

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Investigating the Chinese Threat, Part Two: Human Rights Abuses, Torture and Disappearances

**Testimony of
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I want to thank you Madame Chairman Ros-Lehtinen for the invitation to testify at today's hearing. It is extremely important to have such a prestigious forum to discuss the pressing matter of human rights in China and highlight the increasing repression of Uyghurs.

Since the violent suppression of Uyghur protesters by Chinese security forces in East Turkestan's capital of Urumchi in July 2009, the Uyghurs have experienced an intense period of human rights violations. The unrest in 2009 has led to the implementation of policies in the region that have not only engendered an atmosphere of fear, but have also accelerated the assimilation of the Uyghurs and their homeland into a greater Han China.

This month marked three years of intimidating security measures, swift judicial procedures and countless disappearances. Human Rights Watch describes enforced disappearances as "serious violations of international human rights law" and the

Chinese government has been continuing this practice among Uyghurs without fear of censure from the international community. In a report focused on Uyghur disappearances after July 2009, Human Rights Watch states that the 43 disappearances documented were “just the tip of the iceberg.” The report details the beatings of male Uyghurs of all ages during security sweeps and raids and says, “The security forces simply went after every young man they could catch and packed them into their trucks by the dozens.”

Deaths in custody of Uyghurs allegedly involved in the unrest have been reported. Noor-ul-Islam Sherbaz, a 17-year-old Uyghur, was sentenced to life in April 2010 after a 30-minute trial in Aksu. By December 2011, he was dead. In a visit just before his death, his mother reported visible signs of physical abuse on her son’s body.

State retribution of Uyghurs allegedly involved in the unrest has been enacted in the Chinese courts and the process has been rapid. Twelve months after the unrest, 24 Uyghurs received death sentences and a further eight were sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve. Only four months after the unrest, eight Uyghur men were executed without due process. For these eight men, all of the following happened within the span of less than one month. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced, their sentences were upheld by the Xinjiang Higher People’s Court and the Supreme People’s Court, and they were executed. Human Rights Watch documented the way in which Xinjiang judicial authorities accelerated trials for individuals tried in connection with July 2009 unrest in Urumchi, stating that criminal suspects had been tried under the “three fast” principle: “fast review, fast arrest and fast prosecution,” according to instructions from Party leadership.

In May 2010, the central government convened a “Xinjiang Work Forum” chaired by Chinese President Hu Jintao that mapped out the development of East Turkestan. The Xinjiang Work Forum was prompted in large part by the tacit acknowledgment on the part of Chinese officials that preceding policies in the region had exacerbated the 2009 tensions in the region. Policies adopted at the Work Forum intensified natural resource extraction, infrastructure projects, demolitions of Uyghur neighborhoods and the transference of capital, investment and personnel from eastern areas of China. These policies did not address the root causes of the July 2009 unrest and the legitimate grievances of the Uyghur people. Instead, by focusing the economy back onto resource extraction this further exacerbated tensions in East Turkestan.

Work Forum policies also continued the pattern of bringing more Han Chinese to East Turkestan and furnishing them with economic opportunities unavailable to the Uyghurs. This month the government announced a plan to formally grant residence to 6 million “floating” Chinese spurred into migrating to East Turkestan under government economic policies. A decade old policy to transfer Uyghur women out of East Turkestan and work in eastern China is still in place even though Uyghurs have become an absolute minority in their homeland. Incidentally, there is no evidence that Uyghur workers were returned to East Turkestan after the mob killing of their co-workers by Han Chinese mobs in Shaoguan, Guangdong province on July 26, 2009, which triggered the July 2009 unrest in Urumchi.

Compounded by the near elimination of the Uyghur language in the education system and restrictions on cultural practices, the Uyghurs face losing their ethnic distinctiveness. In a physical manifestation of this cultural genocide, the Chinese authorities are demolishing Uyghur neighborhoods across East Turkestan, most notably in Kashgar. This ‘no choice’ destruction of centuries old Uyghur architecture and heritage has a human cost too, as relocated Uyghurs are inadequately compensated and housed in flimsy, but heavily monitored, apartment blocks far from city centers.

Chinese authorities have long targeted religious freedoms among Uyghurs. No one under the age of 18 can enter a mosque in East Turkestan; university and school students are forbidden from praying on campus, even in their dormitories; and students are prohibited from fasting during Ramadan. In recent years, restrictions on Uyghurs’ adherence to the Islamic faith have increasingly been codified into Chinese law, criminalizing peaceful religious practices among Uyghurs on par with illicit and violent criminal activity.

A crackdown on religion has been in force in weeks prior to and after the third anniversary of the July 2009 unrest. House-to-house searches in the Gujanbagh neighborhood of Hotan were announced on June 7, 2012. This followed the police raid of an “illegal” religious school for children in Hotan that injured 12 Uyghur children, the death of a Uyghur child in police custody for studying Islamic prayer in the city of Korla, and the sentencing of nine Uyghur men in the city of Kashgar for

their involvement with “illegal religious schools” or religious instruction. In the current Holy Month of Ramadan, the government has set up “Ramadan stability groups” in every official department and organization. Officials from these stability groups have to go and stay in mosques, so as to carry out personal surveillance work. While in Aksu, police are conducting searches of Uyghur homes for “illegal” religious materials.

Like every Uyghur, I have paid a personal price for my ethnicity and human rights advocacy. My sons, Alim and Ablikim, suffer daily in Chinese prisons. Alim received a prison sentence on charges of tax evasion in November 2006 and was fined 62,500 USD. Ablikim was sentenced to nine years on charges of “secessionism” in April 2007. The trials of both men were plagued by a lack of evidence and conducted in the absence of due process of law. It is clear both of them were sent to prison in retaliation of my human rights advocacy work on behalf of the Uyghur people in East Turkestan.

After the July 2009, Chinese authorities intensified their harassment against my family. In August 2009, government authorities ordered more than 30 members of my family, including, my children, grandchildren and siblings, to leave their homes in the Akida Trade Center. In interviews broadcast on state television in August 2009, Alim and my son Kahar, together with my daughter Rushangul and my younger brother Memet, were compelled to make false accusations about my role in the unrest in Urumchi. In addition, my children, their spouses and five of my young grandchildren were forced to sign a letter accusing me of having broken my promises not to participate in “ethnic splittism” after leaving China.

In May this year, Chinese authorities forced Alim to sign documents releasing ownership of two of my families’ buildings to the state. Judicial officials reportedly told Alim, who was escorted to a court in Urumchi before being taken back to prison, that the buildings would be demolished in about two weeks’ time. Alim has been subjected to torture and other forms of ill treatment while in prison, resulting in both physical and psychological trauma. Ablikim is believed to have been moved to a special prison facility and tortured.

The U.S. Department of State has consistently raised the Uyghur issue in meetings with their Chinese counterparts. The frequent documentation of the human rights abuses against Uyghurs in State Department report illustrates the depth of concern in the successive U.S. administrations. The U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue should not be a talking shop. The bilateral dialogue should be a result-based dialogue in which China's human rights violations should be stopped and eventually eliminated, not just talked about. I recommend the following actions for Congress:

- Urge the Chinese government to account for the number and whereabouts of the Uyghurs detained since the July 5 unrest and release them immediately.
- Urge the Chinese government to cease the arbitrary detention, arrest, torture and extrajudicial execution of Uyghurs in East Turkestan.
- Urge the Chinese government to stop the execution of Uyghur political prisoners.
- Urge the Chinese government to immediately halt the destruction of tangible and intangible Uyghur culture and to provide an environment where Uyghurs are in control of their ethnic identity.
- Urge Chinese authorities in East Turkestan to abide by the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law and Chinese Constitution to ensure freedom of religious belief.
- Urge Chinese officials to release my sons Alim and Ablikim to the United States.
- Pass legislation requiring the State Department to deny visas to Chinese officials involved in the violation of Uyghur human rights to enter the United States.
- Pass legislation in defense of Uyghur people's fundamental human rights, culture, religion, language and identity.