

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

Hearing

on

Growing Constraints on Language and Ethnic Identity in Today's China

Tuesday, April 5, 2022 – 10:00am

Virtual via Cisco Webex

Statement of Senator Jeff Merkley

Chair

Congressional-Executive Commission on China

- Good morning. Today's hearing of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China on "Growing Constraints on Language and Ethnic Identity in Today's China" will come to order.
- Before we turn to the subject of this hearing, I want to acknowledge that this is our first hearing since the publication of the Commission's annual report on human rights conditions and rule of law developments in China. Every year, the rigorously researched and sourced work of the Commission's non-partisan research staff makes a profound contribution to the understanding of these issues in Congress, the executive branch, the academic and advocacy communities, and elsewhere, and that is certainly true again this year. When the Chinese government seeks to mislead the world about the treatment of Chinese citizens and the government's critics, the fact-based reporting of the CECC Annual Report shines a light and helps document the truth.
- Increasingly, this work informs and catalyzes meaningful action. The *Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act* is the latest example in a string of significant laws that grew out of the CECC's reporting. As Congress now works to advance China-focused legislation, it's crucial that it include tangible steps advocated by this Commission on a bipartisan and bicameral basis, such as expanded humanitarian pathways for Hong Kong residents and Uyghurs fleeing Chinese government persecution, as well as the creation of a China Censorship Monitor and Action Group to protect U.S. businesses and individuals from censorship and intimidation.
- I'd like to thank the Commission's staff – incredible team – for its tireless, professional, and expert work preparing such a high-quality report. While it is truly a team effort with significant contributions from everyone on the staff, I'd like to especially recognize Megan Fluker, who played an integral role in eight of these annual reports and managed production of the last several before leaving the Commission last fall. Megan, I know you're on your next chapter but we really appreciate your many years of dedicated effort.
- Some of the most heart-breaking reporting details the genocide being perpetrated against Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur

Autonomous Region, as well as elements of eugenics in population control policies directed at ethnic minorities. These are not the only ways in which the Chinese Communist Party seeks to destroy religious and ethnic minorities. Chinese authorities have engaged in a years-long campaign of “sinicization,” requiring greater conformity with officially sanctioned interpretations of Chinese culture.

- One of the most pernicious aspects of this campaign targets ethnic minorities’ language and identity. Under a policy that promises “bilingual education,” authorities in fact largely replace instruction in ethnic minority languages with instruction in Mandarin Chinese. Meanwhile, only a fraction of the languages spoken or signed in China today receive official recognition and support, threatening the ability and rights of unrecognized language communities to use and develop their languages.
- These policies break promises made to ethnic minorities under China’s Constitution, under the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, and under international standards such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- In this hearing, we will hear from expert witnesses about the sinicization campaign that runs afoul of these standards for protecting linguistic rights. We’ll hear about recent substantial reductions in the use of Mongolian-language instruction and the harsh crackdown on Mongolian culture that followed protests over these policies. We’ll hear about insidious and widespread efforts to separate Tibetan children from their parents, placing them in boarding schools to disrupt the intergenerational transmission of mother languages. And we’ll hear about the detention and imprisonment that often befalls those who stand up for language, who stand up for cultural rights, including the personal experience of one of our witnesses after he opened a Uyghur language kindergarten.
- This coercive assimilation erodes language, culture, and identity for ethnic minorities in China. I look forward to today’s witnesses helping the Commission better understand the costs to communities of these policies as we work with Uyghurs, Tibetans, Mongolians, and others to protect their cultures from destruction.