

**Written Statement for the Record**  
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**“Surveillance, Suppression and Mass Detention: Xinjiang’s Human Rights Crisis”**

Thank you, Chairman Rubio, Chairman Smith and other members of the Commission for convening this important hearing today. I am pleased to be able to appear before the Commission on behalf of the US mission to the United Nations and discuss our concerns regarding the growing human rights crisis in Xinjiang, with a particular focus on how this crisis is being addressed – or not – at the United Nations, including through its various human rights mechanisms and deliberative bodies. I would like to submit my full remarks for the record.

As Secretary Pompeo noted yesterday in his op-ed welcoming the first ever US-sponsored Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, the State Department recently hosted six journalists from Radio Free Asia’s Uighur Service to hear directly from them about the situation on the ground in Xinjiang. What RFA, as well as the Uighur Service at VOA, have documented over the past year is truly disturbing. Their reporting indicates that Chinese authorities are likely detaining hundreds of thousands of Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in what can only be described as internment camps across Xinjiang. There, they are subjected to ‘political re-education’ designed to undermine their distinct Uighur identity. One of these journalists, Gulchehra Hoja, will testify in the next panel, and will undoubtedly tell you about how 23 of her family members – twenty three -- have been detained, and how since their detention, the authorities have provided little to no information about her family’s well-being.

According to a growing number of credible reports by media and human rights organizations, a version of Gulchehra’s story is becoming the norm for nearly every Uighur living outside China who has family still in Xinjiang. In fact, having a family member overseas appears to be a key trigger for increased scrutiny for Uighurs living in Xinjiang. Likewise, having studied, traveled or worked overseas, appearing to be an observant Muslim, and having an above average education also seem to be among the reasons that certain individuals are subject to intensive scrutiny by the authorities, including detention in the camps. Think about that: over the past year, hundreds of thousands of law-abiding Uighur citizens of China – men, women and even children – have disappeared into state custody, with barely any notice from the international community. That is why this hearing is so timely and important.

The United States is deeply troubled by the Chinese government’s worsening crackdown on Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslims in China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Since April 2017 the Xi Jinping leadership, under the guise of fighting “terrorism,” “secession,” and “religious extremism,” has greatly intensified the Chinese Communist Party’s long-standing repressive policies against mainstream, non-violent Muslim cultural and religious practices in Xinjiang. The stated goal of the current campaign is to “Sinicize religion” and “adapt religion to a socialist society,” suggesting that Beijing wagers that it now possesses the political, diplomatic,

and technological capabilities to transform religion and ethnicity in Chinese society in a way that its predecessors never could, even during the peak horrors of the Cultural Revolution and other heinous Maoists campaigns intended to remake Chinese society.

The scope of this campaign is truly breathtaking: authorities now prohibit “abnormal” beards and the wearing of veils in public, and classify refusal to watch state television, refusal to wear shorts, abstention from alcohol and tobacco, refusal to eat pork, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, or practicing traditional funeral rituals, as potential signs that individuals harbor extreme religious views. Chinese authorities have banned parents from giving their children a number of traditional Islamic names, including “Muhammad,” “Islam,” “Fatima,” and “Aisha,” and have reportedly required children under age 16 who have Islamic names to change them. Of particular concern, since 2015 Chinese authorities have increasingly criminalized or punished the teaching of Islam to young people—even by their parents—adopting at least six laws or regulations which put parents and religious educators at legal risk for promoting non-violent Muslim scripture, rituals, and clothing to children. Chinese authorities also continue to crack down in particular on the use of Uighur and other minority languages at universities and in classroom instruction.

Failing to comply with these restrictions, or activities such as communicating with relatives abroad and studying in foreign countries, has reportedly led to the detention of a large number of Uighurs and other Muslims, including families and children, minorities in facilities for purported “patriotic re-education.” Detainees are required to learn the Chinese language, recite Chinese and Xinjiang laws and policies, watch pro-government propaganda videos, express their gratitude to the Communist Party and General Secretary Xi Jinping, and renounce their ethnic identities, religious beliefs, and mainstream cultural and religious practices. Detainees are granted no due process or contact with their families, and periods of detention have ranged from several months to indefinite detention in many cases. **A wide array of evidence indicates that the number of individuals detained in such re-education centers since April 2017 numbers at least in the hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions.** There are even disturbing reports that young children have been sent to state-run orphanages if even one of their parents is detained in the internment camps. Notable detainees reportedly include well-known Uyghur athletes, prominent businesspersons, scholars, and students. There have been credible reports of at least two dozen deaths in these camps, including senior citizens who were incarcerated, including the widely revered 82-year old Uighur religious scholar Muhammed Salih Hajim. We call on China to end these counterproductive policies and free all those arbitrarily detained.

To guarantee that this suppression continues beyond the internment camps into the daily lives of all Uighurs, Chinese authorities have constructed a highly intrusive, high-tech surveillance system in Xinjiang, which many experts fear will be extended throughout China. This system includes thousands of surveillance cameras, including in mosques; facial recognition software; obligatory content-monitoring apps on smartphones and GPS devices on cars; widespread new police outposts with tens of thousands of newly-hired police, and even Party personnel embedded in people’s homes; and compulsory collection of vast biometric datasets on ethnic and religious minorities throughout the region, including DNA and blood samples, 3-D photos, iris scans, and voiceprints. Human Rights Watch has documented that many of these DNA samples were collected deceptively as part of what regional officials called a Xinjiang-wide “health”

campaign. This surveillance system has spurred security experts and Xinjiang specialists to label it one of the world's most intrusive police states.

As with many things related to China's human rights abuses, the repression does not stop at the Chinese border. The detention and persecution of Uighur and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang has compelled them to stop communicating with their family and friends based abroad, including in the United States, for fear of retribution by authorities. We have received reports that U.S. lawful permanent residents and family members of U.S. citizens have been detained in these detention centers for indefinite periods. We have also received reports that U.S. citizens have been detained and interrogated while visiting Xinjiang. In addition to the cases of the RFA journalists mentioned earlier, we note that more than thirty relatives of Ms. Rebiya Kadeer have been disappeared or detained. This treatment of U.S. citizens, U.S. LPRs, and their family members is unacceptable, and we unequivocally condemn these actions by the Chinese government. China must provide information about the locations and medical conditions of those detained and immediately release them if there is no evidence of actual criminal activity. We also have demanded that, at a minimum, China should meet its obligations under international law to provide consular access, not to mention minimum standards of due process, to those it has detained.

We also are concerned by reports of Chinese authorities harassing Uighurs abroad in order to compel them to act as informants against other Uighurs, return to Xinjiang or remain silent about the situation there, sometimes by detaining their family members. This includes harassment of American citizens, LPRs, and individuals legally residing in the United States. China has applied similar pressure to dual nationals or family members of citizens in other countries. Dating back to at least 2003, China has pressured other countries to forcibly return Uighurs, at times claiming that individuals are members of "extremist groups" without credible evidence. China has also abused the INTERPOL Red Notice system, inappropriately placing international security travel notices on religious and political dissidents. We applaud governments that have resisted Chinese pressure and upheld their commitments to international human rights.

What is happening in Xinjiang is not just a human rights matter; it is also a security issue. China, like every other country, has the right to protect its security. But for these measures against violent extremism to be effective, they must promote good governance, inclusion, and respect for the rights of its minority citizens. However, draconian, indiscriminate, and disproportionate controls on ethnic minorities' expressions of their cultural and religious identities have the potential to incite radicalization and violence. Chinese authorities appear to be targeting law-abiding Uighurs -- including non-violent activists and advocates for human rights - - as terrorist threats on the basis of their political, cultural and religious beliefs and practices, even if they do not advocate violence.

Given the severity of this crisis, it is worth asking: why haven't the pre-eminent human rights bodies of the United Nations taken up this issue, exposed it and demanded changes in China's policies? Part of the answer certainly lies with China's membership on the UN's Human Rights Council, its role as a permanent member of the Security Council, and its ability to continue to portray itself as a developing country from the "global south" in alignment with the Group of 77. From its perch on the HRC, China is able to effectively block any action on its appalling human

rights record in Xinjiang, as well as scrutiny of the broader human rights crackdown underway in China. Likewise, by severely limiting access for special rapporteurs, human rights experts and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Chinese limit the discourse around these abuses. As a veto-wielding member of the Security Council, China effectively shuts down not only any discussion of its human rights abuses, but uses its position to shield other bad actors from criticism and generally block efforts to raise human rights issues in the Council. In doing so, China gains favor with other countries that have poor human rights records – of which there remain far too many in the UN -- and these help block criticism of China in the General Assembly and other forums.

Perhaps more disturbing than these defensive strategies, however, is China's ongoing, comprehensive effort to re-write the entire normative framework of international human rights in a manner that is more aligned with its authoritarian political system and the interests of the Chinese Communist Party. This effort includes an emphasis on the 'right to development' versus fundamental civil and political rights, and the promotion of 'win-win' cooperation on human rights that privileges the interests of governments over their basic obligation to respect inherent human rights that attach at the individual level. A key aspect of this effort is China's ability to obfuscate its intentions behind talk of 'mutually beneficial cooperation' and a "shared future of all humanity" that appeals to other governments who dislike being criticized for human rights violations. The Chinese took a major step forward at the March 2018 session of the UN Human Rights Council, when the Council passed a Chinese resolution promoting 'win-win cooperation' on human rights. The United States was the only vote against the resolution. At the same session, I listened in horror as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights praised the good intentions he saw behind Xi Jinping's 'win-win' slogans, seemingly oblivious to the threat they pose to the very notion of respect for individual human rights. Instead, he offered only a wan concern about the "mis-match" between the aspirations of "win-win" and its implementation on the ground – as if they were not fruit of the same poisonous tree. In the same speech, Prince Zeid expressed strong concerns about "hate speech" and other perceived human rights abuses in the U.S. It was nothing short of surreal.

In April, I had the opportunity to hear directly about the situation in Xinjiang from Mr. Dolkan Isa, who is the president of the World Uighur Congress. He was in New York to attend the annual meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples. Mr. Isa is a quiet and diligent person, now a naturalized German citizen, who carefully and deliberately explains the repression that his community in Xinjiang is experiencing – despite the fact that his own family has been targeted by the authorities and he has essentially lost communication with them. We had our discussion about this situation while we sat in a small lounge outside the UN Security Council. The fact that Mr. Isa was even able to sit in that lounge, inside the walls of the UN, was a minor miracle given the extent to which Chinese authorities have gone to block him from entering the premises over the years. In April 2017, while attempting to attend the same Forum as a member of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization delegation, Mr. Isa was forcibly removed from the UN premises after representatives of the Chinese mission to the UN alleged he was a security threat. The Chinese authorities provided no evidence to back up their claims but UN security removed Mr. Isa nonetheless. This shocking behavior was subsequently documented in a report on reprisals against human rights activists by the UN Secretary General. This report, which criticized the manner in which UN security responded and called for changes

to the way the UN handled such allegations, was released one month before the 2018 Indigenous Peoples Forum. Yet the Chinese mission in New York attempted again this year to block Mr. Isa from participating as an NGO delegate, accusing him of involvement in terrorist financing and recruitment, while again providing no evidence. After a lengthy delay, and several interventions from the US and German missions on Mr. Isa's behalf, he was finally allowed to participate on the final day of the Forum.

Having been thwarted in their efforts to block Mr. Isa's participation, the Chinese delegation then went after the German NGO that had sponsored his participation – the Society for Threatened Peoples. They used their position as a member of the UN committee that accredits civil society participation to attempt to revoke the Society's consultative status. In their remarks to the Committee, the Chinese referred to Mr. Isa as a terrorist and a separatist who threatened Chinese sovereignty and territorial integrity. Let that sink in for a moment – China, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a nuclear power with one of the biggest armies in the world- is threatened by a mild-mannered German citizen who talks about China's treatment of the Uighur people.

Once again, the US and German missions pushed back and we ultimately overcame Chinese efforts to intimidate the NGO. Afterwards, several NY-based colleagues expressed surprise that the normally careful and disciplined Chinese delegation would go to such extreme lengths – including a highly public fight with the United States in the NGO Committee – to block the participation of a previously little-known activist in a relatively obscure UN event. But those who follow human rights issues in China were not the least bit surprised to see the Chinese attempt to use the NGO Committee or any other part of the UN as a tool to carry out reprisals against an individual who has spoken out about China's human rights record, in particular China's treatment of Uighur Muslims.

With China facing both its Universal Periodic Review and a period review in the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination later this year, there will be more opportunities to call attention to the situation in Xinjiang, as well as the ongoing abuses in Tibet and Inner Mongolia and the general crackdown underway against human rights defenders, lawyers and other dissidents across China. The question is: Will others join us? So far the silence has mostly been deafening.

I want to conclude my remarks by talking about a case that is close to my heart: the Uighur scholar, Ilham Tohti. Ilham was an economics professor at Minzu University who wrote blog posts and articles asserting Uighurs' rights to genuine autonomy under Chinese law resulted in his arrest and a life sentence in prison in 2014 on charges of separatism. He was the kind of moderate voice who advocated for improved understanding between Han Chinese and Uighurs, while also encouraging the Chinese authorities to respect Uighurs' linguistic, cultural and religious rights. He was a friend to Chinese human rights lawyers, Tibetan writers, and American scholars. His lovely daughter Jewher is today a student at Indiana University. He was supposed to travel with her and take up a teaching post there, but instead Chinese authorities pulled him off a plane and took him to prison. Today, he is serving a life sentence for separatism. We remain deeply concerned about the ongoing detention of Ilham Tohti, not just because of the issues around his arbitrary detention and unfair trial, as well as his worsening medical condition as he

serves his absurd sentence, but because of the broader implications of China's targeting of him and moderate voices like him – the very people who could help to build a truly multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, stable and prosperous society in Xinjiang and throughout China.

As a small tribute to Ilham and those like him who are suffering for trying to improve human rights in Xinjiang and China, I would like to read a Chinese poem written in the aftermath of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo's death a little more than one year ago. This poem could have just as easily apply to Ilham Tohti and the other voices calling for moderation, peaceful coexistence and respect for human rights that the Chinese government is attempting to silence in Xinjiang:

*They tried to bury him*

*nǐ men xiǎng bǎ tā (你们想把他)*

*Bury him in the ground*

*mái zàng zài ní tǔ lǐ (埋葬在泥土里)*

*But what they did not understand*

*dàn nǐ men wàng jì le (但你们忘记了)*

*Is that he is the seed.*

*tā shì yī lì zhǒng zǐ*

The world should know what is happening in Xinjiang, and USUN is committed to working toward that end – to watering the seeds, wherever they are. We face an uphill climb to do so at the United Nations, but we look forward to working with Congress, our colleagues in the Administration and with other countries who are committed to human rights, to ensure that China is not able to bury these abuses in the ground.

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