



Suppression, Surveillance, and Mass Detention: Xinjiang's Human Rights Crisis

Congressional-Executive Commission on China
Thursday, July 26, 2018

*Representative Christopher Smith
Cochair*

As Prepared for Delivery

I commend Senator Rubio for holding this hearing. There is a dire need to shine a light on the stunning and outrageous detention of nearly one million Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

What is clear from news reports is that Uyghurs are being detained in “reeducation centers” throughout Xinjiang. Those interned are being asked to renounce Islam, inform on their families for “extremism,” and parrot their love for Xi Jinping and the Communist Party.

Whole families disappear, children are detained, students studying abroad and soccer players are detained because of their “foreign” contacts. There are reports of suicides and deaths and mistreatment in these detention centers.

Human rights champion Rebiya Kadeer’s whole family--sons, daughters in law, grandchildren have disappeared. The disappearance of the families of other Uyghurs has also happened—like Radio Free Asia’s heroic journalists.

It is mind-boggling. The Chinese government is constructing a high-tech police state in Xinjiang whose goal is the forcible assimilation and “transformation” of entire ethnic minority populations and the “sinacization” of their religious beliefs and practices. In fact, retaining religious beliefs or attachment to culture and language make one a suspect in Xinjiang.

All this is being done in the name of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism. But China’s repression may just create the extremism that they fear.

Over the past year, the world has started to see too many comparisons between the Nazis and the current Chinese government.

First there was the death of Liu Xiaobo, the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to die in state custody since Carl Von Ossietzky died in Nazi internment.

Now nearly one million are detained in what should be called concentration camps—the largest jailing of an ethnic and religious minority maybe since the Holocaust, certainly since the apartheid days in South Africa.

“Reeducation” is not a new tactic in China. Tibetans, Falun Gong and other dissidents have experienced “reeducation through labor”—but the size and scale of what is happening to the Uyghurs is audaciously repressive, even by China’s low standards.

Where is the outrage? Where is the anger? I commend the State Department and Secretary Pompeo for their public statements. But why has the Organization of Islamic Cooperation been silent? What has Turkey and other Turkic nations been doing to address this issue?

We are at a critical point. Governments and parliamentarians need to condemn what is happening in Xinjiang. The UN must investigate and seek answers to what may be massive human rights abuses or worse.

Businesses, non-governmental organization, and academics that remain silent--because they want to remain in favor with the Chinese government and Communist Party—risk losing their integrity by doing so.

The International Olympic Committee should be asked to reassess China’s hosting of the 2022 games if they maintain an apartheid-like police state targeting Muslim minorities.

How can any law firm or lobby shop shill for the government of China while Uyghurs are so brutally and forcefully assimilated? Or when Tibetans, Christians, human rights lawyers, and Falun Gong are systematically repressed?

I heard former Congressman Frank Wolf say recently that in the 1980s, no firm would have dared to work for the Soviet Union—but now China’s cash is too tempting to turn down even for some of my former House colleagues.

Shame. Shame. It is really a shame.

I wonder if the Congress should consider limiting US government contracts by the exact amount lobby firms receive from China, Russia, or some other authoritarian government? That would make for some interesting business choices. Either make no profit from your dealings with China or choose to represent an increasingly repressive and authoritarian Chinese government.

No one should profit from representing authoritarian countries, particularly when they constantly seek to undermine US values and interests.

Chinese officials also should not profit from their complicity in torture and arbitrary detentions. This is the exact reason the Congress passed the Global Magnitsky Act.

The Senator and I have urged the State Department to consider levying Magnitsky sanctions on officials in Xinjiang. We will continue to do so and press for the use of this important tool to hold officials accountable.

We urge anyone with specific and credible information about the complicity of Chinese government officials in human rights abuses in Xinjiang to send that information to us. We will make sure it gets to the State and Treasury Departments.

I also think the sanctions available in the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 should be considered, particularly broad economic sanctions targeting industries in Xinjiang that benefit China's political leaders or other "state-owned entities." We want to make sure that Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities do not suffer from such sanctions, but they do not much share in the wealth generated by Chinese populations right now.

China has been designated as a "Country of Particular Concern" since 1999. That designation carries with it the possibility of economic sanctions. This lever should be used now because, in my opinion, what is happening in *Xinjiang is currently the world's worst religious freedom situation—the forced "sinacization" of Islam through detention and severe restrictions on religious belief and practice.*

Targeted and tough economic sanctions are the only way to convince China's leaders that they have a clear interest in ending repression of China's Muslim minorities.

There is also an important role for the U.N here. I glad that Ambassador Currie is here with us today. What is happening in Xinjiang are clear violations of many international treaties and covenants where China is a party.

I realize that China's veto on the UN Security Council will create obstacles to many UN investigation, as will their presence on the UN Human Rights Council, but we should be making them use their veto, we should consider requesting a briefing on the situation at the Security Council, and work together the OIC and other Muslim majority countries to raise the issue within the UN system.

At a time when the Chinese government is seeking to gain allies through its Belt and Road initiative, particularly in Central Asia and Africa, it would seem the last thing they want is an international debate about their poor and abusive treatment of ethnic and religious minorities.

Finally, I want to commend the exemplary work of Radio Free Asia's Uyghur Service reporters. Despite unacceptable threats to their families they have kept working and have provided us with an extraordinary record of events. Your courage and professionalism are admirable. Thank you.

Senator, I commend you again for holding this important hearing to shine a light on an outrageous and horrible situation.

We all need to believe in the power of light and sunshine because only evil flourishes in the dark.

###