

UIGHURS: A HISTORY OF PERSECUTION

Hearing before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight *Remarks Prepared For Delivery*

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN BILL DELAHUNT

This hearing will come to order.

I represent Plymouth, Massachusetts—America’s hometown. Almost 400 years ago a small vessel called the Mayflower made landfall there and forever changed the history of the world. The men and women on that boat arrived seeking religious liberty and freedom from persecution. Over the span of American history, many millions from many lands have followed the pilgrims’ to our shores and have sought refuge. George Washington once wrote that he hoped that America, and these are his words, “might become a safe and agreeable asylum to the virtuous and persecuted part of mankind, to whatever nation they might belong.”

For most of our history we have honored President Washington’s hope for that part of mankind.

And that is why we are here today—to receive testimony concerning the Uighurs, who are an ethnic, Muslim minority from Northwest China. Twenty-two Uighurs were arrested in late 2001 and 17 are still detained at Guantanamo Bay while 5 were previously resettled in Albania.

It is our purpose to determine whether the Uighurs, previously or currently detained at Guantanamo, are “virtuous and persecuted” as Washington said or-- as one of our colleagues has seemed to conclude—are terrorists. In other words, are the Uighurs freedom fighters worthy of our support and assistance? Or are they a threat to our national security?

It is important to note that in June of 2007 the House passed H. Res. 497 that acknowledged that China had and was using the “war on terror” to oppress the Uighurs. The resolution states that the Chinese Communists had, and this is the language of the resolution, “manipulated the strategic objectives of the international war on terror to increase their cultural and religious oppression of the Muslim population residing in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.” Let me repeat that and please listen carefully—the Chinese Communists have manipulated the strategic objectives of the international war on terror to increase their cultural and religious oppression of the Uighurs. What better way to achieve these strategic objectives than to label the Uighurs as terrorists?

Now we hear the term “terrorist” applied to the 22 Uighur men who either are or were detained at Guantanamo Bay. My question is—Have some been duped by the Chinese Communist government?

Today we begin an effort to find answers to that and many other questions. We shall undertake a search for the truth. As the Committee on Oversight of American foreign policy, it is our responsibility to do so and we take that seriously. This Committee also has within its jurisdiction the responsibility to review human rights conditions worldwide.

I would submit that the American concept of due process is also a human right and it would appear there has been no due process afforded the Uighurs until recently. It should be noted for the record that the Bush Administration concluded that the remaining 17 Uighurs were not a threat to the United States. And a federal court ordered these Uighurs released in a seminal opinion finding the men to be non-enemy combatants-- and not a risk to United States national security. Yet, some would seem to deny these men redress and continue to detain them if no other country would accept them for resettlement.

A former Speaker of the House even said we should have sent the Uighur detainees back to China—an act that would undoubtedly violate our domestic laws and treaty obligations under the Convention Against Torture for it is indisputable that the Uighurs have been a persecuted minority in China and they would certainly face torture or be killed upon their return.

Today is the first of a series of hearings we plan to hold in which we will explore the truth and learn more about the treatment of the Uighurs in China and the circumstances surrounding the detention of Uighurs at Guantanamo.

Although there have been recent media reports that the Uighurs may be resettled in the nation of Palau, the Uighur story still needs to be told—because it is part of our story and the way we dealt with the “War on Terror.” We in this Subcommittee plan to pursue this diligently because we cannot let the Congress or American people forget the lessons learned from the Uighurs in Guantanamo.

As to the treatment of the Uighurs in China, which is the subject of this initial hearing, our colleague, Congressman Chris Smith, eloquently stated before that, “the list of serious human rights abuses committed by the Chinese Government is long. It includes the pervasive systematic exploitation of women and the murder of their children through forced abortion as part of its coercive one-child-per-couple policy. Against the Uighurs, it is used as a means of genocide, of trying to destroy an entire race and ethnic group of people because of their ethnicity. The imprisonment of democratic dissidents and religious believers remains a serious and pervasive problem in the PRC...”

Mr. Smith went on to say that if a “Uyghur or anyone is arrested, the way they get a conviction is they torture you. Eventually you sign on the bottom line and you admit your so-called crimes.... Again, there is abuse after abuse after abuse, and the Uyghurs are at the brunt of it.”

The 2008 Human Rights report published by our own Department of State confirms what Congressman Smith and others have publically stated. Let me read some excerpts from that report:

- “During the year the [Chinese] government increased its severe cultural and religious repression of the ethnic minorities in Tibetan areas and the [Uighur Autonomous] Region.”
- “Executions of Uighurs whom authorities accused of separatism, but which some observers claimed were politically motivated, were reported during prior reporting periods.”

- “The [Chinese] government’s repression of religious freedom intensified in Tibetan areas and the [Uighur Autonomous] Region.”
- “Regulations restricting Muslims’ religious activity, teaching, and places of worship continued to be implemented forcefully in the [Uighur Autonomous] Region. Measures to tighten control over religion in the [Uighur Autonomous] Region included increasing surveillance of mosques, religious leaders, and practitioners; detaining and arresting persons engaged in unauthorized religious activities; curbing illegal scripture readings.”
- “The [Chinese] government reportedly continued to limit access to mosques, detain citizens for possession of unauthorized religious texts, imprison citizens for religious activities determined to be “extremist”, pressure Muslims who were fasting to eat during Ramadan, and confiscate Muslims’ passports to strengthen control over Muslim pilgrimages.”
- “The government in the [Uighur Autonomous Region] took measures to dilute expressions of Uighur identity, including measures to reduce education in ethnic minority languages in [Uighur Autonomous Region] schools and to institute language requirements that disadvantage ethnic minority teachers.”
- “During the year authorities increased repression in the [Uighur Autonomous Region], and targeted the region’s ethnic Uighur population. In August officials in the [Uighur Autonomous Region] reiterated a pledge to crack down on the government-designated “three forces” of religious extremism, “splittism,” and terrorism.”

- “The [Chinese] government continued to repress Uighurs expressing peaceful political dissent and independent Muslim religious leaders, often citing counterterrorism as the reason for taking action. Uighurs were sentenced to long prison terms, and in some cases executed, on charges of separatism.”

Yet, for the first time many Americans are beginning to learn who the Uighur people are.

And today we begin to learn more facts about these people called Uighurs. Although Muslim, we will learn today that the Uighur men and women are not jihadis but are a peace loving people who seek only civil rights. We will learn about their treatment in Communist China. And their likely fate if the Uighurs in Guantanamo were sent back there—almost certain torture and perhaps murder.

Let me now turn to my friend and colleague, Mr. Rohrabacher, for any statements he may care to make.