

Save the Women

IF YOU WANT TO TOUCH THE PAST, TOUCH A ROCK.
IF YOU WANT TO TOUCH THE PRESENT, TOUCH A FLOWER.
IF YOU WANT TO TOUCH THE FUTURE, TOUCH A LIFE.
- UNKNOWN AUTHOR

Who Are Uyghurs?

The Uyghurs are a Turkic people who are culturally and linguistically similar to other Turkic peoples of Central Asia.

Region: East Turkestan, annexed to the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, renamed Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955

Population: Approximately 11 million (according to Chinese official statistics)

Due to their overt differences to the majority Han population of China, and their historical ties to Central Asia, any assertive expression of ethnic, cultural or religious identity by Uyghurs is suspect and may result in being charged with "separatism" or being sent to re-education.

Over 1 million Uyghurs have been placed in "re-education camps"

Introduction

When I first began this project in 2017, I simply wanted to document the stories of Uyghur women who are political prisoners in China, and connect their cases with influential voices outside of East Turkestan (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China). A public international outcry was one method through which I believed we could pressure the Chinese government to release these women. However, since the project's initiation, the repression of Uyghurs has rapidly developed into a full-blown crisis. The Chinese government has detained over one million Uyghur people – regardless of gender or age, and including children – in "re-education camps." These mass-detention "camps" are extra-judicial prisons; there is no charge, no trial, no sentence. All are surrounded by guard towers and barbed wire.

The stories of these seven Uyghur women will help draw an authentic picture of this secret network of indefinite-detention facilities. The stories are intended to reach influential leaders, media voices, and compassionate people and organizations. My goal is to motivate them to take action to stop the crimes against humanity taking place in China today.





HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Uyghurs are denied a broad spectrum of basic and internationally recognized human rights by the PRC government, serving to control and suppress the unique Uyghur identity, including:

- Severe controls on religious practices, for e.g. the ban of religious names like Muhammad or Medina, types of beards, veils, the learning and teaching of religion, mosque attendance, etc.
- Restrictions on freedom of association and assembly
- Denial of the right to freedom of expression, for e.g. Uyghur language websites are routinely closed down and webmasters imprisoned
- Demolition of traditional Uyghur neighborhoods
- Reduction reproductive rights
- Ban on Uyghur as a language of instruction in schools



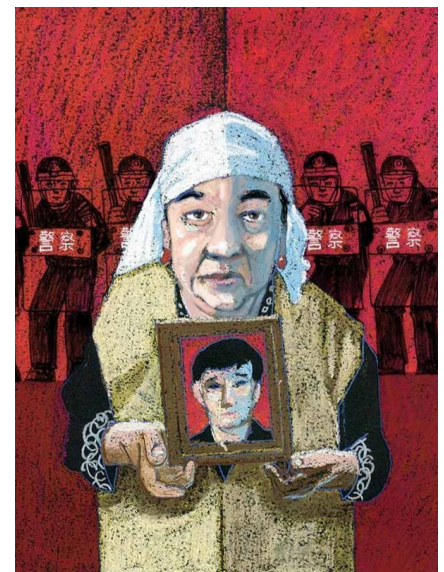
- Ban on religious, cultural and historical Uyghur-language books
- Intense surveillance: numerous checkpoints for public places such as shopping malls, enforced collection of biometric data, installation of monitoring apps on phones, grid policing, facial recognition cameras and predictive policing technology
- Criminalisation of regular behaviour

The perceived threats of “terrorism,” “separatism,” and “religious extremism” – referred to in official PRC sources as the “three evil forces” – serve as the PRC authorities’ main justification for these injustices.

UYGHUR WOMEN

As with women in other areas of the world, Uyghur women in East Turkestan are subjected to the indignities of human trafficking and to the deprivations of poverty. Gender and ethnic discrimination against Uyghur women makes them one of the most vulnerable in the PRC. Women face endemic discrimination in the workplace and significant challenges in securing meaningful employment. Religious curbs disproportionately focus on women, as Chinese authorities have instituted compulsory education programs in an attempt to de-veil Uyghur women who choose to veil for their religious practice.

However, in the face of immense difficulty, Uyghur women have stood up to the Chinese government’s violations of Uyghur human rights. Women have customarily assumed a leading role in Uyghur society throughout history and the tradition continues today. In 2008 over 600 women protested in Khotan over discriminatory Chinese government policies and in 2014 up to 25 women were arrested in Kucha for resisting new curbs on their religious expression. Journalists Mehbube Ablesh and Gulmire Imin were imprisoned in 2008 and 2009 respectively for their writings on Chinese repression. In the wake of the unrest in Urumchi in July 2009 thousands of Uyghur men were indiscriminately detained in security sweeps of Uyghur neighborhoods. It was Uyghur women who confronted armed Chinese police to demand information on the whereabouts of their loved ones. Uyghur women, such as Patigul Ghulam, spoke truth to power when asking the Chinese government for transparency on the disappearance of young Uyghurs after the 2009 unrest. As the result, her whereabouts are unknown right now.



Detained for Speaking Out



Buzeynep Abdureshid (Buzainafu Abudourexiti)

Returned to China in 2015 after studying for two years in Egypt, detained in March 2017 and sentenced in a secret trial to seven years in prison. No information has been provided about the charges against her, but it is believed that it may be part of a wider crackdown on Uyghur students who studied abroad.

Status: Held incommunicado, grave risk of torture and other ill-treatment.



Atikem Rozi

Rozi was a student of Uyghur scholar, Ilham Tohti and contributed to the Uighurbiz website. Chinese authorities summoned her for questioning in Beijing on January 15, 2014 and detained her on January 17, 2014; she was then 22 years old. She was among seven students of Ilham Tohti tried on November 25 and sentenced on December 8.

Status: Charged with separatism, sentenced to 3-8 years (specific length unknown); current location unknown.



Gulmire Imin

A former government employee and administrator of the Uyghur-language Salkin website. Imin's online writings frequently criticized government policies in the Uyghur homeland.

Status: Arrested on July 14, 2009 for calling for the July 5th demonstration online to protest a violent attack weeks earlier against Uyghur migrant workers in China's eastern Guangdong province. No official documents regarding her detention were given to family. Convicted of ethnic separatism in a closed trial and sentenced to life imprisonment on April 1, 2010.



Oghulnisa Ghojaabdulla

Since 2017, large numbers of Uyghurs have been detained without due process in "re-education camps." According to sources cited by Radio Free Asia in a January 22, 2018 article, as many as 120,000 Uyghurs are being held in Kashgar alone. The 55-year-old Uyghur woman named Oghulnisa Ghojaabdulla from Manglay Village in Karakash County, Kashgar disappeared approximately a year ago into one of these facilities. Status: Unknown.



Gulgine Tashmemet (Guligeina Tashimaimaiti)

Completed her Master of Philosophy at the University of Technology in southern Malaysia's Johor state and was planning to do her PhD, according to her sister in Germany. Gulgine flew home to Ghulja (Yining) city in the XUAR's Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture on Dec. 26 2017. Her sister says she lost contact soon after. She then learnt from a friend that Gulgine had been taken to a "re-education camp" as soon as she had arrived in Ghulja.

Status: Unknown.



Pezilet Bekri

A government official who had been promoted from her position in Kashgar (Kashi) city's Office of Religious Affairs to the Communist Party secretary of Kashgar's Yabagh Neighborhood Committee in 2015 after being commended for her diligent work, according to RFA's Uyghur Service. After she "expressed sympathy" for fellow members of her ethnic group in the "re-education camps," she was being stripped off from her position and placed in one of the camps since April, 2017.

Status: Unknown



Rahile Dawut

An internationally renowned scholar of Uyghur culture, a folklorist, anthropologist of religion, curator, and videographer, Prof. Dawut served as founder and Director of the Centre for Anthropology and Folklore at Xinjiang University. On Dec. 2017, she was to travel from Urumqi to Beijing, however she never arrived at her destination. There is a high possibility she has been either imprisoned or sent to re-education camp like many other Uyghur intellectuals.

Status: Unknown

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CAMPS?

As of 2016, since Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo relocated from the Tibet Autonomous Region to assume leadership of XUAR, the repressive policies have escalated immensely. The region is considered one of the most heavily policed places in the world today. Currently, over 20% of all criminal arrests in China happens there, despite the fact that the region contains only

1.5% of the country's population. One of the most alarming developments have been the detainment of over a million Uyghurs in "re-education camps" since 2017, according to "many numerous and credible reports," (United Nations panel, August 2018). Based on eye-witness reports, satellite imagery, and analysis of government documents and job advertisements, this is what we know:

- Detentions are arbitrary. Common "crimes" are: speaking to relatives abroad, having gone abroad previously, praying regularly, growing a beard, being "two-faced" or "insufficiently loyal to the state". There is no legal basis, and there are reports of teenagers and elderly also being detained
- Detained people include prominent cultural leaders: religious scholars, singers, poets, academics, athletes, business owners, philanthropists
- Physical abuse: reports of lack of food, overcrowding, extremely unsanitary conditions, beatings, torture and death
- Psychological abuse: political indoctrination, chanting patriotic songs in order to receive food, stress from poor conditions and indefinite confinement, former detainees report thoughts of suicide are common

China has denied that "re-education" camps exist, however there does exist a network of centers for "transformation through education" or "counter-extremism education" which they claim has helped create "stability" for the region. However, the broader effects of the camps include:

- Increased number of orphanages, displaced children and broken families, as many adults are detained for indefinite periods
- "Ghost towns", the closing of many minority businesses, home closures, reduced work force
- Widespread decline of mental health in diaspora Uyghur communities who can no longer contact family and friends in the region



"Feel the Party's kindness, listen to the Party, follow the Party, and be good daughters of the Party" - advice to Uyghur women from the Xinjiang Women's Federation Party Secretary, April, 2017

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Influence and Awareness: Despite the recent uptake in journalism, these issues still remain underreported. It was only after international public outcry and pressure from the German government that Liu Xia, an artist under house arrest for 8 years after her husband, Liu Xiaobo, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his activism, was freed. Similarly, it was only after Condoleezza Rice took on the case of Rebiya Kadeer, an Uyghur businesswoman, women's rights activist and political prisoner, that China released her from jail.

We do not want to be another Anne Frank

It is only with the help of powerful and influential people that these seven innocent women and the million others like them can be freed. We appeal to conscience and humanity, we appeal to advancement beyond the cycle of history; as we remember those affected by Nazi concentration camps, by the Cultural Revolution, by Japanese internment camps in the US, we continue to say "never again" - yet here we stand, again, at the precipice of a mass crime against humanity. We do not want another Anne Frank, nor do we want dozens of documentaries parsing through what went wrong, in hindsight. The time to act is now. To read more about these 7 women, visit:

- <https://www.amnestyusa.org/urgent-actions/urgent-action-uyghur-woman-incommunicado-after-secret-trial-china-ua-222-17/>
- <https://cpj.org/data/people/atikem-rozi/index.php>
- <https://www.uscirf.gov/gulmira-imin>
- <https://muslimvillage.com/2018/03/12/128480/china-s-re-education-camps-oppression-uyghur-muslims/>
- <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2018-05-29-university-of-technology-malaysia/>
- <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/arrested-04032018163824.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/world/asia/china-xinjiang-rahile-dawut.html>

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Uyghur Human Rights Project
<https://uhrp.org>



Human Rights Watch
www.hrw.org



Amnesty International
www.amnesty.org



World Uyghur Congress
www.uyghurcongress.org

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