education to essentially go against their culture and denounce their beliefs.

### **Chinese Government Assimilation Policy**

Assimilation, according to the Cambridge English Dictionary is: "the process of becoming similar to others by taking in and using their customs and culture"<sup>1</sup>. The Chinese government has an overall goal; achieving national unity through having people follow the same customs, traditions and have the same cultural and ethnic background. In order to foster that, the Chinese government has set a one-child policy for Uyghur families and has created a new program, through which married interethnic couples have access to more benefits.

<sup>1</sup>"ASSIMILATION | Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary." *Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus*, [dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/assimilation](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/assimilation).

## **Cultural Genocide**

Cultural genocide, or cultural cleansing, is a concept that lawyer Raphael Lemkin distinguished in 1944 as a component of genocide. It does not have a set and clear definition, however in international law, it is considered to be similar to the term 'ethnocide', meaning the elimination of social-cultural characteristics as a form of assimilation.<sup>2</sup>

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **Radio Free Asia Interviews**

Radio Free Asia is an organization operating from the United States of America, funded by the US Agency for Global Media and it is tasked with promoting human rights and calling out human rights' violations. It publishes news and information to Eastern Asian people, claiming that the Chinese Government does not allow a free press. In this issue, Radio Free Asia has helped a lot in creating an actual 'profile' about what is happening in Re-Education camps, through providing the public with survivor testimonies, and with information they have obtained through telephone interviews.

In the said interviews, information on how many Uyghur people have been detained has been provided to the public, but also some more insight on how the Chinese Government has reacted. Between 2017 and 2018, there has been a multitude of interviews which have given insight, one of the most recent stating that there are at least four re-education centers, with more than thirty thousand people being held there. Later on, there were reports of at least 7 deaths amongst the newer 242 detainees, but the exact number is yet to be confirmed. Finally, prominent Uyghur figures, who express their frustration about the situation in Xinjiang, have been arrested by Chinese officials often accused of being terrorists.

### **China's History with Re-Education Camps**

It is not the first time that China has used camps for "Re-Educating" purposes, the first time being the Laogai Re-Education Camps, or better yet prison system. After the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, they created an earlier form of the current camps. Those camps used to be directed to both prisoners, but also people that the Chinese government considered not to be correct socialist citizens, and they aimed to reform them

<sup>2</sup> "What Does Cultural Genocide Mean?" *Definitions.net*, [www.definitions.net/definition/Cultural%20genocide](http://www.definitions.net/definition/Cultural%20genocide).

in order to be a proper member of the state. Similarly to now, people who were taken there, were denied their right to a fair trial and were taken with no explanation.

In the Lagoi system, the Chinese government both re-educated and profited from the extortion of the imprisoned people. The forced labor, conducted at those camps, often aimed at producing some profit for the Chinese government, having them often work in farms and other agricultural practices which advantage the government. In addition, some were ridiculed to a major extent for the sole amusement of Chinese officials, and multiple were beaten to death. There was no release date for any of the prisoners, who were subject to any form of punishment the Chinese government deemed appropriate, until they were 'rehabilitated'.

### **The Chinese Government's Stance**

The Chinese Government has denied all allegations of the existence of Re-Education camps in the region of Xinjiang. In fact, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of China has claimed that the Republic respects all of the rights of the Uyghur people, highlighting the right of free exercise of religion. Representatives of China, in a multitude of international organizations including the UN, have claimed that there are "vocational training centers", tasked with rehabilitating people who have been found guilty of minor crimes.

The Republic has been using the country's sovereignty as one of the arguments as to why they would not allow monitors in Xinjiang. The United Nations' Human Rights High Commissioner was the first one to express that idea, but a Chinese Foreign Ministry Representative has stated that the UN, and all of the officials, should respect the UN Charter, ergo respect China's sovereignty, and not listen to 'one-sided' information.

### **The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**

Xinjiang is China's most western region and has been under Chinese control since the 18th century, after occasional brief periods of autonomy and independence. Aside from China, a country which played an important role in making Xinjiang what it is today is Russia which has largely influenced and supported the Uyghur separatist movements but eventually came to support the Communist Party. Later on, China tried to encourage the Han Chinese to emigrate in Xinjiang, in order for the Uyghur people not to be able to largely expand.

### **The autonomous rule of Xinjiang by the Uyghurs**

The region of Xinjiang has been part of China and has been under the rule of a multitude of minorities, but Uyghur Muslims have been settled there for the longest period of time any of them has, and make up more than 45% of the population of Xinjiang, which is why there have been multiple attempts for the autonomous rule of the region. However, the government of China, especially after the Great Leap, has held strong policies in order to prevent actual autonomy by the Uyghur people. Due to the fact that these policies would now allow for the Uyghur people to freely exercise their religion or participate in cultural practices without facing discrimination, there have been multiple, and occasionally, violent protests by the Uyghur people, which eventually led to even stricter legislation.

### **Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorism Campaign**

The Strike Hard against Violent Terrorism Campaign, which was established by the government of China, was advertised as a way to prevent terrorist acts, but mostly used as a means for the Chinese government to control the Uyghur people. Measures included cell phone and computer surveillance, DNA collection, the placement of CCTV cameras near Uyghur houses and voice samples. The government of China claims that this campaign is helping the people, and has no plan to end it in the foreseeable future.

### **Xinjiang De-extremification Regulations**

The De-Extremification Regulations are a part of China's legislative system, and they have been created in order to combat possible terrorist acts, and extremism. The government of China has essentially passed laws which have managed to legalize the oppression of the Uyghur people and to justify malicious actions which have been previously taken against them. The regulations are vague enough not to explicitly target the Uyghur people, but grant the Chinese authorities the necessary flexibility in order to do so. They have banned clothing and symbols which showcase one's religion, along with irregular names, and have branded all of those ways to promote extremism.

The De-Extremification Regulations, aside from enhancing the discrimination the Uyghurs face, have another goal, which is to assist the assimilation policy. If cultural and religious practices are considered illegal, then the Uyghur people are either going to have to go against their faith, thus assisting the assimilation policy, or if they chose to follow their religion, they will be put into re-education camps, once again assisting the assimilation policy.

## **The Scale and Nature of the Current Internment Camp System**

An idea of what is happening in the Re-Education Camps has been formulated because of the extensive testimonies survivors have given, and because of surveillance photos which have been taken, proving the existence of massive infrastructure which is retaining about a million Uyghur people.

Before these people are captured, there is a certain pattern police officers have been following. The act could be described as an enforced disappearance since the Uyghur people are forcibly taken from their homes, occasionally with a minor offense used as an excuse for their detainment. Additionally, they are not given the right to a trial or legal assistance, even if there is a claim for an offense.

During their stay in the camp, as part of the assimilation process, the Uyghur people are forced to face a number of difficulties. Firstly, they are made to eat pork and consume alcohol, in order to essentially denounce Islam. Secondly, the prisoners are forced to work in the factories close to the camps with no pay. Moreover, they are forced to study communist propaganda, while also learning Mandarin and chanting “Long Live Xi Jinping” and the national anthem of China. If the detainees fail to do any of those things properly, they are denied access to food and water.

Infrastructure wise, the living conditions the Uyghur people are subjected to are extremely prison-like. Every room has a surveillance camera, through which the authorities can track every personal moment of the person who is staying in the room. On the walls outside the classrooms, the officials have written pro-communist and pro-China slogans.

## **MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

### **China**

China is the reason for the very existence of the Re-Education camps and is the only country which is actually profiting of them. It is also important to note, that because of the fact that this is happening in Chinese territory, there is not much ground for governments from different areas of the globe to act. Moreover, as previously mentioned, China is continuously denying all allegations about the camps' existence.

### **The United States of America**

The United States has been one of the first countries to voice their disapproval of the situation in China and has asked for the Chinese government to close the re-education camps, and for the international community to take action. The US has also threatened with

the possibility of sanctions being imposed on China if the unjust treatment of the Uyghurs does not come to an end.

### **Saudi Arabia**

The government of Saudi Arabia is the one who has strongly supported China's usage of Re-Education camps. They have branded it as a way to successfully combat terrorism, and have praised the government of China for taking that action.

### **Sweden**

Sweden is the first country which has stated they will grant asylum to the Uyghur Muslims, in order to protect them from the future that awaits them if they return to China. Moreover, the Swedish government is encouraging other Western countries to come to the assistance of the Uyghur people.

### **Human Rights Watch**

The Human Rights Watch is the organization which has taken the most prominent action in order to aid the Uyghur people, having spoken out multiple times and called out China's injustices. It has previously encouraged China to end the mass detention of the Uyghur people and has published multiple reports. However, aside from informing the public, Human Rights Watch has yet to produce the desired effect, closing the camps.

### **The Uyghur American Association**

The Uyghur American Association is an organization tasked with promoting the fair treatment of the Uyghur people worldwide. In fact, the very reason it was created was to call out unfair acts by the Chinese Government in the region of Xinjiang against the Uyghur people, playing a really big part in both informing the public, but also providing the victims and their relatives with help.

## **TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

| <b>Date</b>             | <b>Description of Event</b>  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> Century | The existence of the Uyghur people is documented in Chinese records for the first time |
| 1933                    | The East Turkestan Republic is established   |
| 1944                    | The Second East Turkestan Republic is established                                      |
| 1949                    | The People's Republic of China is founded by Mao Zedong                                |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 1955          | The Xinjiang Autonomous Region is established  |
| 1962          | Sixty thousand Uyghurs emigrate from China to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) |
| 1970          | The Han concentration in Xinjiang has increased to 40% of the overall Xinjiang population    |
| 1990          | The Baren Township Riot happens  |
| 1996          | The Strike Hard Campaign launches  |
| February 1997 | 30 Muslim people are arrested and executed by the Chinese government during the Ramadan      |
| March 1997    | A bomb is placed on a bus, with two casualties and Uyghur separatists are held accountable   |
| August 2008   | The Kashgar attack takes place   |
| 2014          | The first Re-Education camp opens  |
| April 2017    | The Xinjiang De-Extremification Regulations enter into force                                 |

### **UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS**

- United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- 1951 Refugee Convention, Resolution 2198 (XXI) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination Adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution of 21<sup>st</sup> December 1965
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16<sup>th</sup> December 1966 entry into force 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1976, in accordance with Article 49
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16<sup>th</sup> December 1966 entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27.

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

Since the appearance of the issue, there have been multiple attempts to better the situation for the Uyghurs. The Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act (2019), which was passed by the United States' government, is aiming to help the Uyghur people by providing the necessary resources to address the situation of the detainees.

Other than that, a significant attempt was made by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, while reviewing the report of China, in which China was once again called to stop the detainment of the Uyghur people.

The Uyghur Human Rights Project is an ongoing project which is tasked with solving the issues the Uyghur people face, by informing the public of ways they can help, pressuring governments and reporting with any updates on the issue.

There have been different instances of cultural genocide in the past, a familiar example is the genocide in Cambodia, with Cham Muslims. In order to save the Muslim minority, there were sanctions imposed by some countries, while also supplying aid in the form of taking in refugees.

## **POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

There are several steps which can be taken in order to ensure that the unjust treatment of the Uyghur people comes to an end, primarily by the Chinese Government. However, before any action is taken, it is important that the Chinese Government admits to their actions since they have refused to do so. The government of China's first step should be to close all camps immediately and ensure that officials, who are responsible for the deaths of the Uyghur people, are prosecuted. Moreover, it is equally important that there is an overall reform of China's legislation, in order to prevent any discriminatory acts against the Uyghur people, and any other ethnic minority.

As far as the international community is concerned, any concerned government and organization can aid in the combat of the detainment of the Uyghur people. What is of utmost importance is that they pressure China by continuously calling out the actions they are taking and possibly impose sanctions. Furthermore, countries and Non-Governmental Organizations should also take steps to ensure that the Uyghur Muslims who manage to escape the camps are protected in the long term, and the government of China cannot harm them. Additionally, a way must be found to ensure that the government of China will actually shut down the camps, and the overall discriminatory treatment will come to an end.

Shutting down the camps, and stopping the current harassment of the Uyghur people will fix the problem, but it is also important that the relations between the Uyghur people and China will be bettered since the multitude of them permanently reside there. A question which must be answered is whether the re-education camps should be demolished

or remain as testimonials to what Uyghur people were put through. Other than that, what could happen is that negotiations take place between a representative of the Uyghur group and the Chinese government, to ensure the improvement of the treatment they receive.

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