



The U.S. Response to China's War on Uyghurs
Written Statement submitted by Omer Kanat, Executive Director, Uyghur Human Rights Project

Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC)
Hearing on "China's War on Religion: The Threat to Religious Freedom
and Why it Matters to the United States"
Nov 20, 2025

I welcome the opportunity to submit a written statement to CECC, and thank the Staff and Commissioners for your leadership.

China's war on the Uyghurs is brutal and shocking. The U.S. has an obligation to carry out policies pursuant to the January 2021 policy finding of genocide and crimes against humanity. The evidence and legal analysis remain valid, and indeed both the Biden administration and the second Trump administration have re-affirmed that genocide is taking place.

On August 12, 2025, the State Department confirmed once again that China's atrocity crimes against Uyghurs continue. The annual China Country Report begins: "Genocide and crimes against humanity occurred during the year in China against predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang."

The U.S. must not countenance profits from complicity with the government's comprehensive forced-labor program, which has continued to grow stronger with new policies and implementation. Implementation of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, a global landmark introduced by this Commission, requires additional resources as well as systematic cooperation with our trading partners. Implementation of President Biden's executive orders barring U.S. capital from financing repression is also urgent.

A robust U.S. response to China's weaponization of supply chains and investment flows serves both national security and national interest. From critical minerals to pharmaceuticals to the entire automotive supply chain, Americans' needs cannot be held hostage by the PRC government's use of forced labor, subsidies, and other unfair trade practices.

Finally, the U.S. must take stronger action to punish and deter the PRC's transnational repression, further brutalizing the victims of its war on religion, even when on U.S. soil.

Recommendations to Congress

Ending profits from complicity and imposing costs for atrocities

1. Congress should urge the State Department to issue the mandatory reports and impose

additional Magnitsky Sanctions, as required under the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020.

2. Also pursuant to the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, CECC should seek information on the justification for the 2023 removal of the Ministry of Public Security's Institute of Forensic Science from the Commerce Department Bureau of Industry and Security Entity List.
3. Congress should press the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force (FLETF) to add new entities to the UFLPA Entity List.
4. Congress should seek information from the U.S. Trade Representative on implementation details of the forced-labor bans included as commitments in the trade agreements negotiated in 2025.
5. CECC should investigate and hold hearings on potential additions to President Trump's Executive Order 13959 of November 12, 2020, and President Biden's amendments announced June 3, 2021, banning U.S. investment in securities of companies based in the the PRC, to compile additional companies that should not receive American investment due to their involvement in human rights violations.
6. Congress should seek information on the State Department's implementation of the U.S. Visa Restriction Policy to Address the Forced Return of Uyghurs and Members of Other Ethnic or Religious Groups with Protection Concerns to China, [announced](#) March 14, 2025.
7. Congress should seek information from the State Department on actions taken under the 2022 [visa ban](#) intended to promote accountability for transnational repression committed by People's Republic of China (PRC) officials.
8. CECC and USCIRF should hold an annual joint hearing and continue to press for implementation of their recommendations to address atrocities, as detailed in their respective annual reports.
9. CECC should press for the House Foreign Affairs Committee to hold annual hearings on its annual reports, as mandated in Title III, Sec. 302 (i) (1), HR 4444.
10. Congress should pass the following bills:
 - [Uyghur Genocide Accountability and Sanctions Act \(H.R.4830/S.2560\)](#)
 - [Uyghur Policy Act \(H.R.2635/S.1542\)](#)
 - [Stop Forced Organ Harvesting Act of 2025 \(H.R.1503\)](#) (The Senate should take it up and pass it.)

Punishing and deterring transnational repression on U.S. soil

1. Congress and the Department of Justice should seek information from federal and state law-enforcement on their actions to punish and deter transnational repression (TNR).
2. Congress should pass the following bills:
 - [Preventing the Forced Return of Uyghurs Act \(S.2502\)](#)
 - [Combatting the Persecution of Religious Groups in China Act \(H.R.5838/S.3056\)](#)

- [Transnational Repression Policy Act \(H.R.4829/S.2525\)](#)
- [Strengthening State and Local Efforts to Counter TNR \(H.R.2139\)](#)
- [Law Enforcement Support and Counter TNR Act \(H.R.2116\)](#)
- [Countering TNR Act of 2025 \(H.R.2148\)](#)

Key features of genocidal religious persecution of Uyghurs since 2016

Mosques, Shrines, and Cemeteries

In 2019, UHRP published a [report](#) on the Chinese government's destruction of Uyghur mosques, shrines, and cemeteries. The report focuses on over 100 mosques that have been fully or partially destroyed since 2016. The iconic Kargilik Grand Mosque, built in 1540 CE, was completely demolished. Many mosques that remain have been altered by removing Islamic symbols and architectural features like domes, minarets, crescent moons, and Arabic script. While the destruction of Uyghur mosques is not new, the scale increased dramatically after the Chinese government launched its "Mosque Rectification Program" in 2016. Under this new campaign, authorities [destroyed](#) an estimated 5,000 Uyghur mosques in just three months, claiming that the buildings were in poor condition and posed a safety risk.

The government's actions are part of a deliberate campaign to eliminate not just these physical sacred spaces, but the Uyghur religious and cultural heritage they represent. By destroying places of worship, imprisoning religious leaders, and suppressing religious expression, the Chinese government has effectively prevented the Uyghur people from passing down their faith to the next generation. Rahile Dawut, a prominent Uyghur ethnographer who has since been sentenced to life in prison for "endangering state security", predicted this tragic fate in a 2012 interview: "If one were to remove these ... shrines, the Uyghur people would lose contact with earth. They would no longer have a personal, cultural, and spiritual history. After a few years we would not have a memory of why we live here or where we belong."

Chinese authorities' increased use of the formal prison system in the war on Uyghurs

A [UHRP analysis](#) published in 2024 found that the Uyghur Region has the world's highest incarceration rate, with 1 in 26 Uyghurs and other non-Han Turkic peoples in the Uyghur Region being imprisoned. Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples make up more than a third of China's total prison population, despite only being 1% of China's overall population. However, these statistics only include those who were formally imprisoned from 2017 to 2022. The total number of Uyghurs and other non-Han Turkic peoples detained in so-called reeducation camps, forced labor facilities, and other forms of arbitrary detention remains unknown.

To be clear, these statistics do not indicate increased criminality among Uyghurs. Rather, they demonstrate the criminalization of ordinary behavior and the disproportionate punishment Uyghurs face in the PRC judicial system. Other UHRP reporting, including a [2024 report](#) on the mass imprisonment of Uyghur religious women, reveals that Uyghurs have received long prison sentences for so-called crimes such as reading religious texts, fasting, and dressing modestly.

Imprisonment of Uyghur imams and female religious teachers

UHRP [compiled](#) an extensive database to arrive at a count of 1,046 confirmed cases of detention and imprisonment of imams and other religious figures by Xinjiang authorities. Of the 1,046 recorded cases, 428 have been sent to formal prisons, including 304 sentenced to prison terms, 202 have been detained in camps, and 18 have died while in detention or prison. The remaining cases are likely being held indefinitely or sentenced without reporting. The dataset confirms that hundreds of religious figures have been sentenced, without due process, to prison terms for quotidian religious practice and expression protected under Chinese law and internationally recognized human rights treaties. Imams have been sentenced for “illegal” religious teaching (often to children), prayer outside a state-approved mosque, the possession of “illegal” religious materials, and communication or travel abroad.

The research found prison sentences of 15 years or more for “teaching others to pray,” “studying for six months in Egypt,” “refusing to hand in [a] Quran book to be burned,” and a life sentence for “spreading the faith and for organizing people.”

The figures presented are not comprehensive, given extreme secrecy and lack of transparency in the Uyghur Region, and very likely represent a small fraction of the total number of religious figures detained. Nonetheless, the data provides an alarming indication of the scale and severity of the Chinese government’s persecution of religious figures since 2014. Reference: [China Detaining and Sentencing Uyghur Imams en Masse, UHRP Reveals](#)

Female religious teachers known as Būwi

In a [2024 report](#), UHRP documented the mass incarceration of Uyghur women for religious practice. Uyghur female religious leaders, known as būwi, have been especially targeted. Būwi serve as religious teachers, lead women’s religious gatherings, and conduct rituals. While most previous reporting focused on the persecution of Uyghur imams, UHRP’s reporting reveals that Uyghur religious women, [including](#) elderly women, have also been detained, prosecuted, and incarcerated amid the CCP’s “anti -extremism” campaigns beginning in 2017.

So-called “signs of religious extremism” used to justify detention include reading the Quran, fasting during Ramadan, daily prayer, eating halal foods, and dressing modestly – all ordinary, innocuous religious practices observed by Muslims worldwide. UHRP documented evidence of many women receiving 10+ year prison sentences for these religious practices. The longest sentence uncovered by UHRP’s reporting is that of Aytıla Rozi, an Uyghur woman sentenced to 20 years for teaching the Quran to a small group of women between 2009 and 2011. Many of these so-called “crimes” occurred decades ago, when the accused women were children. Leaked police files reveal that 91 women from a single county were detained simply for registering with the state as būwi, continuing a disturbing trend of retroactively criminalizing actions once permitted and even endorsed by the state.

Example from the leaked Xinjiang Police Files:



Helchem Pazil (海里且木·帕孜里)

- ID no. 652801194401100020
- Born: 1944
- **Detained:** Unknown
- Evidence of criminal activities: "Inciting ethnic hatred and discrimination" and "disturbing social order."
- **Sentence:** Ten years

In 2022, RFA Uyghur Service [reported](#) that Pazil was sentenced for participating in religious gatherings.

Forced renunciation of faith under threat of torture

CECC has heard from a number of survivors of the Chinese government's so-called "re-education" camps. They [recount](#) being forced to renounce belief in God and declare loyalty to Xi Jinping and the CCP. Detainees are required to confess and criticize their past religious activities and beliefs. Camp survivor Omir Bekali recalls another detainee sharing this self-criticism: "I was taught the Holy Quran by my father and I learned it because I didn't know better." Those who refuse to renounce their faith and comply with so-called "lessons" face horrific physical, sexual, and psychological torture. As UHRP reported in 2018, a Chinese-language tract stated that those sent to re-education were "sick in their thoughts," having been "infected" with extremism, comparing religious extremism to a drug, cancer or a virus. Those "infected with terrorist thought" need to be sent to re-education to undergo "hospital treatment." Thus, their detention is justified, not as punishment but rather an intervention, to ensure their entire family does not contract an "incurable disease." (See Szdiewski, Henryk, [The Mass Internment of Uyghurs: "We Want to be Respected as Humans. Is it too much to ask?"](#), Uyghur Human Rights Project, August 23, 2018.

Forced marriage violating religious freedom

In 2022, UHRP published a [report](#) on forced and incentivized inter-ethnic, inter-faith marriage affecting mostly Uyghur women. Chinese state media videos, government sanctioned stories, and accounts from women in the diaspora offer evidence that government incentivized and forced interfaith and interethnic marriages have been occurring in the Uyghur Region since 2014. Based on this evidence, UHRP has concluded that it is highly likely the Chinese government is systematically imposing forced interethnic marriages on Uyghur women.



Officials in the Uyghur Region have been directed to actively promote interethnic "contact,

exchange, and mingling,” including interethnic marriages, just as they have done in Tibet. Local officials have offered financial incentives for newly married interethnic couples, with one county including an “ethnic intermarriage reward fund” in their 2018 budget. The Chinese state maintains that interethnic marriage promotes ethnic unity and social stability. However, evidence indicates that the government’s program to incentivize and promote interethnic marriage is in fact a tactic intended to assimilate Uyghurs into Han society.

In August 2020, a video depicted the wedding of a Han man and Uyghur woman, featuring the couple thanking the CCP for the “beautiful life” the government had given them. The Uyghur voiceover with Chinese subtitles explains that there is an “urgent need” for 100 brides to “actively respond to the call from the government to promote marriage between Uyghurs and Han.”

A Uyghur camp survivor told Voice of America (VOA) that her neighbors “had to agree to wed their 18-year-old daughter to a Han Chinese out of fear that they could be sent to internment camps.” Local government officials forced the marriage after a Han Chinese man approached the young woman in the factory where she worked and took a photograph with her, which the officials claimed was proof that they were dating.

Transnational repression of Uyghur Americans

UHRP has [reported](#) extensively on the Chinese government’s extraordinary effort to hunt down and persecute Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic peoples from East Turkistan, in a series of 9 recent reports and briefings published since 2017. Reference: [Transnational Repression of Uyghurs \(collected reports and policy recommendations \(uhrp.org\)\)](#).

The research documents:

- 1,546 cases of serious human rights violations experienced by Uyghurs outside China from 1997 through March 2021.
- 292 known cases of Uyghurs deported to China from Arab states alone.
- 74% of diaspora Uyghurs living in democratic countries reported digital risks, threats, or forms of online harassment (according to a 2021 UHRP survey). Only 44 percent felt that their host governments take the intimidation seriously, and only 21 percent felt that the host governments would fix these issues.

UHRP’s 2019 report, “[Repression Across Borders: The CCP’s Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans](#),” documents how the Chinese government routinely carries out surveillance, threats and coercion on American soil to control the speech and actions of Uyghur Americans. The Chinese government’s program of transnational repression is an ambitious and well-resourced campaign affecting all Uyghur Americans, especially the many brave journalists, activists, and students engaged in raising awareness about the crisis of repression in their homeland.

The threats come by text, chat apps, voicemail, email, and messages delivered by third parties. Some members of the community report receiving such messages on a weekly or even a near-daily basis. Non-compliance could result in family members being taken to a concentration

camp.

This intimidation campaign constitutes an ongoing series of crimes committed with impunity on U.S. persons. It is illegal under U.S. federal and state law to issue threats that interfere with free-speech rights. For the Uyghur American community, the enduring and menacing presence of the Chinese government in their daily lives deprives them of their constitutionally protected rights and freedoms.

U.S. federal law enforcement recognized these issues in an unclassified FBI counterintelligence bulletin on violations of Uyghur civil rights on U.S. soil (PRC), [issued](#) in August 2021. UHRP recommends seeking an update and engagement with U.S. law enforcement to provide data to assist with implementation of law enforcement efforts upholding the civil rights of members of persecuted religious groups on U.S. soil against violations perpetrated by foreign state actors. In particular, Congress should seek to ensure that the FBI has a full understanding of the risks and other data, based on the CECC Annual Report and other fact-finding resources in relation to these two public documents on transnational repression on U.S. soil:

- [Transnational Repression — What is it, How you can get help to stop it | FBI](#) (undated).
- [Unclassified FBI Counterintelligence bulletin on violations of Uyghur civil rights on U.S. soil \(PRC\)](#), August 11, 2021.

About the Uyghur Human Rights Project

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) promotes the rights of the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim peoples in East Turkistan, referred to by the Chinese government as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), through research-based advocacy. UHRP documents violations; highlights human rights defenders, survivors, and victims; and researches avenues for defense and positive promotion of Uyghurs' human rights, especially in the arenas of policymaking, grassroots action, and cultural rights promotion. See more at uhrp.org.

UHRP reports cited:

[Twenty Years for Learning the Quran: Uyghur Women and Religious Persecution](#), 2024, Dr. Rachel Harris and Abduweli Ayup.

[UHRP Analysis Finds 1 in 26 Uyghurs Imprisoned in Region With the World's Highest Prison Rate](#), 2024, by Ben Carrdus and Peter Irwin.

[The Persecution of Uyghur Senior Citizens](#), 2024, by Dr. Henryk Szadziewski.

[Forced Marriage of Uyghur Women: State Policies for Interethnic Marriages in East Turkistan](#), 2022, by Andréa J. Worden, Nuzigum Setiwalidi, Dr. Elise Anderson, Dr. Henryk Szadziewski, Louisa Greve, and Ben Carrdus.

[Islam Dispossessed: China's Persecution of Uyghur Imams and Religious Figures](#), 2021, by Peter Irwin.

[No Space Left to Run: China's Transnational Repression of Uyghurs](#), 2021, by Bradley Jardine, Edward Lemon, and Natalie Hall.

[Repression Across Borders: The CCP's Illegal Harassment and Coercion of Uyghur Americans](#),

2019, by Greg Fay.

Additional References

[UHRP U.S. Sanctions Tracker](#)

