



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

March 6, 2024

Brady Binstadt, CEO
Geographic Expeditions, Inc.
1016 Lincoln Boulevard
San Francisco, CA 94129

Dear Mr. Binstadt,

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. Upon conducting a review of your website, we found that you offer a tour of [“The Silk Road,”](#) with stops in the XUAR, including Kashgar and Urumqi, 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. According to an [August 2023 report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project \(UHRP\)](#), “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.

As a U.S.-based 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 ask you to cease operations of tours to the XUAR until the conditions that led to the genocide determination by the U.S. Secretary of State, as well as to the findings by the OHCHR that such behavior may constitute international crimes, no longer remain. Conducting tours in places where genocide is occurring is antithetical to Geographic Expeditions’ own commitment to responsible tourism. 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

CC: Jenny Velasco, Managing Director of Marketing