

Mr. President (or whomever is presiding at the time),

I come to you on behalf of the World Uyghur Congress to bring to your attention to the ongoing and systemic violence committed against the Uyghur people in East Turkestan, (aka: Xinjiang, China). Violence and the severe restriction on political and religious freedom have sharply increased over the past eight months. Since China announced a one-year campaign ostensibly to combat terrorism on May 23, 2014, the region has seen hundreds of arrests as well as numerous deaths in at least ten separate incidents involving security forces and Uyghur citizens. What has been particularly troubling has been the willing neglect of internationally recognized human rights norms throughout. In particular, arbitrary arrests go unchecked with little or no due process for victims. Capricious laws are enacted in the name of security, but are routinely abused as a means to suppress any form of dissent.

Violence can be seen as a direct result of these very conditions – when the essential freedoms of religion, expression, assembly and association are removed, violence is likely to erupt. We, of course, denounce any form of violence on both sides, as the only effective means by which we can ease tensions and resolve the conflict is through cooperation and mutual understanding. Understanding breeds further understanding, which can lead to the reconciliation between the two parties, though it has been clear that the Chinese authorities have been taking the opposite approach. By supporting generalized, discriminatory policies and by responding to violence with more violence, you only serve to exacerbate and escalate tensions.

In doing so, the terms “terrorist” and “terrorism” have also been over-extended to those who merely wish to peacefully practice their rightful freedom of speech or religion. In this way, the Chinese authorities have been trying to legitimize their own actions taken against Uyghur activists and demonstrators. The fact that Uyghur academic, Ilham Tohti, a moderate critic of state policies, was labeled as the “brains” behind the “terrorists” and sentenced to life imprisonment on separatism charges is testament to the severe repression experienced by Uyghurs. Because we all typically see terrorism as inherently bad, this leads us to believe that counter-terrorism must inherently be good. It is clear, however, that there has been a consistent problem with the violent and discriminatory means by which the state tries to combat instability and what it calls terrorism and terrorist activities.

A culture of fear and security is also pervasive for Uyghurs in particular. The effects of this culture filters down to individual security personnel who shoot and kill Uyghur protesters with impunity. Once there is a recognition that such impunity exists, police and security forces are more willing to use potentially deadly force to combat what they may perceive as a threat. As far as we know, investigations are not carried out, and countless Uyghurs have been killed in clashes with police over the past year, with no transparent reporting on these incidents.

To find the solution to tension and violence in the Uyghur region, we must first identify the causes. Discrimination and repression are not adequate means to allow the Uyghur people to live free and dignified lives. It is often said that it is tempting that if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat every problem as though it were a nail. This aphorism is indeed instructive in this case, as China’s

approach to Uyghur dissent has solely been to treat Uyghurs as potential terrorists, and innocent civilians as collaborators. We must reverse this misconception.

Only through constructive dialogue can genuine progress be made, and that's something we urge China and all other UN member states and organizations to enter into as a first step. Thank you.