

## Hearings on Religious Persecution in China: Uighur Witness

March 16, 2000

(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

(The following testimony was testified to with the aid of an interpreter.)

UIGHUR WITNESS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and all the Commission members for inviting me to this hearing.

My father has stayed in a Chinese prison for years. The charges given to my father were counterrevolutionary, religious fanatic, and Uighur nationalist. My brother was also put in jail and has been there for years. As a child, I have never been able to go to mosque and worship. Like most Uighur children, I have never been able to have any religious education. We couldn't tell openly that I believe in God. If we say that, we become unloyal to the Chinese Party and we become persecuted. We could only go to mosque once or twice, during Ramadan or Kurban festivals.

When I was in 7th grade, I went to see a mosque near my school with my classmate. And we were seen by one of our teachers and we were criticized very hardy. Later the principal of our school learned about our visit, I guess, from that teacher. The principal called the two of us into his office and warned to suspend us from school. Only after our parents went to school and we guaranteed that we would never go to mosque again, then we could stay in school and continue our studies. This incident was recorded in our files. Due to that reason, when we took the college entrance exam, I was not admitted to any college. I became unqualified in political aspects for college.

The Chinese government regards religion as an opium. The people who believe in religion are regarded as unloyal to the Chinese Party. They cannot get jobs, they cannot get promoted, and they always get punished. The Chinese government forces the Uighur clergy to follow Chinese lines all the time. The Uighur clergy are

required to preach sermons on the unity of the motherland, unity of nationalities, the implementation of family planning, as well as the love for the Chinese Communist Party. Those Uighur clergy who dared to oppose preaching this content were immediately removed from their positions and mosques were closed.

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, people found out that communism was not a reality, but a sheer lie. The Uighur people lost faith in communism, but their religion was suddenly strengthened after the deaths of communism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The Chinese Communist Party was scared and perceived the rise of Islam as a threat. Then the Chinese government began to heavily clamp down on regulated religious activities, closed down mosques and even removed the Uighur Mullah and Imams because of their political perspectives. In order to manipulate religion and to let it serve the Party, the Chinese government detained, arrested and sentenced a great number of Uighur religious practitioners who didn't abide by the restrictive religious policies.

In an attempt to further restrict the religious practices of the Uighur people, the Chinese government also tightened the number of Uighur pilgrims who go to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Chinese government only allowed those leaders who were faithful to the Party to make their pilgrimages. In addition to that, the Chinese government further restricted religious education and the spread of religious ideas among the leaders.

In order to contain the spirit of Islam, the Chinese government arrested most of the religious students who went to Muslim countries for religious education. In short, the Chinese government used every possible means in controlling and manipulating Islam among the Uighur and they never gave Uighur freedom of religion guaranteed in the Chinese constitution.

The Chinese crackdown of Uighurs on the basis of religion jumped to a higher level since 1995. The Uighur youth in Ghulja City started the traditional Uighur gathering called Mashrap in order to promote Uighur culture. The Chinese government was so scared and nervous about this gathering and began to crack down extremely hard. At first, the Chinese government labeled Mashrap as illegal and disbanded the gathering. The Chinese police arrested most of the leaders of Mashrap and gave them long-term sentences. As a matter of fact, Mashrap was more a traditional and cultural event than a religious one. Even so, the Chinese crackdown on Mashrap astonished all the Uighur people. Basically, the Uighur people lost any faith and interest in the Communist Party and the government.

In 1996, the Chinese Social Science Academy and the Xinjiang Social

Academy jointly published a book called "The Development of Pan-Turkish and Pan-Islamism in Xinjiang." This book purports that Islam and religious ideas are a threat to the unity of the motherland and the unity of nationalities in Xinjiang. The religious threat should be eliminated by all means. The conclusion of this book states that Uighurs will always be a trouble as long as the threat of Islam isn't first eliminated. At present, the Chinese government is possibly using this book as its policy guidelines in containing the Uighur people and Islam in Xinjiang.

Frustrated and long-pressed by the harsh policies imposed by the Chinese government, the brave young men and women of Ghulja rose up on February 5th through the 7th in 1997 and peacefully demonstrated in front of the municipal government building. Instead of listening to the rightful demands of the Uighur youth, the Chinese government bloodily suppressed them. Some 2,000 of them were arrested and sentenced for many years. The Chinese government immediately sealed the China-Kazak border and imposed curfew, actually martial law, in the region. China deployed thousands of paramilitary police in the area and set up checkpoints. The cruelty and barbarity of the Chinese government once again astonished the entire Uighur nation. This time the Uighur people have once and for all lost its faith in the Chinese government.

After the Ghulja crackdown, my friend Nurmhammet's right eye was struck out. Nurmhammet's uncle, Anwar Sawut, was shot dead by the Chinese police on April 24, 1997. He was 48 at the time, and he left six children. A lot of arrested Uighur were in fact sent to labor camps in Lanzhou. Some of them just disappeared from the prisons. This tragic event promoted Uighurs to be quiet about their religious beliefs. There was a lot of depression. The general situation was very serious after the bloody crackdown in Ghulja. I also became very sad and quiet.

In June 1997, Hong Kong returned to China. Prior to that date, the Chinese government again regarded Uighurs as a threat to stability in southern China, and warned the Uighur business community to leave before the return of Hong Kong. The Chinese government forced the Uighurs doing business in Guangzhou and Shenzhen to leave and arrested those who didn't. The Chinese government also confiscated their legal properties and hard-earned money. A lot of them were forced to get on the train and go back to Xinjiang.

While

I was in Urumqi last February, I met some old Uighur men and women who were returning from Beijing. I saw them at a restaurant at the Erdaoqiao Bazaar. They came from Yerkent and Hoten with their own money to make their pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. They told me that the Chinese government rejected their request to make their pilgrimage with the excuse that there was not enough quotas for them to go this year. They told me that they were 412 altogether. They had legal passports, visas from Saudi Arabia. They even bought their round-trip tickets from Beijing to Mecca with their lifelong savings. However, the Chinese

government blocked them at the Beijing airport and didn't allow them to board the plane.

With the hope of making the holy pilgrimage once in their lifetime, these old folks waited in Beijing in the cold February weather. But whichever hotels or guest house they went, the Chinese receptionists refused give them room since they were Uighurs. Out of no choice, some of the old men and women slept on the frozen chairs near the airport. Some of them were almost frozen to death. As a result, they had to stay in the hospital instead. Eventually, they returned in frustration and desperation. All of the Uighurs held legal passports, visas and round-trip tickets. They didn't break any law. Most of these old folks were peasants from southern Xinjiang.

The Chinese government, fearful of the religious influence among the Uighurs, only allow a small number of well-chosen communist Uighur clergy to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. As for those Uighurs who try to make the pilgrimage on their own, just like the above example, the door is always ruthlessly shut.

The Chinese government also uses the money donated by overseas Uighurs for building mosques for other purposes. The government constantly watched and detained religious Uighur students from abroad in order to cut their religious influence. Most of the Uighur religious students from abroad have been arrested on the so-called charges of carrying out illegal religious activities. Recently, the Chinese government has also prevented Uighur cadres, teachers, and students from going to the mosque to worship. Those Uighur cadres, teachers and students who didn't follow this rule were either suspended from the school or fired from their jobs. For instance, my friend Supur, who used to be a teacher at Xinjiang Hydraulic Institute, was fired from his job in May of 1998. The Institute found out that he went to mosque to pray on one Friday. Now he's doing some small business on his own to survive on his own in Beijing.

The Chinese government only executed Uighurs for alleged political and religious offenses in recent years. The Chinese government, since the bloody Ghulja crackdown, has executed a great number of Uighur youth.

COMMISSIONER ABRAMS: Can I ask you to try to wrap up in a couple minutes, so we can have enough time for Professor Gladney.

UIGHUR

WITNESS: The Chinese government expelled many Uighurs who were living

in Beijing and other parts of China back to Xinjiang. Last August the Chinese government arrested Rebiya Kadir, her son and the secretary and put them in jail.

The Chinese communist government has never respected the religious beliefs of the Uighur people. On the contrary, the Chinese government has always been cracking down only harder and harder. For the Chinese Communist Party, religion only means threat.

Thank you.