



ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS
SENATOR JEFF MERKLEY, CHAIRMAN
REPRESENTATIVE JAMES P. MCGOVERN, COCHAIRMAN

January 7, 2022

Brian Chesky
Chief Executive Officer
Airbnb
888 Brannan Street, 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Chesky,

We write to raise concerns over Airbnb’s business activities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China and to raise questions about Airbnb’s commitment to human rights and anti-discrimination in China as it sponsors the Beijing Winter Olympics. In particular, we are concerned about a recent report by Axios that some of Airbnb’s listings in the XUAR are located on land owned by an entity sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department. Axios found that more than a dozen Airbnb listings in the XUAR were located on land owned by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). According to the U.S. Department of State, the XPCC, a quasi-military organization, is directly involved in forced labor and possibly other human rights abuses in the XUAR.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Department of State found that China had committed genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in the XUAR. While Airbnb continues to maintain listings in the XUAR, it has not publicly condemned the continuing genocide taking place there, or other egregious, systematic human rights abuses being carried out against ethnic minorities in China. It also continues to operate in a country whose laws require hosts to discriminate based on ethnicity, place of origin, or lack of a passport, when the ability to obtain a passport can be impossible for people of some ethnic groups.

At a hearing convened by our Commission in July 2021, David Holyoke, Head of Olympics and Paralympics Partnership at Airbnb, testified that Airbnb regularly screens its platform for discriminatory content, and takes action when it finds such content. While Airbnb has stated that it is committed to anti-discrimination, it has also indicated that it is required to “follow local laws and regulations” in China—a requirement that inherently obliges it to engage in discrimination against Uyghurs, Tibetans, and other ethnic minorities in China.

Mr. Holyoke told the Commission in July that Airbnb’s values and policies reflect the human rights norms in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. These Principles stress the importance of

“respect[ing] the principles of internationally recognized human rights to the greatest extent possible” when domestic circumstances conflict with such rights. In order to respond appropriately in such situations, they advise companies “to consult externally with credible, independent experts, including from Governments, civil society, national human rights institutions and relevant multi-stakeholder initiatives.” In addition, the Principles outline a responsibility for companies to provide a remedy in the event they contribute to human rights violations, such as ethnic discrimination, and to verify the effectiveness of their response to the human rights impacts of their business.

We call upon Airbnb to answer the following questions:

- 1) What actions is Airbnb taking, beyond removing discriminatory listings, to remedy human rights violations in the XUAR and throughout China? If Airbnb is not taking any additional actions, why is it not doing so?
- 2) Has Airbnb reached out to government experts, civil society representatives, human rights advocates, and members of the Uyghur and Tibetan diaspora to consult with them on how best to remedy the human rights impacts of their continued business in China, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights?
- 3) Moving forward, will Airbnb commit to monitoring listings in the XUAR to ensure no listings are located on property owned by the XPCC or other entities sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department and/or involved in systematic human rights abuses, and to remove such listings if they are discovered?
- 4) In line with co-founder Joe Gebbia’s statement that “Airbnb’s mission is to create a world where anyone can belong anywhere,” does Airbnb commit to using its platforms to speak out actively on behalf of the human rights of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in China?

We look forward to hearing from you, and thank you in advance for addressing our concerns.

Sincerely,



Senator Jeffrey A. Merkley
Chairman



Representative James P. McGovern
Co-Chairman