



## **Uyghur Women and Human Rights**

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Good morning/afternoon/evening.

Uyghur women in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), are facing a number of challenges that undermine their individual and collective human rights. As with women in other areas of the world, Uyghur women are subjected to the indignities of human trafficking and to the deprivations of poverty; however, Uyghur women are also subjected to rights abuses that are specific to their situation.

While the Chinese government recruits Han Chinese from other parts of the People's Republic of China to take jobs in the XUAR, the authorities use intimidation, threats, and deception to recruit Uyghurs to participate in a labor transfer program to urban factories in eastern China. The government focuses its aggressive recruitment efforts primarily on young, marriage-age Uyghur women and girls from predominantly Uyghur areas such as southern Xinjiang, which is a bastion of Uyghur culture and tradition. Thousands of Uyghur women and young girls have been removed from their communities and families in the Uyghur region and placed into abusive and poor working conditions in eastern China under this program.

Methods used by local authorities to force Uyghurs, particularly young Uyghur women and girls, to participate have included: threatening families with steep fines if they fail to send family members to join the program; threatening farmers with the confiscation of their farmlands and the destruction of their homes if they refuse to allow their daughters to participate; and threatening young women with the confiscation of their resident registration cards and denial of marriage certificates if they choose not to join.

Local authorities have also used deception and empty promises to recruit participants. They have promised alluring salaries and transportation to the factories. However, many participants report facing extremely oppressive working conditions and living arrangements in eastern China, including: physical beatings within the factories; coercion to work when sick and longer hours than are stipulated in the employment contracts; salaries withheld for months as "deposits", garnished wages, and salary deductions for costs that it was agreed would be paid by others, such as transportation to the factory;

medical ailments caused by poor working conditions; a lack of medical treatment; unsanitary food; and unlivable and unsafe dormitories.

Uyghurs, including college graduates who are fluent in Mandarin Chinese, are systematically subjected to blatant and overwhelming employment discrimination for both government jobs and private sector jobs (including private sector jobs publicized by local governments) in Xinjiang. Uyghur women are subjected to discrimination both because they are Uyghur and because they're female. Online notices for state-sector jobs accessed by the Uyghur Human Rights Project in 2009 set forth explicit ethnic and gender requirements that demonstrated a clear bias in favor of Han Chinese applicants and against Uyghurs and other non-Han groups, as well as against women of any ethnicity.

Against the backdrop of the government's intense repression of all Uyghurs' practice of religion and independent expressions of ethnicity, the authorities have targeted the following repressive measures specifically against Uyghur women.

Local governments have also reported on measures to politically train or regulate the activities of Uyghur female religious figures (known as *buwi* in Uyghur). In December 2008, the Xinjiang People's Political Consultative Conference set forth a proposal initiated by the Vice Chairwoman of the Xinjiang Women's Federation, on bringing *buwi* under government and party management. The proposal states, among other things, that *buwi* have existed in a "no-man's land" without state oversight, and calls for using these women's social status to spread the CCP's religious and ethnic policies among Muslim women.

According to Article 15 of the Xinjiang Regulation on Population and Family Planning, Uyghurs and other ethnic minority couples are allowed to have three children in rural areas and two children in urban areas. While Uyghur couples are permitted to have more children than Han couples, they are subjected to many of the same coercive and abusive population planning practices to which Han are subjected and in recent years, the XUAR authorities have actually targeted their population planning enforcement activities in areas of the Uyghur region with predominantly non-Han populations.

The coercive and abusive population planning practices to which Uyghur women have been subjected have included forced abortions and sterilizations. Individuals, acting in an official capacity, such as family planning officials, in the XUAR have forcibly taken Uyghur women from their homes and have subjected them to forced abortions and forced sterilizations. Some men have also been forced to have sterilizations. Uyghur women have suffered permanent health damage or even died as a result of negligent surgery during these forced operations. Population planning officials' career advancement is routinely linked to their enforcement of a set birth quotas and this has created an incentive structure for officials to use coercive measures.

The following recent case highlighted the human rights abuses involved in the population planning system in Xinjiang. In November 2008, local authorities within the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of the XUAR announced plans to force Arzigul Tursun, a Uyghur woman from Ghulja county who was six months pregnant with her third child, to undergo an abortion after she was unable to pay a 45,000 yuan (US \$6,591) fine for exceeding the number of children permitted under the region's population planning regulation. Arzigul escaped from the hospital to which she was forcibly taken for the abortion, but the authorities tracked her down and took her back to the hospital. Following intense international advocacy on her behalf, including from two U.S. Congressmen and the U.S. Ambassador

to China, the authorities released her from the hospital without executing the abortion, but have continued to subject her and her family to harassment and surveillance.

While I strongly condemn the subjection of any ethnic group to coercive population planning, this practice is particularly harmful to the continuity of the Uyghur people, as the Uyghurs make up less than one percent of China's population. Furthermore, Uyghurs in Xinjiang are being subjected to strict limitations on the number of children they can have at the same time as the Chinese government sponsors the mass resettlement of Han Chinese in the region.

In the wake of the July 2009 unrest in the regional capital of Urumchi, a group of Uyghur women gathered on the streets of Urumchi on July 7, 2009 to ask Chinese security forces what had happened to their husbands, fathers and brothers, who had been arrested *en masse* in indiscriminate security sweeps of Uyghur neighborhoods. Without the actions of these women, the international community may not have known about the mass detentions and forcible disappearances that were taking place in the city, since the Chinese government had used intimidation, detention and even beatings in an attempt to manage the actions of foreign reporters who had come to Urumchi. Many of those women simply disappeared after the July 7 protest.

The long arm of the Chinese security apparatus also targeted Uyghur women as the state sought reprisal for the 2009 unrest. A 19-year-old Uyghur student Pezilet Ekber was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve following a closed trial in April 2010 on charges of involvement in violence in Urumchi. It is unclear what criminal charges Ekber was convicted of. Authorities ordered her father to leave Urumchi when he attempted to visit her prior to her trial. Officials also reportedly warned Ekber's parents to refrain from telling anyone about her sentence.

Prior to the 2009 unrest, 32-year-old Gulmire Imin was invited to become an administrator for the Uyghur language *Salkin* website after having published a number of poems online. Gulmire was arrested on July 14, 2009, but her family did not receive any official documents regarding her detention. On April 1, 2010, she was sentenced to life in prison for the crimes of "revealing state secrets", illegally organizing a demonstration, and "splittism". Gulmire was sentenced on the same day as being tried in a closed trial.

The intended result of such harsh sentencing is to frighten Uyghur women from becoming active in opposing Chinese oppression.

I have experienced first-hand the repression of Uyghurs, through my own imprisonment and the imprisonment of two of my sons, Alim and Ablidik Abdureyim. Alim and Ablidik are currently serving lengthy prison sentences in Urumchi, in clear retaliation for my international human rights advocacy. There are reports that they have been tortured in prison, and that they have not been treated for serious medical ailments.

As a businesswoman and philanthropist in the XUAR, I, like the Uyghurs around me, witnessed the slow eradication of my people's religion, language and identity. I tried to help my people out of poverty, give opportunities to marginalized Uyghurs and speak out against the injustices. Through the "Thousand Mothers Movement" I attempted to empower Uyghur women to start their own businesses. For these activities I paid a price- nearly six years in a Chinese prison.

In a speech that I delivered in 1997 as a delegate to the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing, I laid out some of the most pressing problems facing the Uyghur population. I talked about widespread poverty and the dismal state of education for Uyghurs, among many other issues. I also spoke about the right of Uyghur people to self-determination, and expressed the belief that this would bring the stability and peace desired by both the government and the Uyghur people.

Unfortunately, there is no place within Chinese officialdom for the expression of concern over ethnic policies, and my dissent led to my imprisonment from 1999 to 2005. While in prison, I was subject to extended periods of solitary confinement and medical neglect. But far more horrifying were the times I was forced to witness torture of my fellow prisoners — those who had not held an official government position, and who were not the subject of campaigns undertaken by groups such as Amnesty International. Today, when I speak to world audiences, I speak out for them.

When I was released from prison and allowed to come to the United States in 2005, I tasted freedom for the first time. Before I was allowed to board the plane bound for the United States, my Chinese minders told me that I was not allowed to speak out about human rights once I was overseas. They believed they had the right to control my voice outside of China. I believe they also underestimated the power that one human voice can have when it speaks truth to power, and when it is not constrained by the binds of a repressive government.

As Eleanor Roosevelt said: "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

Thank you.