



The Uyghurs: A History of Persecution

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight

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Before I begin my testimony, I would like to thank the members of the committee for holding this important hearing and for inviting me to speak on the persecution of the Uyghur people by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Such interest in the plight of the Uyghur people at the highest levels of the U.S. government shines a light on the darkest corners of Chinese government repression and gives hope to millions of Uyghurs across the world.

This year, China will enter its sixtieth year under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The pace of economic development in the PRC since the inception of the reform era in the late seventies has earned the CCP the admiration of many observers. However, in the rush to praise modern China, a sixty year history of political repression and a present-day policy of minority persecution has been obscured.

The Uyghur people of East Turkestan, an area known by the Chinese authorities as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, have long been victims of the CCP's sixty-year authoritarian rule. In the years since the CCP gained control of East Turkestan in 1949 and before Deng Xiaoping launched his era of economic reforms, Uyghurs were subjected to a number of destructive Communist-led campaigns and movements.

From the purges of East Turkestan nationalists in the Anti-Rightist Campaign of the late fifties, to the starvation, exile and destruction of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976, Uyghurs, along with millions of other victims, were persecuted by the CCP. However, Uyghurs were also subjected to special campaigns specifically directed at them so as to dilute their distinct identity. In the early sixties, the CCP administration instigated a forced resettlement policy with the aims of dispersing concentrations of Uyghurs and of

isolating Uyghurs from their communities. In 1961, my family fell victim to this policy. We were forced to leave our home and to relocate far from our friends and our relations.

As is apparent, documenting the history of Uyghur persecution by the Chinese authorities is a long and detailed undertaking, which is full of personal stories most likely lost due to the silencing of Uyghur dissent throughout the years. However in this testimony, I would like to focus on the present day persecution of Uyghurs and use this opportunity to outline the suffering of the Uyghur people, which is happening as we convene here now.

At this point in history, the Uyghurs in East Turkestan face a critical challenge to their very existence as a people. East Turkestan sits on valuable natural resources, namely oil, and is strategically important due to its proximity to Russia, South Asia and Central Asia. The Chinese government's thirst for energy to drive its economy and its growing dominance in global affairs has made the Uyghur presence in East Turkestan an inconvenience. In order to resolve this, the Chinese government is undertaking methodical long and short term measures. These measures impact every area of Uyghur society, including its politics, economics, and culture. The message these measures spell out is clear. Uyghurs must assimilate or face extinction.

Wang Lequan, the "Xinjiang" Communist Party Secretary has called the subjugation of the Uyghur people a "life and death" struggle. Since 9/11, the Chinese government has used our Islamic faith against us and labeled Uyghurs as terrorists to justify crackdowns and security sweeps as part of the "war on terror". The Chinese authorities have also heavily promoted the notion that a coordinated and organized Uyghur terror network exists under the umbrella of an organization called the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) or the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP)

It is not certain who are the actual members of ETIM or TIP. Independent observers are not even sure if ETIM actually exists. With regard to TIP, doubts exist on whether it is indeed a group operated by some religious Uyghurs or a shadow terror organization created by the PRC authorities to demonize the Uyghur people's peaceful struggle against Chinese repression. It is in the national interest of China to have a radicalized Uyghur group, such as ETIM or TIP, to justify the severe persecution it carries out against the Uyghur people.

Using the terror threat as a pretext, in the pre-Olympics period (from January 2008 to July 2008), the Chinese authorities launched a crackdown in which 25 Uyghurs were killed in alleged "terror raids", 76 Uyghurs were convicted on terror-related charges – 20 of them sentenced to death, and 2 Uyghur "terrorists" were executed at a mass sentencing rally.

On January 4, 2009, The Procuratorial Daily reported that nearly 1,300 people were arrested in East Turkestan on state security crimes in 2008, marking a steep increase over previous years. Of the nearly 1,300 arrests made, 1,154 were formally charged and faced trials or administrative punishment. According to the People's Republic of China's

national statistics bureau, only 742 people were arrested on state security crimes throughout the entire country in 2007, and 619 of these were indicted.

On December 17, 2008 Abdurahman Azat and Kurbanjan Hemit were sentenced by the Intermediate People's Court of Kashgar to death for "intentional homicide and illegally producing guns, ammunition and explosives". Abdurahman Azat and Kurbanjan Hemit had been detained for allegedly carrying out an August 4, 2008 attack in Kashgar in which sixteen armed police were killed. Both men were executed on April 9, 2009 at an unknown location after the announcement of their impending execution was read out in front of 4,000 officials and Kashgar residents in a local stadium. According to local sources, Hemit appeared to have been severely beaten while in custody.

What is disturbing about terror allegations in East Turkestan is the astonishing lack of evidence accompanying the allegations, arrests and death sentences. The case against Abdurahman Azat and Kurbanjan Hemit is particularly alarming as eyewitness evidence from tourist bystanders contradicts the official version of events. We have no idea if this evidence was considered by Chinese judicial authorities as the trial, if there ever was one, was carried out behind closed doors.

Detention, torture and execution represent the short-term measures the Chinese government uses to silence Uyghur dissent. In addition, The Chinese government is committing economic, social and cultural human rights abuses to undermine Uyghur society long-term.

The United Nations documents lower incomes and higher poverty for Uyghurs compared to Han Chinese in East Turkestan. Job opportunities in the public and private sectors are few for the young and talented Uyghurs graduating from university.

A new policy recruits young Uyghur women from majority Uyghur areas of East Turkestan and transfers them to work in factories in urban areas of east China. Under the policy, thousands of Uyghur women have been removed from their families and placed into substandard working conditions thousands of miles from their homes.

Already, hundreds of thousands of young Uyghur women have been transferred from East Turkestan into Beijing, Tianjin, Jiangsu, Qingdao, Shandong, Zhejiang, and other locations. There were 240,000 from the Kashgar Region to China's eastern provinces in 2006. The eventual goal of this policy, as part of the 11th Five Year Plan of the Chinese government, is to transfer some 400,000 young Uyghur women to China's eastern provinces.

The mass in-migration of Han Chinese settlers and the transfer of young Uyghur women to east China has changed the demography of East Turkestan. Today, Uyghurs are a minority in their own land.

This long-term economic strategy is accompanied by cultural human rights abuses. In East Turkestan, China is actively promoting the "Sinification" of Uyghurs, whereby

linguistic, and religious aspects of Uyghur culture are outlawed, banned, or otherwise discouraged.

Uyghurs are not permitted to undertake Hajj, unless it is with an expensive official tour, in which applicants are carefully vetted for their “obedience to the law”. Confiscations of passports, to the point where very few Uyghurs have passports, ensures adherence to the ‘official tours only’ policy.

In addition, students and government employees are not permitted to fast during Ramadan or attend mosques in general. Restaurants are also forced to open during fasting hours in the month of Ramadan. These repressive policies makes it very difficult for Uyghurs to perform the five pillars of the Islamic faith.

Furthermore, Chinese authorities are implementing a monolingual Chinese language education system among Uyghurs in East Turkestan that undermines the linguistic basis of Uyghur culture. Since the mid-1980’s China’s government has moved in stages towards making Chinese the only language of instruction in East Turkestan’s schools. Over the past five years, government efforts at eliminating Uyghur language schools have accelerated dramatically as compulsory Chinese language education has been expanded at every educational level and every township in East Turkestan.

Traveling all over my homeland as a businesswoman and philanthropist, I 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. For this I paid a price.

I was once a political prisoner of the Chinese government. I spent over five years in inhumane conditions for the price of my advocacy on behalf of the Uyghur people. In prison I saw for myself the torture and cruelty enacted on my people by the Chinese authorities. Even in exile and among free people in the United States, I am subjected to harassment from Chinese authorities, including surveillance of my activities at work and at home.

However, it is my two sons Alim and Ablikim who currently pay a greater price. Today they suffer in a Chinese prison, convicted on false and politically motivated charges. Prior to my 2007 meeting with President Bush in Prague, the President said “[a]nother dissident I will meet here is Rebiya Kadeer of China, whose sons have been jailed in what we believe is an act of retaliation for her human rights activities”.

Alim was detained on May 30, 2006 and severely beaten by police on June 1, 2006. He was arraigned on Monday, July 10, 2006 on charges of tax evasion and “attempting to split the state”. On June 13, 2006, he was charged with tax evasion as a result of an investigation into the family business. He has reportedly been tortured and subjected to physical abuse while in detention. He was reported to have ‘confessed’ on or around July 1, 2006 to criminal and political charges against him as a direct consequence of being

tortured. In November 2006, Alim was sentenced to seven years in prison and fined 62,500 USD on charges of tax evasion.

Ablikim was detained on May 30, 2006. He also was severely beaten by police on June 1, 2006. Ablikim was hospitalized in early June following the police beating, and has reportedly been tortured and subjected to severe medical neglect during his detention and subsequent imprisonment. Ablikim was sentenced to nine years in prison on charges of “secessionism” in April 2007.

On May 31 this year, the Chinese authorities allowed some of my children to separately visit Alim and Ablikim. Ablikim, who has heart problems, didn't say much during the visit. He did point to his heart trying to show that his heart problem is getting worse. He looked extremely pale and very skinny. Alim said that he had to do heavy prison labor and suffered tremendously as a result of the poor quality of the food. He too looked quite skinny. Prison authorities only allowed family members to give Alim 100 Chinese Yuan (around \$15) monthly to pay for his food. Alim also stated that he suffered severe stomach problems, for which the authorities didn't provide medical care.

Uyghurs had hoped that the Chinese government would honor its pre-Olympic promises to the international community for greater respect of human rights. Instead, Uyghurs have seen an intensification of the long persecution it has suffered at the hands of the PRC authorities. This is a critical time for the Uyghur people, so in conclusion I will offer, in the context of the long-standing support shown by the U.S. to the Uyghur people, four recommendations to policy makers on addressing the egregious human rights abuses that prevail in East Turkestan.

I ask that the committee encourage the establishment of an international and independent body to investigate Chinese government allegations of organized Uyghur terror and the existence of ETIM or TIP.

Secondly, I ask that the committee work with the U.S. Department of State to establish a consulate in Urumchi, the regional capital, to monitor and document the deteriorating rights situation in the region.

Thirdly, I ask that the U.S. Embassy send officials to visit my children in prison.

Lastly, I ask that the committee work with the U.S. Department of State to establish a Special Envoy on Uyghur Affairs to oversee, at a senior level, the evaluation of Chinese government performance on improving human rights in East Turkestan, and the launch of dialogue on a solution to the legitimate grievances of the Uyghur people.

Thank you.