

Testimony of Elfidar Iltebir

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CECC Hearing—"Implementation of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act and the Impact on Global Supply Chains"

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My name is Elfidar Iltebir and I was born in East Turkistan, Uyghurs' homeland where Uyghurs have been living for thousands of years and what China now calls the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Like many Uyghurs, my family also faced persecution at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). After waging more than six decades of repressive assimilationist policies to weaken and eliminate the Uyghur identity, the CCP under its general secretary Xi decided to implement the final solution and resorted to genocide in the 21st century. The CCP's ultimate goal is to completely annihilate the Uyghur identity, our cultural values and religious beliefs, and homogenize China's population by forcefully transforming Uyghurs into majority Han Chinese. To achieve this goal, the CCP has transformed our homeland into a totalitarian surveillance state; detained millions of people in detention camps, forced labor camps, and formal prisons; and subjected Uyghur people to such inhumane conditions, including torture, sexual abuse, forced sterilization, forced labor, and forced separation of families.

When my father, a prominent Uyghur writer and intellectual, felt threatened for his life in our homeland, our family fled China in 1992. Thanks to the American Government, we were able to seek refuge in the United States, our adopted homeland. Inspired by the belief that all human beings are endowed with certain rights and freedoms that governments are supposed to protect, not abuse, I wanted to help my people fight for their God-given rights and freedoms in this land of the free and home of the brave. I am now the President of the Uyghur American Association based here in Washington, DC. UAA is a nonpartisan community-based organization that promotes the preservation of Uyghur culture and advocates for the human rights, freedom, and self-determination of the Uyghur people. We serve as the primary hub for the Uyghur diaspora in the United States and respond to the needs of our community members on a variety of issues. Since 2017, we have focused major efforts on advocating for the Uyghur people being subjected to genocide in our homeland, including family, friends and other loved ones of UAA members.

The main point I would like to stress today is that the Chinese government's campaign of forced labor targeting Uyghurs is not purely an economic exploitation that benefits the Chinese companies. It is a critical part of China's systematic oppression of the Uyghur people and the ongoing genocide in the Uyghur homeland. The Chinese government's forced labor practices are tearing apart the fabric of Uyghur society, separating families and displacing them from their communities, stripping away their ethnic and religious identity, and leading to a reduction and dilution of Uyghur population. As Uyghur intellectuals, religious scholars, professionals, businesspeople, cultural icons, and tradition-bearers are still imprisoned in detention camps, forced labor camps, or formal prisons; and Uyghur men and women are enslaved in factories while their children are raised in state orphanages, this ongoing genocide puts Uyghur people at the verge of total annihilation. And we believe that is the ultimate goal of the CCP.

I want to share a quick story of my friend Kalbinur Gheni, who now lives in DC. In 2018, her sister Renagul was taken to a concentration camp for praying at her father's funeral and possessing religious literature. She was later transferred to a prison and forced to work at a garment factory inside of the prison. Her children were separated from her family. The Chinese government not only detained twelve other members of Kalbinur's family and sent them to camps and later to prisons, it has also been harassing her on US soil for speaking out about her detained family members. She received threatening messages directly from the Chinese police almost every week last year.

Many more members of our community have similar stories of loved ones being detained and exploited. This is one reason our community fought so hard for the passage of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) and why we continue to fight for its full enforcement. We stayed up many nights writing thousands of letters, made even more phone calls, and roamed the halls at Capitol Hill, knocking on every door to deliver our message. Our message was simple: **Stop sourcing goods from supply chains tainted with Uyghur forced labor. No business with genocide. No profit from genocide.** On behalf of Uyghur Americans, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Rubio, Senator Merkley, Representative Smith, and Representative McGovern for your leadership and to many others who were instrumental in passing the UFLPA. Thank you for refusing to make Americans complicit in China's genocide against Uyghurs and for putting universal values of human rights and dignity above economic interests.

We were overjoyed with the passage of the UFLPA. We believed the UFLPA would be a turning point in stopping China's genocide. **We believed it would be a catalyst for greater awareness among businesses of the CCP's atrocities in the Uyghur homeland, that it would compel them to investigate and cut links to supply chains connected to Uyghur forced labor in the Uyghur homeland and across China.** We believed we would see the shift we had been waiting for since the beginning of this genocide and that the Chinese government would get the message loud and clear from the United States: **We stand against the ongoing genocide against Uyghurs and we're not spending an American dollar on any goods that are tainted by the forced labor of the Uyghur people. Americans will not consume or profit from the proceeds of genocide.**

However, when I recently saw in my neighborhood grocery store the red date products that were produced by the Bingtuan or the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), which is a paramilitary organization that implements the Chinese government's genocidal policies in the region and facilitates Uyghur forced labor, it felt like a slap in my face. How are the US-sanctioned XPCC's products being displayed on shelves in the US in packaging with images of dancing Uyghurs and outlines of Uyghur scenery? As an Uyghur American, every time I shop for clothing items, grocery items, or electronics, or look at automobiles or solar panels, I think about how these "Made in China" products might have been made by a loved one in my hometown subject to forced labor and if not my loved one that of another fellow Uyghur here in the United States. Why, I ask myself, are Chinese companies still able to circumvent the UFLPA and continue to profit from Uyghur forced labor? The human cost of this forced labor is why it is so important to ensure that the UFLPA is fully and rigorously implemented the way it is intended. I know there are hundreds of hard-working people at the Customs and Border Protection Agency, the Forced Labor Enforcement Task Force and other government agencies as well as human rights and workers rights groups that are committed to enforcing the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act. I also know there are

many challenges, gaps and loopholes that require us to keep working together to fully implement and enforce the UFLPA so that American businesses and consumers don't become complicit in the genocide against Uyghurs. ***We must face these challenges and many more head on and strengthen enforcement mechanisms to ensure that American and Chinese businesses and the Chinese government get the message: No business with Uyghur genocide.***

As Uyghur-Americans, we are prepared to contribute to the successful implementation and enforcement of the UFLPA so that we can help deliver that message. We may not be able to close the camps overnight, to reunite our families this Ramadan, to stop the Chinese government's mass sterilization of Uyghur women by the next session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and much more that we need to end this genocide. ***But as I sit here today, I can say with confidence that together we can stop products made with Uyghur forced labor from entering into US soil and make this genocide costly on China. We can be an example for our allies to implement similar laws so "Made in China" products tainted with Uyghur forced labor cannot enter any markets that value human beings and fair trade.***

If there is one thing we can ask the U.S. Government on behalf of the Uyghur American Association, that would be to hold the Chinese government and affiliated entities accountable for the genocide and crimes against humanity by imposing economic cost on Chinese officials and companies implementing, facilitating, and supporting this genocide. The United States passed two historic legislations, Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, signed by the Trump Administration, and Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, signed by the Biden Administration. Yet, as far as we know, no Chinese official or entity has been sanctioned under these legislative authorities. Both administrations recognized China's atrocities as genocide. Yet, US businesses are still operating in the genocide zone, US companies are still selling technology to Chinese companies implementing this genocide, and US companies are still investing in Chinese companies supporting the Chinese government's genocidal policies. We need to ensure no American technology or investment is flowing to Chinese companies that are linked to China's genocide against Uyghurs and no Chinese products tainted with Uyghur forced labor are entering our territory. First we, as Americans, need to eliminate our inadvertent complicity in this ongoing genocide and then we can ask our allies and partners to do the same so that the Chinese government is held accountable for its genocide and crimes against humanity it is committing against Uyghurs in the 21st century.