

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing on Protection from Persecution: Establishing Humanitarian Pathways
for Hong Kongers and Uyghurs

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Testimony of Tahir Hamut Izgil
Uyghur poet and filmmaker

Good morning.

My name is Tahir Hamut Izgil. I am a Uyghur poet and filmmaker.

In the spring of 2017, the Chinese Communist government launched a large-scale detention of local ethnic groups, including Uyghurs. In August of the same year, I fled to the United States to seek asylum, for the safety of my family and myself. I was one of a very few lucky Uyghurs who was able to leave at that time. Many other Uyghurs could not get the same opportunity. They could not get passports, or their passports were confiscated. They lost the ability to travel abroad, and they were interned in concentration camps established by the Chinese government.

Refusal to give passports to Uyghurs is one of the most important methods enforced by the Chinese government to inhibit Uyghurs from taking refuge abroad. Radio Free Asia and the Uyghur Human Rights Project [reported](#) extensively ten years ago on this violation of the right to travel freely.

Then, in 2015, the Chinese government began confiscating passports from the few Uyghurs who had them. The confiscations initially started with the passports of Uyghurs who worked in the government. The large-scale detention in 2017 marked the beginning of confiscations of ordinary citizens' passports.

However, even Uyghurs who have been able to go abroad, despite such obstacles, still have great difficulty in achieving secure living conditions.

It has been four years since I applied for asylum here in the United States, and I still have not received asylum. My two daughters' Chinese passports expired in 2019 and they have no official status here. Some Uyghurs in the United States have been waiting for asylum status for 7 or 8 years. Although some Uyghur Americans are living in safe conditions and have work opportunities in the United States, many have not been granted legal residency status, and they are going through many hardships and anxieties. Many continue to receive threats from the Chinese government.

Uyghurs elsewhere around the world are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and resettlement to a safe place. These refugees' precarious fate is a huge worry for Uyghur diaspora communities. For example, more than 50 Uyghur asylum-seekers are being held in prisons in Thailand, with no country willing to take them. Tens of thousands of Uyghurs in Turkey are living in fear of being unable to obtain legal status, or being unable to relocate to another country.

Uyghurs who are abroad are in great danger when their Chinese passports expire. This is because the Chinese government has deliberately refused to renew them. The government tells Uyghurs they must go to China for renewal, unlike Han Chinese citizens, who can renew their passports at a Chinese embassy or consulate. The Uyghur Human Rights Project called this the "[weaponization of passports](#)." Uyghurs living in countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt are experiencing great hardships after their passport expires, because they do not have a valid passport to travel anywhere else, but at the same time they cannot get asylum status. They live in constant fear of being extradited to China.

In Turkey, more than 200 people have been waiting in UNHCR refugee camps to be granted safe haven. In Afghanistan, more than 100 Uyghur families in Kabul are living in horrendous straits, in great fear of the Chinese government, which has close ties with the Taliban regime. The danger is that some governments are treating Uyghur refugees as assets, to bargain with China over a variety of interests.

The root cause of these tragedies is the Chinese government's genocide against the Uyghurs. While the U.S. government and several Western parliaments formally recognized the Uyghur genocide, the international community must do more, and provide humanitarian assistance to Uyghurs abroad who are the victims of these crimes against humanity.

In conclusion, I urge the Congress to find out why Uyghurs' U.S. asylum applications have been in limbo for so many years, at a time when the U.S. government has recognized the genocide.

It is also urgent that the U.S. Congress pass a law to provide safe resettlement for Uyghur refugees around the world. At this time, when effective measures have not been taken to end China's genocide against the Uyghurs, it will give Uyghurs some hope for the future if the Congress passes a U.S. law to bring refugees to safety.

Thank you.