



**Uyghur American Association**

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**Statement by Nuri Turkel  
General Secretary, Uyghur American Association  
Before CECC  
March 10th 2003**

It is a real honor to be in here and I would like to thank the Congressional-Executive Commission on China for giving me this opportunity to address some of the issues, which are grave concerns to the Uyghur people in East Turkestan.

The political situation in East Turkestan has been increasingly worsening, especially after 9/11. Despite criticisms and warnings by the US government and human rights groups, China's persecution of Uyghurs in the name of War on Terror has been escalated. As a result, more than 3,000 Uyghurs have been arrested, and a percentage of that have been executed. At this crucial moment of history, Uyghurs desperately need the attention from the international community listen to their grievances and urge peace loving people of the civilized world to make the distinction between terrorists who seek to take innocent lives and those who simply seek self-defense from a brutal and intolerant regime. Here, I would like address a few important issues for your attention; 1) Chinese communist chief, Wang Lequan's recent statement and intentional destruction of ancient Uyghur buildings and sites in Kashgar, 2) evicting the Uyghurs out of Chinese cities, and 3) China's rejection of foreign media request to cover recent earthquake in Kashgar region.

**China's "go west" campaign and its destructive nature**

The migrant Chinese have been the major beneficiaries of western development program in East Turkestan but the Uyghurs are paying the highest price for it. China observers believe that China's western development policies are designed to bring more prosperity to the west. Such a belief contradicts with the reality where the unemployment and economic disparity are rampant among the Uyghurs. Media reports indicate that the government favors Chinese who have migrated to the area over their more qualified Uyghur counterparts in its hiring practices. Chinese Communist Party Xinjiang Chief Wang Lequan's recent statement further disproves such a belief. At a recent meeting, when Wang stated that it is wrong to believe that economic development would help reduce and eliminate separatist activity in Xinjiang, so the government's priority should be cracking down on separatist activity. This reveals that Chinese governments' real intent of developing the West is not to win over ethnic minorities in those areas but attracting more ethnic Chinese immigrants into the region in order to permanently change the demographic structure of the region in the favor of ethnic Chinese. The changed demographic structure, in turn, would help the government's long term policy of assimilating Uyghurs into Chinese. China's such discriminatory policies against Uyghurs are a blatant violation of its obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ratified by China in 1982).

So called 'Western development' not only facilitates China's attempt to make the Uyghurs second class citizens in their own homeland but also destroy Uyghur cultural identity. Foreign travelers have expressed their disappointments when they witnessed the disappearance of central Asian charm and destruction of valuable Uyghur cultural heritage. The pace of the destruction is breathtaking. Today, ancient city, Kashgar that is considered as a cradle of ancient Turkic civilization in Central Asia is virtually unrecognizable.

At the same meeting, Wang also has called for a fight against Uyghur dissent in ideological front. He stated, 'Xinjiang' must promote patriotism and the unity of nationalities education, and resolutely condemn the distorted history promoted by ethnic separatists, including the history of ethnic development and religious progress. 'Xinjiang' must sow the ideas in the minds of people that preserve stability". Wang's statement further displays a hidden intent to wipe out the Uyghur identity by waging relentless destruction of Uyghur culture. People are identified by their culture, rather not by their religion, race and facial complexion. The Uyghurs are very much of proud of their cultural heritage despite long suffered humiliation and the destruction of their cultural identity. Locking up historians, burning books, and destroying historic sites, and imposing Chinese language education are not a recent phenomenon but rather a continuing effort by the authoritarian Chinese regime to wipe out the Uyghurs from the face of the earth. The Uyghurs have long suffered such destructions since 1949, especially during China's notorious "cultural revolution", and now they face even greater danger. The intentional destruction of the Uyghur cultural heritage is a violation of the UN convention adopted by UNESCO and signed by China. Such reckless acts perpetuated by the Chinese authorities constitute a harmful impoverishment of the world heritage.

### **Uyghurs are discriminated both at home and inner Chinese cities**

The Uyghurs are not only facing all types of discriminations and ill treatment in East Turkestan but also experiencing the same in other inner Chinese cities. It's been reported that the Uyghur residents of Beijing have been evicted out and even put on the train to sent back to their hometowns. That is causing enormous social tensions and discontent, and it appears to be rising. A Uyghur woman in Beijing told the western journalists that Uyghurs are not allowed to work and live in Beijing and had been ordered to leave. She also said, millions of Han Chinese can go to East Turkestan and do whatever they want but a few hundred Uyghurs can't live in Chinese cities. Harassment by the police, rejection of lodging, and disapproval of business licenses are common place in inner Chinese cities thanks to the Chinese propaganda to portray the Uyghurs as "terrorists". Because of the indoctrinated belief of the local Chinese residents and government's tacit approval of mistreating Uyghurs has created enormous frustration and humiliation among the Uyghurs. Some of the Uyghur "fortune seekers" are forced to come to inner Chinese cities to look for a job because of the limited employment opportunities in East Turkestan where all the jobs are taken away by immigrant Han Chinese. In fact, Chinese authorities are trying to limit Uyghurs' employment opportunities and economical resources wherever possible in order to make the Uyghurs eventually think nothing but food so that it will not be threatened by the idea of Uyghur independence.

### **Denying access to information in East Turkestan has deep roots**

China has been enforcing strict media censorship in past decades. Such a censorship can better serve China's objective to keep its brutal crack down on political dissent behind the doors and mislead the world and its own population with false information. This is even true during the times of natural disaster. Denial of access to and dissemination of information in East Turkestan is not a sporadic, but rather has a systematic character. It has been reported that the Chinese authorities have rejected foreign journalists to cover the deadly earthquake that took more than 266 lives, injured 4000 and left tons of thousands

homeless in cold winter in Kashgar. Despite the ban, several foreign journalists have entered the area, at the risk of being arrested and expelled, filed reports. The remaining international media have been restricted to using only photographs, or news received from the Chinese state media, including CCTV, the only national TV whose members are given access to disaster area. The network is mainly broadcasting pictures of Chinese soldiers helping thousands of victims. However, no independent observers have been admitted into the disaster areas, and witnesses are disputing the official death toll and the effectiveness of rescue efforts. Systematic refusals of foreign media to the real footage of recent earthquake clearly demonstrate an example of the misleading and prerogative nature of its information.

The existence of the Uyghur people is under extreme threat. The human rights situation is worsening day by day as the civilized free world is watching the Chinese authorities to continue devastating and wage cultural genocide against Uyghur people. The people of East Turkestan need help from free and democratic world to put pressure on the Chinese government and urge it to respect the human rights of Uyghur people. We hereby respectfully ask the United States government to appoint a special coordinator at the State Department to monitor human right situation in East Turkestan.

Thank you very for your attention to this important matter.

Uyghur American Association

### **Supplemental Statement**

#### **Statement by Nuri Turkel General Secretary, Uyghur American Association Before CECC March 10th 2003**

#### **Chinese Government Must Tell the Truth About Gulja Incident**

Some events in the Peoples Republic of China are abused to further a harmful and misleading political agenda. One such example is the demonstrations held in Gulja City, known to the Chinese government as Yining. In February 1997, at the end of Ramadan, Chinese authorities arrested some individuals engaged in planning religious activities. Over the next two days, large crowds of Uyghur people peacefully marched in the streets and called for their release. The Chinese government response was swift and overwhelming when armed troops confronted the demonstrators and sought to 'restore order.' These were the facts when the story was first reported and foreign journalists were expelled that covered it. These facts are supported by eye-witness testimony, as well as Chinese government media video tapes purporting to document the 'atrocities' of the Uyghur demonstrators.

After the Gulja incident, Amnesty International documented many human rights abuses inflicted upon the Uyghur people on that and the following days. Shooting unarmed demonstrators, using water cannons in sub-freezing weather while denying flight, mass arrests, incidents of torture and summary executions was the retribution unleashed upon the Uyghur people for asking for religious leaders to be released from jail. The activities were a revival of Uyghur religious customs and were not sanctioned by the Chinese government, that was the initial crime. In subsequent strike-hard campaigns, the abuses have continued and were at a fever pitch before the cowardly acts of terrorism perpetrated on the USA in September 2001. Since that fateful day, the Chinese government has stepped up its campaign and sought to seek international approval for the supposed campaign against international terrorism.

The abuses of human rights in pursuit of terrorism has caused much suffering, torture and death among all the people of East Turkistan, even though there is little or no evidence to indicate that such terrorism really exists. The Chinese government, through whatever means, has convinced the US government to place a small group of Uyghur exiles (known as the East Turkistan Islamic Movement-ETIM) on its list of terrorist organizations. Far from being widely documented and well-known, this small group was unknown to expert sources and it was widely believed that its members didn't number over fifty or sixty which were believed to have been captured. From sources within East Turkistan (aka Xinjiang), tens of thousands have been arrested and detained for supposed involvement in the ETIM. Prior to September 2001, the Strike-Hard campaigns focused on dissent and separatism, crushing any threat to the continued power of the Chinese government.

Today, the same campaigns are ongoing under the guise of 'battling terrorism', but the behavior and results that brought universal condemnation for the Chinese government's brutal abuse of the East Turkistan people has not changed. Nor have the real reasons, except officially. Terrorism, as defined by the Chinese government, also includes separatism. Whether or not an individual has perpetrated an act of violence, they are still considered a terrorist, even if they wish redress against injustice. Peaceful words and non-violent actions are evidence in Chinese government courts that a terrorist plot has been committed and because there is no transparency, the injustice continues and hurts more and more each and every day.

As was mentioned earlier, some facts concerning events have been abused to support a harmful and misleading political agenda. The example cited was a peaceful demonstration to obtain the release of religious figures reviving centuries-old customs. In September 2002, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the incident in Gulja was organized by the "East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah" which is another name for the "East Turkistan Islamic Movement." This re-writing of history stretches the credulity of the Chinese Foreign Ministry. At one point, an acknowledged small group of individuals is suspected of terrorist activities inside the Peoples Republic of China. In the days since that declaration, the same small group is accused of all terrorist acts and that association is used to underpin actions against any dissent. More than five years after the Gulja incident, the Chinese government connects the activities of a few religious persons to a world-wide terrorist conspiracy and condemns millions of the people in East Turkistan to suffer under the overbearing weight of a dictatorship bent on crushing dissent, not violent terrorist acts.

The Uyghur American Association echoes the concerns voiced by Amnesty International in its letter to Ismaili Tiliwaldi, the newly appointed Chair of the XUAR(Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region) government. The entire text is included in Amnesty International press release dated 4 February 2003 (ASA 17/011/2003). We not only support but demand an independent inquiry into the serious human rights violations that took place during and after the demonstration and more information about those that remain in prison. We not only support but demand an independent inquiry into the deaths of Salam Kari and Abduhelil Abdumigit, who died apparently of torture while in custody. Likewise, we would also know the fates of Ablat Patar, Iminjan, Kasim Haji, Hamit Mejit, Shevket Sakhal who are still in prison. Such an inquiry will address concerns of the international community and, when those found guilty of exceeding their authority are punished, will serve as an initial redress of the injuries suffered by the people of East Turkistan.

The Uyghur American Association, in the absence of efforts on the part of the Chinese government, calls on a complete investigation of the Gulja incident by US and international authorities, its alleged links with international terrorism, the continued Chinese government campaign to crush dissent by labeling it a 'War on Terrorism' and the toll on the lives of the people of East Turkistan.

Uyghur American Association  
March 7, 2003