



ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
REPRESENTATIVE CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CHAIR
SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY, COCHAIR

March 6, 2024

Mr. Geoffrey Kent, Chairman Emeritus
Abercrombie & Kent USA LLC
1411 Opus Place Suite 300 - Executive Towers West II
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Dear Mr. Kent:

We write to raise concerns about the tours your company is offering to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) — a region where the Chinese government is committing genocide and other horrific human rights abuses targeting Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities. Authorities in the XUAR have subjected individuals from these ethnic minority groups to forced separation of children from their families; forced labor; and the forced sterilizations and forced abortions of women with the intent to lower birth rates. Millions have been arbitrarily detained, including leading religious figures, scholars, musicians, and writers, in mass internment camps and other detention facilities. Since January 2021, the U.S. Department of State has determined that these actions amount to genocide — a crime under international law according to the Genocide Convention. Furthermore, in August 2022, the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) released an assessment detailing how the Chinese government’s actions in the XUAR [“may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.”](#)

Tourism only serves to whitewash these atrocities — serving the interests of the Chinese Communist Party and government and not the interests of Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities living in the XUAR. According to [an August 2023 report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project \(UHRP\)](#), Abercrombie & Kent offers tours with stops in the XUAR, including Kashgar, Urumqi, and Turpan, where many religious and cultural sites — such as mosques and market bazaars — have been either demolished or appropriated for profit. It is unlikely that most Turkic and Muslim individuals who are involved in the tours you advertise participate voluntarily, given the discontent of these populations with official policies, as reported by our Commission. Their participation could be coerced through risk of punishment from authorities for failure to comply.

Make no mistake: under the current circumstances, tourism in the XUAR serves as a conduit for Chinese authorities’ repression of Turkic and Muslim peoples and facilitates the destruction and appropriation of their heritage and identity. Commercial tours offer visits to mosques in the region, while officials deny these communities the ability to practice their faith. Some tours even include visits to Uyghurs’ homes, while Uyghurs themselves are forcibly separated from their family members, both in the region and abroad. As

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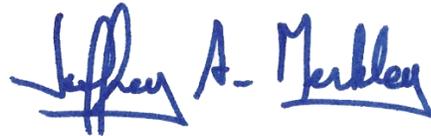
UHRP described in their report, “travel companies are implicitly supporting the normalization of genocidal Chinese government policies intended to destroy the Uyghur identity.” It is our strong belief that well-intentioned tourists should not be put in the position of condoning or supporting atrocities — or be used as propaganda pawns — allowing the Chinese government to cover up its genocide and crimes against humanity.

Upon conducting a review of your company, we found that while your American website no longer features tours in the XUAR, your tour titled [“The Search for Shangri-La.”](#) which includes stops in the XUAR, is still offered on your UK site. As a travel company with American clientele, we trust you understand and agree that business as usual is not possible given the repression taking place in the XUAR. We urge your company to immediately end all tours to the region. We have also sent a similar letter to other tour companies indicated in UHRP’s report and supplemented it by sending a letter to the U.S. State Department asking it to raise the travel advisory to Level 4 to ensure that no U.S. policies implicitly endorse the PRC’s atrocities. Thank you in advance and we look forward to your timely response to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Representative Chris Smith
Chair



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Cochair