



**Uyghur American Association**

6509 Elnido Drive  
McLean, VA 22101  
703-749-9547

[www.uyghuramerican.org](http://www.uyghuramerican.org)

**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 Sakhali 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