

## **Written Testimony on China's Transnational Repression at CECC Hearing: Rushan Abbas**

My name is Rushan Abbas. I am an Uyghur-American, a mother and a Uyghur rights activist. I am the founder and Executive Director of Campaign For Uyghurs (CFU.) I currently live in Falls Church, Virginia but I was born in Urumqi, the capital city of the so-called 'Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region'. Xinjiang is a name that has been designated by the Chinese government and means the "New Frontier". However, it is important to note that historically and geographically, this area has been known as East Turkistan. This name pays respect to the Uyghur and other Turkic groups who have inhabited the region for centuries. My activism is focused on the human rights and freedoms of the Uyghur people. The situation in East Turkistan has raised global concerns, as there have multiple determinations by US, NGO, and other government entities of systemic discrimination against Uyghurs by the Chinese government amounting to crimes against humanity and genocide. By raising awareness and speaking out against these injustices, I hope to counter Chinese propaganda and contribute to the international dialogue and efforts to safeguard the rights and dignity of Uyghurs.

### **Introduction to Transnational Repression (TNR)**

Thank you for giving me the platform to testify about China's transnational repression and long-arm policing of Uyghurs in the diaspora. It is essential to shed light on the various tactics employed by the Chinese government to intimidate and silence Uyghurs who live on American soil. Surveillance is an ever-present reality that we face collectively as Uyghurs in the region, and also diaspora members. The feeling of being constantly watched weighs heavily on my mind. There have been occasions where I have suspected the presence of Chinese agents within our communities, keeping a tight watch on our activities and reporting back to their superiors. The presence of online surveillance, including hacking attempts and strange online activities, as well as systematic hate speech dissemination through bot accounts, and libel targeted at myself and other Uyghur individuals. These actions jeopardize the safety of Uyghur individuals by creating online echo chambers of hate and disinformation.

However, it is the targeting of our families that has caused immense distress and anguish within the Uyghur diaspora. The Chinese government's ruthless approach extends to our loved ones who still reside in East Turkistan. We hear stories of harassment, arbitrary detention, and forced disappearance, all meant to exert pressure on us and deter any attempts to expose the truth about the atrocities being committed against the Uyghurs.

These threats and intimidation tactics have created a suffocating atmosphere of fear, making it challenging for Uyghur diaspora members to speak out, testify in public, or participate in interviews. We are torn between our moral obligation to fight for the survival of our people, who

are being systematically erased in the region, and our familial obligation of minimizing potential risk to vulnerable relatives.

It is essential for the international community to understand the gravity of the threats faced by the Uyghur diaspora and to support and amplify the courageous voices that speak out. By standing in solidarity with us, you send a powerful message to the CCP that we are not alone and at the very least, the United States stands for its constituents' safety. Together, we can shed light on the Chinese government's transnational repression and work towards bringing about justice and accountability for the countless victims of these heinous human rights abuses.

### **Personal Story**

My family's personal experience serves as a harrowing testament to the grave repercussions faced by Uyghur activists and their loved ones who dare to use their freedom of speech to advocate for human rights. In 2018, we received news that 24 of my husband's family members had gone missing and were likely detained. I spoke up about the unjustful arrests, and highlighted the Uyghur genocide and crimes against humanity being committed by the Chinese government, on September 5, 2018. On September 11th, exactly five years ago, the authorities arbitrarily detained my sister, Dr. Gulshan Abbas, who, to this day, remains a victim of their unjust actions. It was only in December 2020 that we received indirect information through a third party, confirming her unfair sentencing on fabricated charges of 'terrorism' and 'social disruption'. The spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs later verified these distressing revelations during a press conference.

My sister is an apolitical person and the circumstances surrounding her abduction are direct retribution imposed upon my own activism, highlighting the Chinese Communist Party's utilization of transnational kin punishment and repression. This excruciatingly painful situation unveils the extent to which Chinese authorities resort to arbitrary detention, persecution, and a flagrant disregard for justice to squash dissent and promote their own political agenda.

I also stand before you today to share a deeply distressing story that reveals another dark reality of China's transnational repression. In January 2023, my father-in-law, Abdulkarim Zikrullah Idris, tragically left this world at the age of 81. What is truly heartbreaking is that our family learned of his passing on August 15th, seven months after it occurred. The exact date and circumstances surrounding his death remain shrouded in uncertainty, leaving us in a state of anguish and longing for closure.

In the era of instant communication, internet and advanced technologies like AI, Uyghurs encounter radio silence when seeking updates on the well-being of their loved ones. The last time my husband was able to communicate with his father was on April 25, 2017, and for the past 6

and a half years, we have been uninformed about his location and health, until recently. I must also add that my husband has not been able to see his father for more than twenty years, preventing him from bidding a final farewell or participating in a proper burial.

My mother-in-law Habibehan Idris has been reported to be outside of the camps, while her children, Turanisahan Idris, Bu'Aisha Idris, Bu'Hadiqa Idris, and Abdurahim Idris, are missing and reportedly detained and their spouses and children are also missing. She currently battles illness, which is made all the more challenging by the absence of the caregiving support that her children would have provided because they too have also been imprisoned by the Chinese government.

The absence of closure and being forced to live in the unknown about the fate of our family members is a blatant violation of basic human rights by the Chinese regime, and underscores the ongoing suffering endured by the Uyghurs.

CFU's Program Directors, Arslan Hidayat's in-laws, his father-in-law Abdurashid Tohti, mother-in-law Tajigul Qadir, and two brother-in-laws Ametjan Abdurashid and Mohamed Ali Abdurashid are missing since mid-2017. The Chinese government refused to provide any information about these detained individuals. The only information they have is that they have been given long-term prison sentences for fabricated charges of "disturbing social order" and "preparing to commit terrorist activities."

The Chinese government claims to be operating in accordance with the "rule of law" and commits to protecting "the public's right to information" in court rulings in our homeland. However, none of these assertions seem to hold true in the cases involving Uyghurs.

### **China's Intimidation Tactics**

As mentioned before, due to China's transnational repression and intimidation tactics Uyghurs are hesitant to speak out, testify, or participate in interviews. This reluctance stems from the threats issued by the Chinese government, which has created an atmosphere of fear and suppression. Consequently, Uyghurs refrain from sharing their experiences and knowledge, depriving the world of valuable insights and hindering efforts to shed light on the situation. Amnesty International's research, captured in the study "Nowhere Feels Safe," involved interviews with individuals from Uyghur, Kazakh, Uzbek, and other ethnic backgrounds residing in 22 countries. An important revelation emerged: approximately two-thirds, hesitated to link their names to the study, driven by concerns over potential consequences for themselves or their families stemming from Chinese authorities.

The report “We know you better than you know yourself”: China’s transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora revealed that around 2/3 of Uyghurs surveyed have been directly threatened and experienced threats to their family while living in the U.K. and about 4 in 5 Uyghurs report to being directly threatened or having their families threatened by Chinese authorities while living in Turkey.

The Chinese government employs various methods, such as phone calls, emails, or social media messages, to intimidate Uyghur diaspora members. These tactics involve harassment, threats, or warnings that aim to instill fear and dissuade individuals from persisting in their activism or advocacy efforts. This direct form of communication can evoke intense intimidation, leaving Uyghur diaspora members feeling vulnerable and anxious.

Instances in the United States exemplify these tactics. Uyghurs in the US have reported receiving phone calls from Chinese authorities or even family members in the region, warning them that their online activities or activism could lead to the detention or harm of their relatives. An illustrative case involves a Uyghur American who carried a photograph of his detained sister as a symbol of his advocacy against CCP's abuses. When his parents contacted him, they delivered a distressing ultimatum: to ensure his sister's safety, he was pressured to suspend his activism. This situation underscores the extent of pressure and coercion exerted on Uyghur diaspora members to silence their voices.

Safeguard Defenders’ recent report “Targeted in Turkiye, China’s Transnational Repression Against Uyghurs” further exposed China’s tactics of threatening the Uyghur community to stopping activism work; producing pro-China propaganda; and/or spying on other Uyghurs. The report identifies how the CCP’s patterns of harassment are organized by local Chinese police and state agents that are operating in collaboration with employees within Chinese Embassies. They have formulated networks in East Turkistan that are structured around specific Uyghur neighborhoods or districts in China. Their networks involve cooperation between Chinese police, “Neighborhood Working Groups,” and Chinese police operatives. The Chinese police exploit intelligence gathered through these transnational networks, and information known by family members in the region, to exert control over Uyghurs in the diaspora. Although the report is on Uyghurs in Turkey, most of the tactics being used by Chinese police against Uyghurs share stark similarities to Uyghur Americans.

The specific repression tactics include threatening to harm their family in East Turkistan, using coercion to compel the Uyghur community into collaboration by refraining from processing their passport renewal requests, offering financial incentives, and even luring them with what they yearn for the most: reconnecting with their families. Uyghurs in the diaspora are coerced to become informants, remain silent about human rights violations in the Uyghur region, or take part in pro-CCP propaganda. The report “We know you better than yourself”: China’s

transnational repression of the Uyghur diaspora (2023) also indicates a significant shift in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) approach since 2017, with a heightened emphasis on deploying Uyghur informants, employing intimidation tactics to silence open discourse among Uyghurs, and enlisting them to contribute to the creation of favorable depictions of China.

I have been a target of attacks and harassment by Uyghurs in the diaspora whose family members are in detention back home. They have used tactics such as hate speech, libel and blackmail to discredit my advocacy, and reinforce disinformation and propaganda by the CCP. They are being reported to the FBI.

Uyghurs in exile are monitored closely, both physically and digitally. This surveillance can range from monitoring online activities and social media presence to physical surveillance, including tracking movements, infiltrating community organizations, and attending public events where Uyghur diaspora members gather. Chinese security agents or informants may be present within these communities, keeping a watchful eye on their activities and reporting back to authorities. The objective of conducting such surveillance is to keep tabs on Uyghur activists, advocates, and community members, instill a sense of constant scrutiny, and create a climate of fear.

Furthermore, Uyghurs abroad frequently experience calls from family members or law enforcement personnel, pressuring them to disclose details about their current location, educational institution, and information concerning other Uyghurs hailing from the same hometown as the inquiring official, thus falling under their surveillance "jurisdiction." It's essential to note that the Chinese Communist Party has no rightful claim to personal and identifiable information of Uyghurs living outside China; however, these individuals are compelled to provide information under duress.

The Chinese government makes a point to use tactics that put immense pressure on diaspora members to fear potential consequences for their loved ones who remain in East Turkistan. This involves using family members as leverage to pressure, coerce, or silence Uyghurs abroad. Families experience harassment, arbitrary detention, and even forced disappearance, leaving Uyghur diaspora members torn between raising awareness about the atrocities and protecting their vulnerable relatives.

By using these tactics, the Chinese government aims to suppress dissent, maintain control over the diaspora community, and discourage Uyghurs from advocating for the rights of their fellow Uyghurs. These actions create a climate of fear and vulnerability, making it difficult for Uyghur diaspora members to openly express their concerns, share information about human rights abuses, or support international efforts to hold China accountable for its actions. As such, it has become increasingly crucial to support and amplify the voices of the diaspora community, empowering them to share their experiences while ensuring their safety and protection.

## **Legislative and Policy Recommendations**

In addressing China's transnational repression and supporting Uyghurs in the diaspora, there are several policy suggestions and legislative steps that can be considered.

We recommend the United States introduce and pass legislation that explicitly condemns China's transnational repression tactics, focusing on the protection of Uyghur activists, advocates, and their families. The legislation can provide legal remedies for cases of harassment, intimidation, or threats faced by Uyghur community members, enabling them to seek justice and hold perpetrators accountable. It can also establish mechanisms for individuals to report incidents and receive support.

The introduction of the 'Transnational Repression Policy Act' (TRPA) on March 16th, 2023, by Senator Jeff Merkley, Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Ben Cardin, and Senator Bill Hagerty—members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, is a good start. The TRPA, if enacted, would greatly assist Uyghurs facing transnational repression by China. This commitment from the United States would strengthen efforts to advocate for Uyghur rights and work towards a more secure and just global environment for all individuals affected by transnational repression.

The U.S. government should consider implementing targeted sanctions on Chinese officials and entities involved in transnational repression and human rights abuses against the Uyghur community. These sanctions can include freezing assets, restricting access to financial systems, and imposing travel bans. By targeting those responsible for human rights violations, the U.S. sends a strong message that such actions will have consequences and discourages other countries from engaging in similar behavior.

The United States can engage in diplomatic efforts to mobilize international support in addressing the issue of transnational repression carried out by China. This can involve championing resolutions or joint statements at the United Nations and other international forums, urging countries to explicitly condemn China's actions and take a firm stance against transnational repression. Collaborating with like-minded countries, the U.S. can also establish multilateral initiatives aimed at investigating and countering China's repressive actions.

The U.S. should work closely with its allies and partners to strengthen intelligence sharing related to transnational repression activities carried out by China. Enhanced collaboration allows for the identification of networks and individuals involved in such activities and helps build a comprehensive understanding of China's methods. The intelligence gathered can be used to expose tactics, support legal action, and strengthen advocacy efforts.

The United States can take steps to raise awareness about China's transnational repression and the threats faced by the Uyghur diaspora. This can involve supporting media campaigns, hosting public events, and sponsoring educational initiatives that inform the public about the situation. Additionally, the U.S. government can work with human rights organizations, media outlets, and Uyghur community representatives to create safe platforms for Uyghurs to share their testimonies, ensuring their voices are heard and their stories are documented.

In an era of extensive surveillance, protection of digital rights is crucial. The U.S. can introduce policies and initiatives to strengthen online privacy, encryption standards, and cybersecurity practices, specifically focused on the Uyghur diaspora. These efforts can involve providing resources, training, and guidance on secure digital practices, while also advocating for international agreements and norms that condemn state-sponsored hacking and cyber espionage activities.

By implementing these policy suggestions, the United States government can take a proactive approach in addressing China's transnational repression, supporting the Uyghur diaspora, and fostering international collaboration to seek justice and accountability for Uyghurs.

## **Conclusion**

It is crucial that we shed light on the plight of countless families torn apart by China's reprehensible tactics. By denying basic human rights and resorting to arbitrary detention, the Chinese government seeks to silence those who speak up for justice and challenge their oppressive regime. The agony faced by my family is not unique; it is a testament to the suffering endured by many others who fall victim to the same repressive tactics. As we remember my family members, my relatives, my loved ones, let us also advocate for the rights of those unjustly imprisoned, offer support to their loved ones left behind, and strive for a world where transparency, empathy, and justice prevail. Only through consistent and unwavering efforts can we hope to make a difference in the lives of those affected by transnational repression and bring an end to this cycle of suffering.