



ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
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July 29, 2021

Christopher J. Nassetta
President and Chief Executive Officer
Hilton Worldwide Holdings Inc.
7930 Jones Branch Drive
McLean, Virginia 22102

Dear Mr. Nassetta:

We write to raise concerns over recent reports that a Hampton by Hilton hotel is being constructed on the site of a mosque that was destroyed in Hotan prefecture in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China, in 2018. The site is emblematic of the Chinese government's campaign of widespread destruction of Uyghur religious and cultural sites in the XUAR and official efforts to eradicate Uyghurs' religious and cultural practices. These abuses are among those the U.S. government has determined to be genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. Hilton should not allow its name to be used to perpetuate and promote the cultural erasure and repression of the millions of Uyghurs living in the XUAR.

Over the past several years, authorities in the XUAR have demolished or damaged around 16,000 mosques and more than half of the region's other religious sites, such as shrines and cemeteries, according to the Commission's research. This destruction has taken place as authorities have demolished Uyghur neighborhoods that long stood as the cultural heart of Hotan, Kashgar, and other areas of the XUAR. Uyghurs have been displaced from the homes, mosques, and communities that have been integral to their cultural and spiritual lives for generations.

Meanwhile, peaceful expressions of Uyghur religious activity have been criminalized, and many Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims have been arbitrarily detained simply due to their religious or ethnic identity. Authorities have targeted Turkic Muslim religious figures in the XUAR, including state-sanctioned imams, for detention in both mass internment camps and prisons. Officials have also arbitrarily detained leading secular Turkic intellectuals and cultural figures, including Uyghur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz scholars, musicians, writers, and journalists in mass internment camps and other facilities.

On paper, the Chinese government has formally committed itself to preserve Uyghur and other Muslim ethnic groups’ cultural heritage, not only through its domestic legislation but also through its ratification of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. While the government has outwardly promoted cultural heritage protection in line with state goals—such as by enshrining the Uyghur cultural gathering known as the *meshrep* in a list of forms of intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding—it has simultaneously cracked down on Uyghur expressions of the *meshrep* and other community-based cultural practices, allowing only state-approved versions of such practices to be performed.

Official destruction of religious, cultural and historic sites in traditionally Uyghur areas has been carried out in the absence of consultation with those affected. This stands in violation of China’s Historic Cities Regulation and international standards such as UNESCO’s Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas and the International Council on Monuments and Sites’ (ICOMOS) Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas. China’s Historic Cities Regulation and its Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage both call for preservation efforts for designated historic areas.

As authorities in the XUAR have demolished the spaces meaningful to Uyghur life and carried out a campaign of mass detention, forced labor, and surveillance in the region, the continued presence of international brands in the XUAR has given the Chinese government a public relations tool to whitewash these human rights abuses. International companies continue to expand their presence in the XUAR without conducting due diligence into the ways this has facilitated the repression of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims. The Chinese firm overseeing the Hilton construction project in Hotan reportedly said it would “comply fully with all local laws, authorities and Hilton brand development standards.”

As a signatory to the UN Global Compact, Hilton has committed itself to supporting international human rights standards, and it is required to “address any negative human rights impacts related to [its] business.” Hilton has also stated its commitment to non-discrimination, prohibiting “discrimination based on any personal characteristic, including race, color, gender, religion or nationality.” Given these commitments, we ask that Hilton take steps to halt construction and otherwise disassociate itself and its brand from the hotel project in Hotan and reject complicity in the persecution of Uyghurs.

Sincerely,



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Chairman



Representative James P. McGovern
Co-Chairman



Representative Christopher H. Smith
Ranking Member



Senator Marco Rubio
Ranking Member