



Ending “Business as Usual” to Combat the Genocide of the Uyghurs

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U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)
Hearing on China’s Religious Freedom Violations: Domestic Repression and
Malign Influence Abroad
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I welcome the opportunity to testify before USCIRF and thank the Staff and Commissioners, especially, Nury Turkel, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, and former Congressman Frank Wolf, for their focus on this issue. USCIRF’s role in the protection of freedom of religion and belief is widely recognized not only in its advisory capacity to the U.S. government but also in setting the agenda globally.

I’d like to start with a positive message regarding the U.S. response to the Uyghur genocide. The U.S. has imposed a total of 107 punitive sanctions targeting specific perpetrators of the repression against Uyghurs. This is 102 more than any other government, and 107 more than any multilateral body. This includes:

- Global Magnitsky targeted human-rights sanctions -- financial bans and visa sanctions,
- two separate visa bans targeting broad categories of perpetrators,
- import bans,
- export bans, and
- investment bans.

The targets are 33 PRC officials and government agencies and 57 Chinese companies; some are subject to two or more sanctions. For example, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) and XPCC officials, are under 4 separate U.S. Sanctions.

The Chinese government has created both an unprecedented human rights crisis in the Uyghur homeland, but also a crisis outside its borders. This includes subverting the functioning of the United Nations human rights system. It includes a refugee crisis that has received almost no international attention or policy response, despite the commendable USCIRF Hearing on Refugees Fleeing Religious Persecution in February 2021. And it includes an extraordinary campaign of repression abroad, is systematically pursuing Uyghurs living in other countries and pressuring governments to forcibly return them to China.

Today I'd like to highlight three key aspects of the genocide: forced inter-faith marriage, the detention of 1000-plus imams and *buwi* (female religious teachers), and the scope of the Chinese government's cross-border persecution of the Uyghur diaspora and Uyghur refugees.

Forced Inter-faith and Inter-ethnic marriage

UHRP has just published a new report on forced and incentivized inter-ethnic, inter-faith marriage affecting mostly Uyghur women. Reference: [Forced Marriage of Uyghur Women: State Policies for Interethnic Marriages in East Turkistan - Uyghur Human Rights Project \(uhrp.org\)](https://uhrp.org/2020/01/20/forced-marriage-of-uyghur-women-state-policies-for-interethnic-marriages-in-east-turkistan)

Chinese state media videos, government sanctioned stories, and accounts from women in the diaspora offer evidence that government incentivized and forced interfaith and interethnic marriages have been occurring in the Uyghur Region since 2014. Based on this evidence, UHRP has concluded that it is highly likely the Chinese government is systematically imposing forced interethnic marriages on Uyghur women.

Officials in the Uyghur Region have been directed to actively promote interethnic “contact, exchange, and mingling,” including interethnic marriages, just as they have done in Tibet. The Chinese state maintains that interethnic marriage promotes ethnic unity and social stability. However, evidence indicates that the government's program to incentivize and promote interethnic marriage is in fact a tactic intended to assimilate Uyghurs into Han society

In one county, the government announced an incentive of 10,000 yuan per year (US \$1,600) per “minhan” or “mixed” couple – approximately 2,600 yuan more than the average annual income of rural residents in East Turkistan at the time. The incentive would be provided for five years to newly-married couples for as long as the marriage remained “harmonious.” Other incentives included help with housing, medical care, government jobs, and tuition waivers through high school for the children of such marriages, plus tuition subsidies for subsequent education.



Internal government documents from Kashgar and another county had statistics for their 2018 budgets for their “ethnic intermarriage reward fund.”

In August 2020, a video depicted the wedding of a Han man and Uyghur woman, featuring the couple thanking the CCP for the “beautiful life” the government had given them. The Uyghur voiceover with Chinese subtitles explains that there is an “urgent need” for 100 brides to “actively respond to the call from the government to promote marriage between Uyghurs and Han.”

An informal marriage guide for male Han cadres published in 2019, entitled “How to Win the Heart of a Uyghur Girl,” cautions Han men that as they are “selecting” a Uyghur woman, they must first and foremost uphold a few iron-clad principles: the woman they love “must love the Motherland, love the Party, and she must have unrivaled passion for socialist Xinjiang.”

A Uyghur activist and camp survivor who now lives in the US told Voice of America (VOA) that her neighbors in Meket County in Kashgar Prefecture “had to agree to wed their 18-year-old daughter to a Han Chinese out of fear that they could be sent to internment camps.” Local government officials forced the interethnic marriage after a Han Chinese man approached the young woman in the factory where she worked and took a photograph with her, which the officials claimed was proof that they were dating, and then demanded she agree to the marriage.

Forced and incentivized marriages in the Uyghur Region are forms of gender-based crimes that violate international human rights standards and further the ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity being committed in East Turkistan.

In addition, it is a very rare case, and possibly the only case anywhere in the world, where a member-state of the United Nations is engaged in forced marriage by actions of the government.

UHRP recommends that USCIRF include this crime in its next annual report, and ensure that the forced marriage of Uyghur women be cited in any analysis of gender-based crimes worldwide.

Imprisonment of imams and female religious teachers

UHRP compiled an extensive database to arrive at a count of 1000+ confirmed cases of detention and imprisonment of imams and other religious figures by Xinjiang authorities. The dataset reveals that of the 1,046 recorded cases, 428 have been sent to formal prisons, including 304 sentenced to prison terms. Of the cases with sentencing information, 96 percent have received prison terms of five years or more, and 25 percent were sentenced to 20 years or more, often on unclear charges.

Another 202 religious figures have been detained in camps, 18 have died while in detention or in prison, or shortly thereafter, and incomplete data for the remaining cases likely indicate that these individuals continue to be held indefinitely, or have received sentences that remain unreported.

The dataset confirms that hundreds of religious figures have been sentenced, without due process, to prison terms for quotidian religious practice and expression protected under Chinese law and internationally recognized human rights treaties. Imams have been sentenced for “illegal” religious teaching (often to children), prayer outside a state-approved mosque, the possession of “illegal” religious materials, and communication or travel abroad.

The research found prison sentences of 15 years or more for “teaching others to pray,” “studying for six months in Egypt,” “refusing to hand in [a] Quran book to be burned,” and a life sentence for “spreading the faith and for organizing people.”

The figures presented are not comprehensive, given extreme secrecy and lack of transparency in the Uyghur Region, and very likely represent a small fraction of the total number of religious figures detained. Nonetheless, the data provides an alarming indication of the scale and severity of the Chinese government’s persecution of religious figures since 2014. Reference: [China Detaining and Sentencing Uyghur Imams en Masse, UHRP Reveals](#)

Deportations to China and Transnational Repression of Uyghurs; “surveillance technology bill of rights for religious freedom”

UHRP has reported extensively on the Chinese government’s extraordinary effort to hunt down and persecute Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic peoples from East Turkistan, in a series of 9 recent reports and briefings published since 2017. Reference: [Transnational Repression of Uyghurs \(collected reports and policy recommendations \(uhrp.org\)\)](#).

The research documents:

- 1,546 cases of serious human rights violations experienced by Uyghurs outside China from 1997 through March 2021, offering critical insight into the scope and evolution of the Chinese government’s longstanding efforts to control and repress Uyghurs across sovereign borders.
- 292 known cases of Uyghurs deported to China from Arab states alone
- In a UHRP survey of diaspora Uyghurs living in democratic countries in 2021, 74 percent reported digital risks, threats, or forms of online harassment. Only 44 percent felt that their host governments take the intimidation seriously, and only 21 percent felt that the host governments would fix these issues.

On our own soil, UHRP's 2019 report, "[Repression Across Borders: The CCP's Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans](#)," documents how the Chinese government routinely carries out surveillance, threats and coercion on American soil to control the speech and actions of Uyghur Americans. The Chinese government's program of transnational repression is an ambitious and well-resourced campaign affecting all Uyghur Americans, especially the many brave journalists, activists, and students engaged in raising awareness about the crisis of repression in their homeland.

The threats come by text, chat apps, voicemail, email, and messages delivered by third parties; some members of the community report receiving such messages on a weekly or even a near-daily basis. Non-compliance could result in family members being taken to a concentration camp.

These communications illustrate the way Chinese agents apply pressure against Uyghurs abroad through their family members at home, adding to the extreme emotional distress of separated Uyghur families. That so many speak out, despite the dire risks, demonstrates the resilience of Uyghurs in the United States.

The key policy implications are that this intimidation campaign constitutes an ongoing series of crimes committed with impunity on U.S. persons. It is illegal under U.S. federal and state law to issue threats that interfere with free-speech rights. For the Uyghur American community, the enduring and menacing presence of the Chinese government in their daily lives deprives them of their constitutionally protected rights and freedoms.

U.S. federal law enforcement recognized these issues in an unclassified FBI counterintelligence bulletin on violations of Uyghur civil rights on U.S. soil (PRC), [issued](#) in August 2021.

We recommend that USCIRF follow up with US law enforcement to seek an update and engagement regarding implementation of this bulletin in the past year, as well as FBI's general factsheet, [Transnational Repression – What is it, How you can get help to stop it | FBI](#) (undated).

Most importantly, given the scope and sophistication of China's tech tools for transnational repression, I suggest that USCIRF work to develop or endorse a "**surveillance technology bill of rights for religious freedom**." Such a charter should provide normative standards for the private sector, for government procurement, and for national policies to restrict the export of U.S. surveillance technology to CPCs, SWL countries, and all state actors. In the case of China, the potential for malicious use of technology by Chinese companies active in the campaign of repression in the Uyghur Region should be a high priority for all actors in

purchasing decisions and in regard to product-development partners, exports of components and systems.

Recommendations for USCIRF:

Forced Inter-faith marriage

- USCIRF should report on this issue in the 2023 USCIRF annual report. Specifically, state-imposed forced marriage would need to be introduced as a new category, and should be included specifically in the sections on China.
- USCIRF should advise the State Department to include this issue in its annual Religious Freedom Report, Trafficking in Persons Report, and Country Reports. Specifically, state-imposed forced marriage would need to be introduced as a new category, and should be included specifically in the sections on China.

Transnational Repression

(1) Add **adherence to the non-refoulement principle** as part of the overall metric for assessing religious freedom for each country.

- In USCIRF's annual report, add a section on each CPC and SWL government's adherence to the non-refoulement principle. Under international law, governments are prohibited from sending individuals back to countries where they would be at risk of persecution, torture, ill-treatment, or other serious human rights violations. Upholding religious freedom is not only about treatment of people while on the sovereign soil of each government, but also adherence to non-refoulement for people likely to be targeted for their religious identity or practices.
- In USCIRF's communications with other governments, raise the non-refoulement principle regarding Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic peoples in relation to China, and urge governments to adopt non-refoulement policies for all people likely to be targeted for their religious identity or practices.

(2) Seek an update and engagement with U.S. law enforcement to provide data to assist with implementation of law enforcement efforts upholding the civil rights of members of persecuted religious groups on U.S. soil against violations perpetrated by foreign state actors. In particular, USCIRF should seek to ensure that the FBI has a full understanding of the risks and other data based on the USCIRF Annual Report and other fact-finding resources in relation to these two public documents on transnational repression of civil rights on U.S. soil:

- [Transnational Repression — What is it, How you can get help to stop it | FBI](#) (undated).
- [Unclassified FBI Counterintelligence bulletin on violations of Uyghur civil rights on U.S. soil \(PRC\)](#), August 11, 2021.

(3) Engage with US government agencies interacting with INTERPOL, urging them to raise and monitor religious persecution in relation to the “Red Notice” process, and other “political” uses

of INTERPOL data-sharing.

- U.S. government agencies should request clarification from INTERPOL to ensure that its procedures explicitly take account of targeting for religious persecution and discrimination purposes, under the rubric of its new policy for handling “political” uses of INTERPOL

(4) Propose a “surveillance technology bill of rights for religious freedom” charter or set of standards.

- USCIRF should develop a set of “religious freedom criteria” as normative standards for the private sector, for government procurement, and for national policies to restrict the export of surveillance technology to CPCs, SWL countries, and all state actors. In the case of China, the potential for malicious use of technology by Chinese companies active in the campaign of repression in the Uyghur Region should be a high priority for all actors in purchasing decisions and in regard to product-development partners, exports of components and systems.
- USCIRF should seek an update from the Commerce Department about the effectiveness of its new June 2020 rule clarification, requiring consideration of the “risk” of human rights abuse by any end-user, including private-sector customers, before approving any exports of items on the Commerce Control List.¹

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[Export license policy for crime control items revised to include risk of human rights abuse in all decisions, including private-sector end-users, Bureau of Industry and Security \(BIS\), Commerce Department](#)

In this final rule, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) amended the EAR by revising the licensing policy of paragraph (b) of § 742.7 to clarify to the exporting community that Commerce Control List (CCL) licensing decisions are based in part upon U.S. Government assessments about whether controlled items may be used to engage in or enable violations or abuses of human rights, including those involving censorship, surveillance, detention, or excessive use of force. This revision furthers the foreign policy interests of the United States pertaining to the prevention of human rights violations and abuses by helping to ensure that items are not exported or reexported in support of human rights violations or abuses, including telecommunications and information security and sensors. This licensing policy enables BIS and other reviewing agencies to consider violations or abuses of human rights by individuals or entities other than the government of the importing country, such as companies. Additional notes: (1) In removing the “internationally recognized” standard from “human rights” in § 742.7(b), BIS can make decisions based on US Government determinations. (2) BIS needs only judge that there is a “risk” that the items would be used in such a manner.

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/10/06/2020-21815/amendment-to-licensing-policy-for-items-controlled-for-crime-control-reasons>

<https://www.bis.doc.gov/index.php/regulations/commerce-control-list-ccl>

About the Uyghur Human Rights Project:

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) promotes the rights of the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim peoples in East Turkistan, referred to by the Chinese government as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), through research-based advocacy. UHRP documents violations; highlights human rights defenders, survivors, and victims; and researches avenues for defense and positive promotion of Uyghurs' human rights, especially in the arenas of policymaking, grassroots action, and cultural rights promotion.

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Annex on Transnational Repression

UHRP Submissions to Government

1. [UHRP submits statement on issues facing Uyghur refugees to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom - Uyghur Human Rights Project](#)

UHRP Reports and Briefings:

1. [New UHRP Report Finds Arab States have Deported or Detained 292 Uyghurs at China's Bidding](#), March 24, 2022
2. ["Your Family Will Suffer": How China is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in 22 Liberal Democracies](#), November 10, 2021
3. ["Nets Cast from the Earth to the Sky": China's Hunt for Pakistan's Uyghurs](#), August 11, 2021
4. [No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs](#), June 24, 2021
5. [Weaponized Passports: The Crisis of Uyghur Statelessness](#), April 1, 2021
6. ["The Government Never Oppresses Us": China's proof-of-life videos as intimidation of Uyghurs abroad](#), Feb 1, 2021
7. [Repression Across Borders: The CCP's Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans](#), August 28, 2019
8. ['Another Form of Control': Complications in obtaining documents from China impacts immigration processes and livelihoods for Uyghurs abroad](#), August 10, 2018
9. ['The Fifth Poison': The Harassment of Uyghurs Overseas](#), November 28, 2017
10. ['They Can't Send Me Back': Uyghur Asylum Seekers in Europe face pressure to return to China](#), Sep 20, 2011

Statements:

1. [UHRP Encouraged by US Visa Ban to Oppose Transnational Repression. Urges Multilateral Action](#), March 22, 2022
2. [UHRP Welcomes Prosecutions of Chinese Secret Police Harassing and Spying in the U.S.](#), March 16, 2022
3. [12 years after July 5 unrest in Ürümchi, UHRP again calls for safe haven for Uyghur refugees](#) , July 5 2021
4. [On World Refugee Day 2021, UHRP Calls for Global Protections for Uyghur Refugees](#), June 20, 2021
5. [UHRP Calls for Due Process in Turkish Case Regarding Dolkun Isa](#), Jun 8, 2021
6. [UHRP welcomes Senate legislation to support safe haven for Uyghurs abroad](#), April 13, 2021
7. [UHRP welcomes House bill to provide Uyghurs safe haven](#), March 9, 2021
8. OP-ED: [How Beijing uses family videos to try to discredit Uyghur advocates](#), Emily Upton in the HK Free Press, Feb 28 2021
9. [UHRP submits statement on issues facing Uyghur refugees to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom \(USCIRF\)](#), Feb 12, 2021
10. [Uyghurs fear deportation if Turkey-China extradition agreement comes into force](#) Dec 30, 2020
11. OP-ED: [China's Barbarity Toward Uyghur Families Should Shock Our Consciences and Spur Action](#). Omer Kanat in the Diplomat, Oct 22, 2020
12. [Uyghur camp survivor arrives safely in the United States](#), Sep 25, 2020
13. [On World Refugee Day, UHRP Urges UNHCR to Address Looming Uyghur Statelessness](#) Jun 19, 2020
14. OP-ED: [Uyghurs Without Passports: Forced Legibility and Illegibility](#), Henryk Szadziwski in The Geopolitics, May 12, 2020
15. [UHRP welcomes rescue of Uyghur camp survivors](#), April 29, 2020
16. [Open threats against Uyghur activist in Germany lay bare China's lawless persecution](#), Jan 15, 2020
17. [China's propaganda videos are an ineffective attempt to discredit #StillNoInfo](#), Jan 14, 2020
18. OP-ED: [China's Cross-Border Campaign to Terrorize Uyghur Americans](#), Omer Kanat in The Diplomat, August 29, 2019
19. [World Refugee Day 2019: Thailand should free Uyghur refugees](#), Jun 19, 2019
20. OP-ED: [Uyghur refugees deserve freedom](#), Omer Kanat in the Bangkok Post, Nov 20, 2018
21. [World Refugee Day 2018: End Forced Returns of Uyghurs](#), Jun 19, 2018
22. [Media Advisory: UHRP-WUC EVENT: Dolkun Isa Speaks on Removal of INTERPOL Red](#)

[Notice After 20 Years](#), Mar 5, 2018

23. [World Refugee Day 2017: UHRP calls for information on returned Uyghur refugees](#), Jun 17, 2017
24. [China: Reveal condition and whereabouts of Uyghur refugees forcibly deported from Thailand to China one year ago](#), Jul 7, 2016
25. [World Refugee Day 2016: End Forced Returns of Uyghur Refugees and Resettle Remaining Uyghurs in Thailand to Safe Third Country](#), Jun 20, 2016