



'Reporters' Roundtable With USCIRF Commissioners and Rebiya Kadeer, Uyghur Muslim Activist

Statement by Ms. Rebiya Kadeer, Uyghur democracy leader

Wednesday, July 15, 2009

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. The last few days in East Turkestan have been a very dark time for the Uyghur people. On July 5, in the regional capital of Urumchi, Chinese police and paramilitary forces cracked down on thousands of Uyghur demonstrators, killing hundreds and injuring hundreds more in a massacre that is unprecedented in East Turkestan under the rule of the People's Republic of China. Witnesses have confirmed that demonstrators were shot and beaten to death by Chinese police, and some were even crushed under armored vehicles. We have also heard reports that demonstrations in the southern cities of Kashgar and Hotan were severely suppressed by large numbers of Chinese troops, and that unrest spread to a number of cities in East Turkestan.

The Uyghur American Association (UAA) and the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) condemn in the strongest possible terms the Chinese government's use of excessive force against the protestors in Urumchi and East Turkestan. We call upon the international community, especially the United States, the European Union and the United Nations, to denounce the brutality used by the Chinese government to suppress the Uyghur demonstrators.

We urgently call for peace, justice and the end of all violence. We call for the Chinese government to ensure the safety of everyone living in East Turkestan. We ask the Chinese government to end its brutal suppression of Uyghurs throughout East Turkestan, and to fully and fairly report on all of the deaths and injuries to demonstrators that have taken place. We ask the Chinese government to release the demonstrators who were arrested for engaging in peaceful protest.

We also condemn, in no uncertain terms, the violent actions of a number of Uyghur demonstrators that have been reported. We absolutely oppose violence in any form. Most of all, we want to condemn China's six-decade long state-sponsored violence against peaceful Uyghurs.

UAA is deeply saddened by the rise in the official toll of both the dead and the wounded of all ethnicities that occurred during the unrest of the past week. UAA expresses condolences to all those killed and wounded in East Turkestan. According to official

figures, the number of dead has reached 184, and the number of injured has reached 1,680.

In light of reports that have reached UAA from residents of East Turkestan, however, and in the absence of independent verification of official figures, UAA cannot accept the casualty toll and its ethnic breakdown as presented by the Chinese government.

The violence that has taken place in Urumchi and throughout East Turkestan reveals deep-rooted, serious problems that the Chinese government has failed to address or mitigate. The killings and beatings belie the constant proclamations of Chinese government officials that Uyghurs are treated fairly and that all ethnic groups live in harmony in East Turkestan.

The immediate cause of the protests in Urumchi and other cities was the lack of government response to the deaths and injuries of Uyghur workers in Guangdong Province on June 26. There has been no official indication that the perpetrators of these deaths and injuries have or will be held responsible for their crimes. According to unconfirmed reports, there were many more deaths than was reported in the official Chinese media.

However, Uyghur demonstrators were doubtless expressing discontent over the severe and comprehensive repression they have suffered for years in East Turkestan. Uyghurs face arbitrary detention, torture, and execution; severe discrimination in the areas of healthcare and employment; religious repression; forced abortion; the removal of Uyghur as a language in schools at all levels of instruction; and the forcible transfer of young Uyghur women and men to eastern China, as millions of Chinese migrants are encouraged by the government to come to East Turkestan to work.

No mechanisms exist by which Uyghurs may express their grievances in response to this repression. Any Uyghur who dares to express the slightest protest, however peaceful, is immediately met with brutal force, instead of any attempt to deal responsibly with the real problems they face.

The Chinese government must change its policy of using only force to deal with all dissent. Uyghurs, Tibetans and Chinese are all victims of Chinese government policy. Until the Chinese government engages in real dialogue with its citizens, and uses the rule of law instead of rule by force, there will be no real peace in China. In order to find a peaceful solution to the East Turkestan issue, I urge the Chinese government to engage in negotiations with the World Uyghur Congress and to work with Uyghurs in forging a common way forward based on equality and mutual understanding..

Thank you.