



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

USCIRF HEARING SUMMARY:

April 2021

U.S. COMPANIES AND UYGHUR FORCED LABOR

Gayle Manchin
Chair

Tony Perkins
Vice Chair

Anurima Bhargava
Vice Chair

Commissioners

Gary Bauer

James W. Carr

Frederick A. Davie

Nadine Maenza

Johnnie Moore

Nury Turkel

Erin D. Singhsinsuk
Executive Director

USCIRF's Mission

To advance international freedom of religion or belief, by independently assessing and unflinchingly confronting threats to this fundamental right.

A Religious Minority Enslaved: Addressing the Complicity of U.S. Companies in Uyghur Forced Labor

On March 10, 2021, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) held a virtual hearing on [*A Religious Minority Enslaved: Addressing the Complicity of U.S. Companies in Uyghur Forced Labor*](#). This hearing examined how U.S. companies are facilitating the religious persecution and forced labor of Uyghur Muslims through the use of their supply chains in the Uyghur region, also known as Xinjiang.



Chair [*Gayle Manchin*](#) led the hearing, convening five witnesses from a variety of perspectives. She opened the event saying that the Chinese government's mass internment of millions of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in camps across Xinjiang "is believed to represent the largest-scale detention of an ethno-religious minority group since World War II."



In his remarks, [*Senator Marco Rubio*](#), lead sponsor of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act ([*S.65*](#)), stated, "When a regime deprives a people of their right to practice their faith freely, they are depriving those people of their full humanity[;] ... the United States and the free world must respond strongly and quickly to the Chinese Communist Party's violations of human rights."



Vice Chair [*Tony Perkins*](#) commended the U.S. government saying that, "it has consistently expressed grave concerns over Xinjiang and has determined that the atrocities in the Uyghur region amount to genocide."



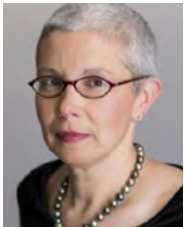
Commissioner [Gary Bauer](#) cautioned all U.S. companies to ensure they are not aiding and abetting the Chinese government’s religious freedom violations: “U.S. Companies operating in China must not sit idly by intentionally ignoring the evidence

and pretending that they can continue to conduct business as usual.”



Commissioner [Nury Turkel](#) thanked Secretary of State Antony Blinken for confirming the Trump Administration’s genocide determination and for his expressed interest to work with international allies to address China’s coercive economic practices. He emphasized, “U.S. companies must follow suit by stepping up and moving beyond the existing and insufficient supply chain due diligence measures.”

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[Dr. Sophie Richardson](#), China Director at Human Rights Watch, addressed the strategies used by the Chinese government, under Xi Jinping specifically, to silence those who speak out on behalf of their human rights or religious freedom violations.

The Chinese government:

- Prosecutes people on baseless charges for non-criminal behavior.
- Uses house arrest or other forms of arbitrary detention.
- Silences people through enforced disappearances, either domestically or abroad.
- Punishes or threatens to punish foreign entities and those operating inside or outside of China.
- Punishes activists’ family members who still reside in China, for speaking up.

Dr. Richardson recommended that the U.S. government and the international community should:

- Launch an independent investigation into serious human rights violations against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims through the auspices of the United Nations (U.N.).
- Create a standing mandate at the U.N. Human Rights Council that specifically monitors and reports on China’s human rights violations.
- Provide safe haven to anyone seeking refuge from the Chinese government.



[Louisa Greve](#), the Director of Global Advocacy at the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), highlighted where international awareness campaigns are succeeding and where the U.S. government can do more:

- Huaifu Fashion cited the negative impacts of sanctions and reported profit losses between 2019 and 2020, when American brands canceled orders.
- The United Kingdom’s Parliament has two ongoing inquiries on corporate supply chains, and the Dutch and Canadian Parliaments have recognized genocide against the Uyghurs.
- The United States has imposed 68 sanctions in response to the internment of Uyghurs since October 2019, making it the only country to do so.

Ms. Greve recommended:

- The U.S. government should create a multilateral strategy with like-minded countries to reprimand the Chinese government for its harassment of activists, journalists, and their family members beyond its borders.
- U.S. diplomats should not meet with the Vice Minister of Ecology, Sun Jinlong, on climate negotiations. Minister Jinlong was the former political commissar of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corporation.
- USCIRF should hold a hearing on the intersection of religious freedom, international trade, and climate change, given that 40-45 percent of the world’s solar-grade polysilicon is from Xinjiang.



[Scott Nova](#), the Executive Director of the Worker Rights Consortium, described the scope of forced labor in Xinjiang:

- The use of forced labor is systematic in the pursuit of economic profit and is a means of social and political control. The ubiquity of forced labor in Xinjiang means that corporations cannot verify that their supply chains are free of forced labor.
- 40 to 45 percent of the solar industry’s global supply of polysilicon, a vital component of solar panels, comes from Xinjiang.

- Prior to the pandemic, Xinjiang produced one-fifth of the global apparel industry's cotton. Additionally, Xinjiang is one of the world's primary producers of tomatoes and tomato-based products.

Mr. Nova stressed that companies' private concerns and statements over forced labor are not enough. Aggressive enforcement of the Withhold Release Orders (WROs) is vital in both the cotton and tomato sectors. The U.S. government should utilize all the policy and legislative tools at its disposal to end complicity in Uyghur forced labor.



[Dr. Adrian Zenz](#), a Senior Fellow in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, discussed how the Chinese government's long-term strategy of subjecting Uyghurs to internment camps is predicated upon a perverse and intrusive combination of forced labor, intergenerational separation, and social control over family units.

- Labor transfers that release those in vocational internment camps into forced labor are designed to tear apart families and communities, reduce population density, and alter a region's demographic composition.
- When parents are placed into forced labor their children are put into full-time education settings. Forced labor and state-sponsored care serve to inhibit the intergenerational transmission of culture, religion, and language.
- Work environments are intentionally secular and preclude religious practices, such as prayer or fasting. This inability to live as part of one's community destroys Xinjiang's ethnic minorities' capacity to engage in religious and spiritual practices.



[Olivia Enos](#), a Senior Policy Analyst at the Asian Studies Center at the Heritage Foundation, provided recommendations to the U.S. government to ensure no goods produced with forced labor make their way into U.S. markets:

- The U.S. government should create a narrowly tailored and rebuttable presumption that goods produced in certain sectors of Xinjiang were made with forced labor.
- The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) should establish a region-wide Withhold Release Order (WRO) under a two-year trial period to determine the percentage of goods produced with forced labor.
- The U.S. government should increase resources to the CBP Forced Labor Division.
- The CBP should increase public awareness about its Forced Labor Division's tip portal and hotline. The CBP relies on tips from individuals, industry experts, and lawyers to track down potential shipments of goods made with forced labor.
- The U.S. government should build a coalition with allies such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union, to adopt measures that ensure goods produced with forced labor in Xinjiang do not make their way into their own markets.

Vice Chair Perkins concluded the hearing by saying, "international trade economically is important, but it cannot be untethered from a commitment to agreed upon fundamental human rights."

USCIRF recommends:

- The U.S. government should enforce existing U.S. laws — such as the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act and Tibetan Policy and Support Act — and continue to impose targeted financial visa sanctions on Chinese government agencies and officials responsible for severe violations of religious freedom.
- The U.S. government should work with U.S. allies to hold the Chinese government accountable for its treatment of religious minorities and its harassment of dissidents outside of its borders.
- The U.S. Congress should support and pass legislation that promotes religious freedom in China, including the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act ([S.65/H.R. 1155](#)).



UNITED STATES COMMISSION *on* INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The Commissioners listed below were present at the hearing.



Vice Chair
Anurima Bhargava



Commissioner
James W. Carr



Commissioner
Frederick A. Davie



Commissioner
Nadine Maenza



Commissioner
Johnnie Moore

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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent, bipartisan federal government entity established by the U.S. Congress to monitor, analyze, and report on religious freedom abroad. USCIRF makes foreign policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and Congress intended to deter religious persecution and promote freedom of religion and belief.