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“Eradicating Ideological Viruses”

China’s Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang’s Muslims



“Eradicating Ideological Viruses”

China’s Campaign of Repression

Against Xinjiang’s Muslims

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Map



Summary

The training has only one purpose: to learn laws and regulations...to eradicate from the mind thoughts about religious extremism and violent terrorism, and to cure ideological diseases. If the education is not going well, we will continue to provide free education, until the students achieve satisfactory results and graduate smoothly.

—Speech by Chinese Communist Youth League Xinjiang Branch, March 2017

[W]hat they want is to force us to assimilate, to identify with the country, such that, in the future, the idea of Uyghur will be in name only, but without its meaning.

—Tohti, who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 2018

The Chinese government has long carried out repressive policies against the Turkic Muslim peoples in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in northwest China. These efforts have been dramatically scaled up since late 2016, when Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo relocated from the Tibet Autonomous Region to assume leadership of Xinjiang.

This report presents new evidence of the Chinese government’s mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment of Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang and details the systemic and increasingly pervasive controls on daily life there. These rampant abuses violate fundamental rights to freedom of expression, religion, and privacy, and protections from torture and unfair trials. More broadly, governmental controls over day-to-day life in Xinjiang primarily affect ethnic Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other minorities, in violation of international law’s prohibitions against discrimination.

This report is primarily based on interviews with 58 former residents of Xinjiang, including 5 former detainees and 38 relatives of detainees. Among the interviewees, 19 people had left Xinjiang since January 2017. Interviewees come from all 14 prefectures in Xinjiang.

In May 2014, China launched its “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” (严厉打击暴力恐怖活动专项行动) in Xinjiang. Since then, the number of people formally arrested

has leaped three-fold compared to the previous five-year period, according to official figures and estimates by the nongovernmental organization Chinese Human Rights Defenders. The government has held people in pretrial detention centers (看守所) and prisons (监狱), both of which are formal facilities, and in political education camps, which have no basis under Chinese law. Those detained have been denied due process rights and suffered torture and other ill-treatment.

International media attention on Xinjiang has thus far focused on the political education camps. Although the Chinese government provides no public information on the number of detainees in these camps, credible estimates place the number in these camps at around one million.¹ Within these secretive facilities, those held are forced to undergo political indoctrination for days, months, and even over a year.

It is not uncommon to find Uyghurs, particularly from Hotan and Kashgar in southern Xinjiang, – perceived by the authorities as anti-government hotspots – reporting that half or more of their immediate family members are in a mix of political education camps, pre-trial detention, and prison. For example, an interviewee said her husband, his 4 brothers, and their 12 nephews – that is, all the men in the family – have been detained in political education camps since 2017.

There have been reports of deaths in the political education camps, raising concerns about physical and psychological abuse, as well as stress from poor conditions, overcrowding, and indefinite confinement. While basic medical care is available, people are held even when they have serious illnesses or are elderly; there are also children in their teens, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people with disabilities. Former detainees reported suicide attempts and harsh punishments for disobedience in the facilities.

¹ Adrian Zenz, “New Evidence for China’s Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” *China Brief*, vol. 18, issue 10, May 15, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/evidence-for-chinas-political-re-education-campaign-in-xinjiang> (accessed August 24, 2018); Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) and Equal Rights Initiative (ERI), “China: Massive Numbers of Uyghurs & Other Ethnic Minorities Forced into Re-education Programs,” August 3, 2018, <https://www.nchrd.org/2018/08/china-massive-numbers-of-uyghurs-other-ethnic-minorities-forced-into-re-education-programs> (accessed August 24, 2018). Zenz estimated the detainee number by extrapolating from a leaked Xinjiang police report, released by a Turkish TV station run by Uyghur exiles, as well as from reports by Radio Free Asia. CHRD and ERI made the estimate by extrapolating the percentages of people detained in villages as reported by dozens of Uyghur villagers in Kashgar Prefecture during interviews with CHRD.

Chinese officials have denied that abuses have occurred; instead they characterize these camps as “vocational education and employment training centers” for “criminals involved in minor offenses.” However, they permit no independent monitoring of these facilities from the UN, human rights organizations, or the media.

In recent years the Chinese government has devoted enormous financial, human, and technical resources for social control in Xinjiang. Authorities have hired tens of thousands additional security personnel while building numerous “convenience” police stations and checkpoints in the region. They have closely monitored people’s familial and social networks as indicators of their level of political trustworthiness. The government detains people and subjects them to greater levels of controls not only based on their own behavior or beliefs, but also those of their family members – a form of collective punishment contrary to international human rights law.

Perhaps the most innovative – and disturbing – of the repressive measures in Xinjiang is the government’s use of high-tech mass surveillance systems. Xinjiang authorities conduct compulsory mass collection of biometric data, such as voice samples and DNA, and use artificial intelligence and big data to identify, profile, and track everyone in Xinjiang. The authorities have envisioned these systems as a series of “filters,” picking out people with certain behavior or characteristics that they believe indicate a threat to the Communist Party’s rule in Xinjiang. These systems have also enabled authorities to implement fine-grained control, subjecting people to differentiated restrictions depending on their perceived levels of “trustworthiness.”

Authorities have sought to justify harsh treatment in the name of maintaining stability and security in Xinjiang, and to “strike at” those deemed terrorists and extremists in a “precise” and “in-depth” manner. Xinjiang officials claim the root of these problems is the “problematic ideas” of Turkic Muslims. These ideas include what authorities describe as extreme religious dogmas, but also any non-Han Chinese sense of identity, be it Islamic, Turkic, Uyghur, or Kazakh. Authorities insist that such beliefs and affinities must be “corrected” or “eradicated.”

During the past five years, a number of violent incidents attributed to Uyghur perpetrators have been reported in Xinjiang and elsewhere in China, and there have been reports of Uyghur fighters joining armed extremist groups abroad. The government has imposed far

greater restrictions on Uyghurs than on other ethnic minorities. However, ethnic Kazakhs living mostly in northern Xinjiang have, since late 2016, been increasingly targeted under the Strike Hard Campaign.

Still, the Strike Hard Campaign's broad mandate to punish and control Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang because of their identities cannot be justified as part of the state's responsibility to ensure public security.

In many ways, the treatment of all Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang – those held inside detention facilities and those ostensibly free – bears disturbing similarities. Inside political education camps, detainees are forced to learn Mandarin Chinese, sing praises of the Chinese Communist Party, and memorize rules applicable primarily to Turkic Muslims. Those outside the camps are required to attend weekly, or even daily, Chinese flag-raising ceremonies, political indoctrination meetings, and at times Mandarin classes. Detainees are told they may not be allowed to leave the camps unless they have learned over 1,000 Chinese characters or are otherwise deemed to have become loyal Chinese subjects; Turkic Muslims living outside are subjected to movement restrictions ranging from house arrest, to being barred from leaving their locales, to being prevented from leaving the country. Inside, people are punished for peacefully practicing religion; outside, the government's religious restrictions are so stringent that it has effectively outlawed Islam. Inside, people are closely watched by guards and are barred from contacting their families and friends. Those living in their homes are watched by their neighbors, officials, and tech-enabled mass surveillance systems, and are not allowed to contact those in foreign countries.

Xinjiang's Strike Hard Campaign has also had implications abroad. The Xinjiang authorities have made foreign ties a punishable offense, targeting people with connections to an official list of "26 sensitive countries," including Kazakhstan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia. People who have been to these countries, have families, or otherwise communicate with people there, have been interrogated, detained, and even tried and imprisoned. Interviewees report that even those with connections to countries outside this list, and those caught using WhatsApp or other foreign communications software, have also been detained. And in recent years, the Chinese government has stepped up pressure on other governments to forcibly return Uyghurs in their countries to China.

Human Rights Watch has also found that the Strike Hard Campaign has divided families, with some family members in Xinjiang and others abroad caught unexpectedly by the tightening of passport controls and border crossings. Children have at times been trapped in one country without their parents. Because Xinjiang authorities punish people for contacting their families abroad, many interviewees said they had lost contact, including with young children, for months or over a year. Others said their families, when they do manage to get in touch, have been instructed by authorities to press them to return to Xinjiang, or to obtain detailed information about their lives abroad. As a result, many ethnic Kazakhs and Uyghurs abroad live with fear and anxiety – particularly in countries where the governments have close relationships with Beijing – feeling that they are under the thumb of the Chinese government, despite being across a border or not even having Chinese citizenship.

The human rights violations in Xinjiang today are of a scope and scale not seen in China since the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution. The establishment and expansion of political education camps and other abusive practices suggest that Beijing's commitment to transforming Xinjiang in its own image is long-term.

It is also evident that China does not foresee a significant political cost to its abusive Xinjiang campaign. Its global influence has largely spared it from public criticism. And its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council means that it can deflect international action, whether sanctions imposed by the council or criminal prosecutions brought at the International Criminal Court, to which China is not a party.

The political obstacles to holding China accountable for its violations do not relieve the United Nations and governments of their responsibilities to uphold human rights protections. They should make use of international forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council, to bring global attention to the issues, notably at China's Universal Periodic Review, and seek concerted action, such as establishing a special mandate to investigate the Strike Hard Campaign. If the UN does not establish a mechanism to investigate abuses in Xinjiang, concerned governments should create their own to gather evidence of arbitrary detentions and other abuses.

Should these efforts fail to reverse China’s policies in Xinjiang, governments should still pursue unilateral measures to send a strong message to the highest levels of the Chinese government to end these grotesque violations. Senior officials should use all opportunities to challenge President Xi publicly over his government’s abuses in Xinjiang. Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and other senior officials responsible for the Strike Hard Campaign should face targeted sanctions – through tools such as the US Global Magnitsky Act and visa protocols. Appropriate export control regimes should be imposed to deny China technologies that facilitate abuses. And governments should take action to assist their own nationals harmed by Chinese policies in Xinjiang, and expedite asylum claims of those at risk of being returned to persecution in Xinjiang. They should also investigate the Chinese government’s intimidation of Turkic Muslim diaspora communities and invoke domestic law as appropriate. Concerned governments should monitor changing human rights developments in Xinjiang, including increased government repression of the Turkic Muslim population, to provide a rapid international response, including public condemnations and targeted sanctions.

Methodology

The scope of this research was severely limited because Human Rights Watch researchers are unable to safely carry out research in Xinjiang. While a number of foreign academics, journalists, and diplomats have had some access to the region, such visits have been tightly monitored by the government. Gathering information would place those interviewed and their family members at serious risk.

This report includes the direct experiences of those held in political education camps and detention centers, but we were unable to speak directly with anyone who had recently been held in Xinjiang's prisons.

The Chinese government is generally hostile to research by international human rights organizations and has long since strictly limited activities of domestic civil society groups, particularly those related to human rights. Government antagonism toward human rights monitoring has increased greatly under the presidency of Xi Jinping.

For this report, Human Rights Watch between March and August 2018 interviewed 58 people affected by the Strike Hard Campaign living outside China. Interviewees were living in Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Turkey, and the United States. The interviews were conducted primarily in Kazakh and Mandarin Chinese, as well as in English, German, Kyrgyz, and Uyghur, in many cases through an interpreter. Forty-three interviews were conducted in person, and 15 by phone.

Interviews with ethnic Kazakhs who left Xinjiang for Kazakhstan heavily inform the content of this report. Kazakhstan has the largest number of, and most recent arrivals from, Xinjiang, as Chinese authorities have increasingly reduced border crossings during the campaign. However, the limited information available suggests that Uyghurs may still be subjected to harsher, albeit similar, treatment to that of ethnic Kazakhs; this report may not reflect the full extent of the repressive policies in Xinjiang, particularly those directed at Uyghurs.

Human Rights Watch interviewed five former detainees of political education camps and formal detention centers; 38 interviewees were relatives of current detainees; and 10 were

relatives of individuals not allowed to leave Xinjiang. Among the 58 interviewees, 19 people had left Xinjiang after January 2017. This date is relevant because it means those individuals would have experienced at least several months under the tenure of Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, who assumed leadership there in August 2016. In terms of ethnicity, 32 interviewees were ethnic Kazakhs, 23 ethnic Uyghurs, and one an ethnic Hui. An ethnic Uzbek and an ethnic Kyrgyz, who were spouses of Uyghurs, were also interviewed.

Apart from the two spouses, all other interviewees were from Xinjiang, including all 14 prefectural divisions: Altay, Bortala, Tacheng, Karamay, Changji, Urumqi, Turpan, Hami, Ili, Kizilsu, Kashgar, Aksu, Hotan, and Bayingolin.²

To protect their identities, the names of all interviewees have been changed, and the location where they were interviewed, along with their place of origin and ethnicity, have been withheld. However, the interviewee's ages, gender, occupations, and other information have been provided where possible.

All those interviewed were informed of the purpose of the interview, its voluntary nature, and the ways in which the information would be used. All interviewees provided verbal consent to be interviewed. All were informed that they could decline to answer questions or could end the interview at any time and that no compensation would be provided for participating.

Human Rights Watch sent a letter on August 13, 2018 to the Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo with questions related to the report (see Appendix I) but had not received any response at time of publication. Human Rights Watch also sent a letter on August 3, 2018, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Kairat Abdurakhmanov, and received a response dated August 25, 2018 (see Appendix II).

² Human Rights Watch, however, did not interview anyone from cities under the direct administration of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), the inhabitants of which are overwhelmingly Hans because of their history as a paramilitary force in the region. However, there are at least two political education camps in XPCC-controlled areas, Tumxuk and Kokdala. Adrian Zenz, "New Evidence for China's Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang," *China Brief*, vol. 18, issue 10, May 15, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/evidence-for-chinas-political-re-education-campaign-in-xinjiang> (accessed August 24, 2018).

Except where stated, information from interviews has been used only where it could be corroborated by other interviews or secondary sources, including official Chinese media and government reports.

The report uses the term “Xinjiang” to refer to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China. Uyghurs in exile often refer to the region as East Turkestan.

The report uses the term “political education camps” only to refer to those facilities in which people are barred from going home for days, months, or years; it does not include other forms of forced political indoctrination programs.

I. Overview of Human Rights in Xinjiang

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is home to Turkic Muslim ethnic minorities: the two biggest groups are the 11 million Uyghurs and the 1.6 million Kazakhs.³ Once in the majority, Turkic Muslims now comprise only about half of Xinjiang’s population, and have never enjoyed the autonomy promised to them under Chinese law.

In a country with a majority Han population, the central government in Beijing has long treated Xinjiang as a “frontier” in which its exotic but alien Turkic Muslim populations require pacification and assimilation.⁴ While some Turkic Muslims desire greater freedoms and autonomy under the current government, others demand a separate state. Beijing thus sees Turkic Muslims, particularly Uyghurs, as an ethno-nationalist threat to the Chinese state.⁵

Turkic Muslims in China

The Chinese authorities are hostile to many expressions of Uyghur identity, including religion, culture, language, and aspirations – including through peaceful transition – of independence.

Authorities enforce detailed and wide-ranging controls over daily life in Xinjiang to minimize, if not eradicate, these expressions. For example, the Chinese government has since the 1990s pushed for what it euphemistically calls “bilingual education” in Xinjiang, an approach that progressively prioritizes Mandarin while marginalizing the Uyghur language.⁶

³ “Population by ethnicity (主要年份分民族人口数),” Statistics Bureau of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, March 15, 2017, http://www.xjtj.gov.cn/sjcx/tjnj_3415/2016xjtjnj/rkjy/201707/t20170714_539451.html (accessed July 10, 2018).

⁴ Chien-peng Chung, “Comparing China’s frontier politics: how much difference did a century make?” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 46, issue 1 (2018); Corey Bosely, “The Ethnic Minority Policies of the People’s Republic of China: Patronage and Prejudice,” *Rutgers Race and the Law Review*, vol.8, issue 2 (2007), pp.312, 317.

⁵ Nicolas Becquelin, “Staged Development in Xinjiang,” *The China Quarterly*, vol. 178 (2004), p.366.

⁶ Mandarin has been increasingly used as a medium of instruction in all levels of schooling in Xinjiang, while Uyghur is increasingly taught as a standalone subject, much like a second language. Children have also been required to enter into such “bilingual education” at progressively younger ages over the years.

Authorities restrict Uyghurs to a certain set of ideas and behaviors considered “normal” and patriotic. For example, they have banned baby names with religious connotations common in the Islamic world, such as Medina, because they encourage “excessive religious fervor.”⁷ The government calls some of these “abnormal” thoughts or behaviors “the three [evil] forces” (“separatism, terrorism, and extremism”), and subjects those exhibiting them to corrections or punishments. A case in point is the respected Uyghur economist Ilham Tohti, who was sentenced to life in prison for “separatism” in September 2014 after a grossly unfair trial.⁸

The Xinjiang authorities’ heavy-handed tactics towards Uyghurs has, since late 2016, broadened to target ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang. There are also reports that other Turkic Muslims, including Kyrgyz and Tartars, as well as Huis, who are non-Turkic Muslims, have also been subjected to some of the abuses described in this report.⁹ Some Han – petitioners and activists – are also held in Xinjiang political education camps.¹⁰

At the same time, the government has been careful in wording official policies in keeping with its official propaganda promoting ethnic unity. Few draconian policies explicitly state that they target Turkic Muslims. Instead, they say they are applied to all of Xinjiang, or to southern Xinjiang, which remains predominantly Uyghur. The government also censors all critical discussions in China concerning the state’s policies towards minorities in Xinjiang.

The Strike Hard Campaign: A Loyalty Drive

Since May 2014, the Chinese government has waged what it calls the “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” (严厉打击暴力恐怖活动专项行动) in Xinjiang. The Chinese government has often pursued “Strike Hard” campaigns throughout China. While the government says they are effective crime-fighting measures, they are often very

⁷ “China Bans Many Muslim Baby Names in Xinjiang,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 24, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/24/china-bans-many-muslim-baby-names-xinjiang>.

⁸ “China Wants You to Forget Ilham Tohti,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 20, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/09/20/china-wants-you-forget-ilham-tohti>.

⁹ Gulchehra Hoja, “Authorities in Xinjiang Extend Uyghur Persecution to Region’s Ethnic Kyrgyz,” *Radio Free Asia*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/kyrgyz-08212017162912.html> (August 9, 2018); Amnesty International, “Urgent Action: Medical Practitioner Held Incommunicado (UA: 1/18 Index: ASA 17/7678/2018 China), January 9, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1776782018ENGLISH.pdf> (accessed August 9, 2018).

¹⁰ Qiao Long, “Former Judge in Xinjiang Huang Yunmin Sent to Legal Assistance Center (新疆前法官黄云敏被送“法律援助中心),” *Radio Free Asia*, March 3, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/renquanfazhi/ql1-03302018111448.html> (August 9, 2018).

abusive. Because police and other officials are encouraged or pressured to achieve high rates of detentions, they are even more inclined than under ordinary circumstances to disregard basic rights guaranteed under Chinese law. Human Rights Watch has previously highlighted the abusive nature of these drives, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet, where they have led to numerous arbitrary arrests and summary executions.¹¹

Under the leadership of Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, who was transferred from Tibet to Xinjiang in August 2016, repression in Xinjiang has reached new heights. The worsening rights situation in Xinjiang also reflects that deepening repression throughout China since President Xi Jinping came to power in March 2013. Among other aspects of everyday life, Xi has tightened the government's grip on religious practice, declaring that religions in China need to be "Sinicized" and have their foreign influence purged.¹²

This Strike Hard Campaign has several stated objectives, but mainly targets anyone who "challenges ... state security, ethnic unity, and social stability,"¹³ which are overly broad labels the government has long misused to punish peaceful activism and expression.¹⁴ To uncover these threats – including those who secretly harbor anti-government sentiment – officials scrutinize the level of Turkic Muslims' political loyalty by dividing people into three categories: "trustworthy" (不放心户), "average" (一般户), and "untrustworthy" (放心户). People who are considered "untrustworthy" are subjected to more official surveillance and restrictions. Their level of trustworthiness is assessed by their social categories, such as whether they are government officials, their familial and social networks, and their behavior, including whether they have repeatedly contacted people abroad.

¹¹ See, for example, Human Rights Watch, *Devastating Blows Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/04/11/devastating-blows/religious-repression-uighurs-xinjiang>.

¹² Chris Buckley, "Chinese Jews of Ancient Lineage Huddle Under Pressure," *New York Times*, September 24, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/25/world/asia/china-kaifeng-jews.html> (accessed June 19, 2018).

¹³ "Chen Quanguo's Report at the 9th Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Chinese Communist Party Congress (陈全国在中国共产党新疆维吾尔自治区第九次代表大会上的报告)," Communist Party of China Online News (中国共产党新闻网) November 10, 2016, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2016/1110/c117005-28851317-2.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

¹⁴ See, for example, "China: Release Taiwanese Democracy Activist," Human Rights Watch news release, April 19, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/18/china-release-taiwanese-democracy-activist>; "China: Free Prominent Lawyer Pu Zhiqiang," Human Rights Watch news release, December 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/13/china-free-prominent-lawyer-pu-zhiqiang>.

One major feature of the ongoing Strike Hard Campaign is the deployment of “*fanghuiju*” (访惠聚)¹⁵ teams in Xinjiang. Between 2014 and 2017, Xinjiang authorities sent 200,000 cadres from government agencies, state-owned enterprises, and public institutions to be stationed in villages, regularly visit and surveil people, and subject them to political propaganda, a scheme that has been extended indefinitely.¹⁶ In October 2016, authorities initiated a related effort, called the “Becoming Family” (结对认亲) campaign. Since December 2017, this “Becoming Family” campaign has been expanded as a compulsory homestay program where more than a million cadres spend at least five days every two months in the homes of Xinjiang residents primarily in the countryside.¹⁷

The Strike Hard Campaign has also targeted minority officials whom the authorities accuse as being “two-faced” or disloyal – those who disagree with the heavy-handed approach in Xinjiang, and those accused of disciplinary infractions such as corruption and family planning violations – and subject them to detention and possible imprisonment. Some of the highest-ranking Uyghur officials toppled in this crackdown include three senior education officials who have been detained for distributing educational materials in Uyghur and Kazakh languages. Authorities said these materials had spread pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism, poisoning students with “separatism.”¹⁸

Another major objective of the Strike Hard Campaign is strengthened border control. Xinjiang residents have long been subjected to a more onerous passport application process than people living in Han-majority areas in China.¹⁹ In August 2015, for reasons that remain unclear, authorities made it easier for Xinjiang residents to apply for and

¹⁵ An acronym that stands for “Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Get Together the Hearts of the People [访民情、惠民生、聚民心]. These teams, also known as “village-based work teams,” was first implemented in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 2011—then extended indefinitely— by then-Tibet Party Secretary Chen Quanguo. See “China: No End to Tibet Surveillance Program,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 18, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/18/china-no-end-tibet-surveillance-program>.

¹⁶ “200,000 Communist Party members Dispatched to Stay in Grassroots Villages in Xinjiang to Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Get Together the Hearts of the People (新疆 20 万机关干部下基层住万村, 访民情、惠民生、聚民心),” People Online (人民网, <http://xj.people.com.cn/GB/188750/361873/>) (accessed August 14, 2018).

¹⁷ “China: Visiting Officials Occupy Homes in Muslim Region,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 13, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/13/china-visiting-officials-occupy-homes-muslim-region>.

¹⁸ “Three Uyghur Senior Government Officials Investigated over Alleged ‘Separatist’ Teaching Materials (教材被指「民族分裂」 三维吾尔高官遭查),” *Sing Tao Daily*, January 11, 2018, <http://std.stheadline.com/daily/news-content.php?id=1729541&target=2> (accessed August 18, 2018).

¹⁹ Tibetans are similarly subjected to such onerous requirements when applying for passports. See Human Rights Watch, *One Passport, Two Systems*, July 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/07/13/one-passport-two-systems/chinas-restrictions-foreign-travel-tibetans-and-others>.

obtain passports. But beginning October 2016, Xinjiang authorities started to recall passports, allegedly for reasons of “collective management.”²⁰ This essentially empowers the police to scrutinize and control each foreign visit, and to heighten scrutiny over those who have links abroad. The authorities have targeted those with connections to a list of “26 sensitive countries” (see Table 1).²¹

Since the start of the Strike Hard Campaign, the Chinese government has also ramped up efforts to compel Chinese citizens of Kazakh and Uyghur ethnicity living abroad to return (see also, Section IV, p. 87), even when the government has not accused them of specific crimes nor appears to have gone through formal extradition channels.

Asylum seekers and refugees in countries are particularly susceptible to pressure from the Chinese government. In July 2017, Egyptian authorities rounded up dozens of Uyghur students in the country at the behest of the Chinese government, forcing at least 20 to return.²² Thailand, Malaysia, and Afghanistan have, since 2014, deported groups of Uyghurs sought by the Chinese government; Malaysia and Thailand continue to hold groups of Uyghurs at risk of forced return.²³ Additional cases of detained Uyghurs facing deportation have also been reported in Bulgaria, Cambodia, India, and the United Arab Emirates, among others.²⁴ Governments that have returned Uyghurs at risk of persecution

²⁰ “China: Passports Arbitrarily Recalled in Xinjiang,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 21, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/21/china-passports-arbitrarily-recalled-xinjiang>.

²¹ Human Rights Watch was able to confirm the content of this list with several interviewees from Xinjiang.

²² “Egypt: Don’t Deport Uyghurs to China,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 7, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/07/egypt-dont-deport-uyghurs-china>.

²³ Edward Wong and Poypiti Amatatham, “Ignoring Protests, Thailand Deports About 100 Uighurs Back to China,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/10/world/asia/thailand-deports-uighur-migrants-to-china.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); Bethany Matta, “China to Neighbours: Send Us Your Uighurs,” *Al Jazeera*, February 19, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/02/china-neighbours-send-uighurs-150217103722697.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); “Malaysia: Don’t Send 11 Detainees to China,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/09/malaysia-dont-send-11-detainees-china> (accessed August 14, 2018); “Thai Officials: Uyghurs Will Be Deported to China (泰国官员：维吾尔人将被遣返至中国),” *BCC*, June 2, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/simp/china/2016/06/160602_thailand_china_uighurs_deportation (accessed August 18, 2018).

²⁴ “European Lawmakers Urge Bulgaria Not to Deport Chinese Uyghur Asylum Seekers (欧洲议员敦促保加利亚勿遣返中国维吾尔族避难者),” *Radio Free Asia*, January 17, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/nu-01172018115658.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); “India to Deport Three Asylum-Seeking Uyghurs to China,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 23, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/india-deport-11232016144310.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); “Uyghur Asylum Seeker Detained in Dubai Feared Deported to China,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 28, 2017, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/dubai-11282017160655.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

or torture and other ill-treatment to China have violated their international legal obligations.²⁵

Table 1: An official list of “26 Sensitive Countries”		
Afghanistan	Libya	Thailand
Algeria	Malaysia	Turkey
Azerbaijan	Nigeria	Turkmenistan
Egypt	Pakistan	United Arab Emirates
Indonesia	Russia	Uzbekistan
Iran	Saudi Arabia	Yemen
Iraq	Somalia	
Kazakhstan	South Sudan	
Kenya	Syria	
Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	

Tech-Enabled Surveillance and Security State

Another major objective of the Strike Hard Campaign is to weave an even-tighter net of surveillance across the region.²⁶ In addition to the tens of thousands of new security personnel and “convenience” police stations, numerous checkpoints – equipped with facial recognition-enabled cameras – across the region examine people and vehicles on roads, in residential areas, and at any point where crowds might gather, such as bus and train stations, entry points to towns and villages, hotels, restaurants, and markets.²⁷ Other security measures include requiring people in some locales to put QR codes on certain

²⁵ Under the principle of non-refoulement, states are prohibited from returning an individual to a country where they may face torture or other serious human rights violations. The principle is enshrined 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, article 33, and Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, article 3, and is considered part of customary international law. See, for example, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Executive Committee Programme, Non-Refoulement, Conclusion No. 6 (XXVIII) (1977) (“[T]he fundamental humanitarian principle of non-refoulement has found expression in various international instruments adopted at the universal and regional levels and is generally accepted by States.”); Jean Allain, “The jus cogens nature of non-refoulement,” vol. 13(4) *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 2002, p. 538 (“[I]t is clear that the norm prohibiting refoulement is part of customary international law, thus binding on all States whether or not they are party to the 1951 Convention.”).

²⁶ Official speeches and policy documents have described the need for building or tightening a “Social Prevention and Control System (社会防控体系)” in Xinjiang, a term that refers to overlapping security and mass surveillance systems, as part of the Strike Hard Campaign and the overall goal of achieving “enduring peace.” See, for example, Wang Xing and Xiao Xin, “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Government Work Report (新疆维吾尔自治区政府工作报告),” *Xinjiang Daily*, February 8, 2017, http://district.ce.cn/newarea/roll/201702/08/t20170208_20056923_2.shtml (accessed August 23, 2018).

²⁷ Adrian Zenz and James Leibold, “Xinjiang’s Rapidly Evolving Security State,” China Brief Volume, vol. 17, Issue 4, March 14, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiangs-rapidly-evolving-security-state/> (accessed August 23, 2018).

types of knives, including kitchen and craft knives, and linking the codes to their ID card numbers.²⁸ In Xinjiang’s capital, Urumqi, all liquids – including water – lighters, and powders are banned from public transport.²⁹

The security presence is so ubiquitous that some domestic Chinese tourists visiting the region marveled at it, noting that the checkpoints meant they “had to stop and start the entire day,”³⁰ even though they were traveling on the highway. Others have noted that in some places, authorities have established “green channels” where Han go through without checks, while Turkic Muslims have to line up on another lane to wait for stringent security controls.³¹

²⁸ See, for example, “Hotan Emergency Management Work Information Brief, Issue No. 8 (和田地区应急管理工作信息第 8 期),” February 17, 2016, <http://www.xjht.gov.cn/article/show.php?itemid=101710> (accessed August 14, 2018); “Knives under Control Now Also Have ‘ID Cards’ after They Have Been Printed with QR Codes (印上小小二维码 管制刀具也有了 “身份证”),” https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/RIYn93gXe_wyszj3BTbDkQ (accessed August 14, 2018).

²⁹ “All Urumqi Public Buses Ban Liquids, Lighters (乌市所有公交车禁带液体、打火机),” *Legal Daily*, July 25, 2014, http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/index/content/2014-07/25/content_5687467.htm (accessed August 14, 2018); “All Urumqi Public Buses Ban Liquids, Lighters (乌鲁木齐市所有公交车禁带液体、打火机),” *Tianshan* (天山网), July 25, 2014, http://news.ts.cn/content/2014-07/25/content_10212180_all.htm (August 14, 2018).

³⁰ “Pictures: Xinjiang’s Security is Good (组图: 新疆治安亚克西),” *China Digital Times* (中国数字时代), October 11, 2017, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/2017/10/> 【异闻观止】组图: 新疆治安亚克西/ (accessed August 14, 2018).

³¹ “Xinjiang Feast 2 (a 10-day Road Trip in Kashgar, Tashkurgan, Khunjerab, Yarkant and Kargilik, September 2017) (新疆盛宴 2 (2017 年 9 月南疆喀什-塔县-红其拉普-莎车-叶城 10 日自驾游)),” *Ctrip* (携程), October 6, 2017, <http://you.ctrip.com/travels/xinjiang100008/3567927.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).



A checkpoint equipped with facial recognition in Turpan, Xinjiang. The photographer noted that police let Han through a fast lane without checking them while Turkic Muslims were in long lines waiting for a thorough security check. © 2018 Darren Byler

One person told Human Rights Watch that he was at an official meeting when the authorities discussed these “green channels”:

In a ‘stability maintenance’ meeting, [the authorities] told us that there are these ‘green channels’ in which those who official license plates are let through – a scanner reads the licenses – but the Uyghurs have to line up and their trunks (后备箱) checked. The authorities told us that, ‘Han, they come to develop Xinjiang, so they should be allowed through the green channel; but the Uyghurs, there are terrorists among them, so they should be checked. You shouldn’t dispute this.’³²

³² Human Rights Watch interview with Ilham (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 12, 2018.

Efforts to monitor Uyghurs include the use of modern, and often cutting-edge, surveillance and biometric technologies. Human Rights Watch has documented the Xinjiang authorities' directive to authorities to collect biometrics, including DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, and blood types of all residents between the age of 12 and 65.³³ These biometrics, as well as "voice samples," are collected as part of the passport application process; in addition, DNA and blood types are being collected through a free annual physical exams program called Physicals for All.³⁴

It is unclear exactly how authorities are using the biometrics, but the amount of information they have on people is enough to frighten many from that region (see Section III, p.73), particularly given that they have no ability to challenge the collection, use, distribution, or retention of this data.

There is also a predictive policing program based on big data and machine learning analysis in Xinjiang called the "Integrated Joint Operations Platform" (IJOP).³⁵ That tool aggregates data about people, often without their knowledge, and detects deviations from what authorities deem "normal," such as the failure to pay phone bills, and treats them as indicators that a person may be politically "untrustworthy." The IJOP then generates lists of people considered threatening to the authorities; the police then apprehend them, interrogate them, and detain some of them.

Restrictions on Freedom of Religion

Authorities have long imposed pervasive restrictions on peaceful religious practice nationally (see Section V, p. 95) and particularly in Xinjiang. The Chinese government's restrictions on the practice of Islam in Xinjiang are among the strictest and most comprehensive in the world.

³³ "China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions," Human Rights Watch news release, December 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/13/china-minority-region-collects-dna-millions>.

³⁴ "China: Voice Biometric Collection Threatens Privacy," Human Rights Watch news release, October 22, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/22/china-voice-biometric-collection-threatens-privacy>.

³⁵ "China: Big Data Fuels Crackdown in Minority Region," Human Rights Watch news release, February 26, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/26/china-big-data-fuels-crackdown-minority-region>.

Human Rights Watch, in 2005, documented a multi-tiered system of surveillance, control, and suppression of religious activity aimed at Xinjiang's Uyghurs.³⁶ Since then, these controls have been strengthened. Following the unrest in Urumqi in 2009,³⁷ there was a burst of regulatory activities aimed at religion, and again in 2016, during the current Strike Hard Campaign. In addition, the Xinjiang Regulations on Religious Affairs were passed in 2014, replacing an outdated 1994 version, further imposing restrictions on religion.³⁸

Taken together, these regional rules curtail many expressions of Islam. The rules:

- Ban any form of appearance – including facial hair and clothing – that is interpreted to “whip up religious fanaticism, [and] disseminate religious extremist ideologies”;
- Require that all Hajj (pilgrimages to Mecca) must be organized by the state;
- Require that the use of “halal” be restricted only to certain food products (meat, dairy and edible oils) and ban such labels for other purposes;
- Prohibit the creation, possession, consumption, and dissemination –including on the internet – of a range of materials defined so broadly and vaguely that any expression can be construed as prohibited. For example, they include anything that “undermines national unity, social stability, economic development, or scientific and technological progress”³⁹ or that “affects religious harmony”⁴⁰;
- Prohibit the circulation of many types of documents relating to religious and ethnic policies which would routinely be public information in other countries, such as drafts of religious laws and regulations;
- Ban religion from education and punishes teachers for failure to stop or report any activities that has “hints of religion” in schools;
- Ban children from participating in religious activities and prohibit anyone, including parents and teachers, from introducing religion to children, including at home; and

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Devastating Blows Religious Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang*, April 11, 2005, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2005/04/11/devastating-blows/religious-repression-uyghurs-xinjiang>.

³⁷ The protests of July 5-7, 2009, in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, were one of the worst episodes of ethnic violence in China in decades. See Human Rights Watch, “We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them”: Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang’s Protests, October 20, 2000, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/10/20/we-are-afraid-even-look-them/enforced-disappearances-wake-xinjiangs-protests>.

³⁸ Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Religious Affairs, 2014 (新疆维吾尔自治区宗教事务条例) replaced the Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Religious Affairs Management, 1994 (新疆维吾尔自治区宗教事务管理条例).

³⁹ Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Religious Affairs, 2014 (新疆维吾尔自治区宗教事务条例 2014), art. 40.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

- Ban high school students from dropping out of school for religious reasons.⁴¹

These overly broad prohibitions make it possible for the authorities to arbitrarily impose punishments on any form of peaceful religious, or even non-religious, expressions. As discussed below (See Section III, Heightened Religious Restrictions), interviewees who have left Xinjiang since 2017 describe increasing government controls over Islamic practices, from greetings to praying.

Response to Terrorism?

As the name of the Strike Hard Campaign suggests, the Chinese government has sought to justify many repressive measures as being necessary to eliminate what it considers to be terrorism and extremism in the region.

The Chinese government has not always portrayed Xinjiang's problems as involving terrorism. In the 1980s, Xinjiang residents enjoyed a relative period of relaxed government policies. But in April 1990, armed confrontations between Uyghurs in Baren township, northwest of Kashgar, and Chinese authorities led China to launch a long-term strategy to assert tighter control over Uyghur areas.⁴² At the same time, the Soviet Union collapsed, leading to the emergence of new Central Asian republics, which the Chinese government feared would stir up ethno-nationalist aspirations in Xinjiang.⁴³

⁴¹ "Political and Legal Office of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, Notice on the Printing and Distribution of 'The (Trial) Application Procedure of Chinese Muslims Traveling Abroad for Pilgrimages' (国家宗教事务局政法司, 关于印发《中国穆斯林出国朝觐报名排队办法(试行)》的通知)," June 16, 2005, <http://www.sara.gov.cn/zcfg/573738.htm> (accessed June 19, 2018); Halal Food Management Regulations of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (新疆维吾尔自治区清真食品管理条例), the 10th Session of the Standing Committee of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region People's Congress (新疆维吾尔自治区第十届人民代表大会常务委员会), effective since January 1, 2004, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E7%BB%B4%E5%90%BE%E5%B0%94%E8%87%AA%E6%B2%BB%E5%8C%BA%E6%B8%85%E7%9C%9F%E9%A3%9F%E5%93%81%E7%AE%A1%E7%90%86%E6%9D%A1%E4%BE%8B/8098743> (accessed June 19, 2018); Measures of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region for Implementing the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 1998, 2008 (revised)(新疆维吾尔自治区实施《中华人民共和国义务教育法》办法 1998, 2008 修订) arts. 10 and 45; Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on the Elimination of Illiteracies, 1986, 1996 (revised)(新疆维吾尔自治区扫除文盲条例 1986, 1996 修改) art. 9; Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Religious Affairs, 2014(新疆维吾尔自治区宗教事务条例 2014) art. 37; Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on the Promulgation of Senior Middle School Education in Southern Xinjiang (新疆维吾尔自治区南疆地区普及高中阶段教育条例 2016) art. 25; Chinese Constitution, art. 38; Regulations of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on Population and Family Planning, 2002, 2017 (revised) (新疆维吾尔自治区人口与计划生育条例 2002, 2017 修正) art. 24; Measures of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region for Implementing the Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China.

⁴² For a good overview of unrest in Uyghur areas during the 1990s, see Justin Hastings, "Charting the Course of Uyghur Unrest," *China Quarterly*, no. 208 (Dec 2011), pp. 893-912.

⁴³ Nicolas Becquelin, "Staged Development in Xinjiang," *The China Quarterly*, vol. 178 (2004), p.366.

Beijing then launched an ambitious plan to accelerate the integration of Xinjiang into China by encouraging Han migration to Xinjiang while committing major resources to economic growth, chiefly through the exploitation of Xinjiang's natural resources. In 1949, Uyghurs made up 75 percent of Xinjiang's population while Han accounted for only 7 percent; currently, Uyghurs account for 48 percent of Xinjiang's population of approximately 23.6 million, while Han have reached 36 percent, or 8.6 million people.⁴⁴ Uyghurs felt increasingly marginalized, fueling at times violent protests against Beijing's policies in Xinjiang, some of which were brutally suppressed, which further exacerbated the grievances towards the state.

Although Xinjiang authorities began to publicly acknowledge anti-state violence in the mid-1990s, they generally suggested that it was carried out only by "a handful of separatists." However, after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, Chinese authorities increasingly portrayed its repression in Xinjiang as part of the "global war on terror."

The Chinese government continues to lobby foreign governments and inter-governmental agencies to label East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and other Uyghur organizations and individuals, including those that peacefully advocate Uyghur independence, as terrorists, and sought foreign cooperation in what it says to be counterterrorism efforts in Xinjiang.⁴⁵ In April 2018, for example, it sought but failed to block the accreditation of Dolkun Isa, a Uyghur rights activist, for a UN forum claiming he is a "terrorist."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Amy Liu & Kevin Peters, "The Hanification of Xinjiang, China: The Economic Effects of the Great Leap West," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, October 2017, vol.17(2), pp. 265-280. After Uyghurs and Hans, the other major minorities in Xinjiang are ethnic Kazakhs, Huis (1 million), Kyrgyz (202,200), Mongols (180,600), Tajiks (50,100); other minorities with fewer than 50,000 include Sibe, Russian, Uzbek, Tartar, Manchu, Daur peoples. See "Population by Ethnicity in Major Years (主要年份分民族人口数)," Statistics Bureau of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, March 15, 2017, http://www.xjtj.gov.cn/sjcx/tjnj_3415/2016xjtjnj/rkjy/201707/t20170714_539451.html (accessed June 19, 2018).

⁴⁵ "China seeks int'l support in counter-terrorism," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, December 15, 2003, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/xw/t56257.htm> (accessed August 14, 2018). The US Treasury Department listed ETIM as a terrorist organization in 2002 during a period of increased US-Chinese cooperation on counterterrorism following the September 11, 2001 attacks. ETIM is also listed by the UN al-Qaida/Taliban Sanctions Committee for its associations with Al-Qaeda, <https://scsanctions.un.org/en/?keywords=al-qaeda>. Experts say reliable information about ETIM is hard to come by, and they disagree about the extent of ETIM's violent activities and ties to militant groups internationally. See Beina Xu et al., "The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM)," Council on Foreign Relations, September 4, 2014, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/east-turkestan-islamic-movement-etim> (August 14, 2018).

⁴⁶ "UNPO Vice President Finally Admitted To UN Indigenous Forum," UNPO, April 26, 2018, <http://unpo.org/article/20769> (accessed July 9, 2018).

There have been a number of reported violent incidents in Xinjiang – notably the Urumqi market bombing in 2014 – and violence attributed to Uyghurs in Beijing in 2013 and Kunming in 2014. Most reports about these and other violent incidents generally describe the events as premeditated attacks, often as terrorism. The Chinese government has blamed some of them on foreign groups including ETIM, though the groups’ existence, strength, and threat level has been debated.

The Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), which many consider to be part of ETIM, has claimed responsibility for the Urumqi and Beijing attacks.⁴⁷ Some Uyghurs have also joined armed extremist groups in Syria, and TIP, which has aligned itself with Al-Qaeda and has set up a Syrian branch.⁴⁸ The Chinese government representative said in August 2018 that there are no accurate figure of the number of Uyghurs who have joined armed extremist groups in Syria, though an earlier 2014 Chinese state media report put the figure at 300.⁴⁹ Obtaining accurate accounts of violence in Xinjiang is extremely difficult since the Chinese government keeps tight control over this information.

Chinese law defines terrorism and extremism in an overbroad and vague manner and does not require that action be taken in furtherance of a crime to prompt prosecution, deprivation of liberty, or other restrictions.⁵⁰ Terrorism charges can stem from mere

⁴⁷ Jonathan Kaiman, “Islamist group claims responsibility for attack on China’s Tiananmen Square,” *Guardian*, November 25, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/25/islamist-china-tiananmen-beijing-attack> (accessed July 10, 2018); Michael Martina and Megha Rajagopalan, “Islamist group claims China station bombing: SITE,” *Reuters*, May 14, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang/islamist-group-claims-china-station-bombing-site-idUSBREA4D07H20140514> (accessed July 10, 2018).

⁴⁸ For an overview of Chinese nationals joining extremist groups in Syria, see Colin P. Clarke and Paul Rexton Kan, “Uighur Foreign Fighters: An Under-examined Jihadist Challenge,” International Center for Counter-Terrorism, November 2017, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ClarkeKan-Uighur-Foreign-Fighters-An-Underexamined-Jihadist-Challenge-Nov-2017-1.pdf>; Jacob Zenn, “An Overview of Chinese Fighters and Anti-Chinese Militant Groups in Syria and Iraq,” *China Brief*, October 10, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/an-overview-of-chinese-fighters-and-anti-chinese-militant-groups-in-syria-and-iraq/>; Thomas Joscelyn, “Analysis: The Turkistan Islamic Party’s jihad in Syria,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, July 10, 2018, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2018/07/analysis-the-turkistan-islamic-partys-jihad-in-syria.php>; and Caleb Weiss, “Turkistan Islamic Party parades in northwestern Syria,” *FDD’s Long War Journal*, November 5, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/11/turkistan-islamic-party-parades-in-northwestern-syria.php>.

⁴⁹ Ben Blanchard, “China envoy says no accurate figure on Uighurs fighting in Syria,” *Reuters*, August 20, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-china/china-envoy-says-no-accurate-figure-on-uighurs-fighting-in-syria-idUSKCN1L5o8G> (accessed August 25, 2018); “About 300 Chinese said fighting alongside Islamic State in Middle East,” *Reuters*, December 15, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-china-idUSKBN0JToUX20141215?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews> (accessed August 25, 2018).

⁵⁰ For in-depth critique about China’s Counterterrorism Law, see “China: Draft Counterterrorism Law a Recipe for Abuses,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 20, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/01/20/china-draft-counterterrorism-law-recipe-abuses>; “China: Disclose Details of Terrorism Convictions,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/16/china-disclose-details-terrorism-convictions>.

possession of “items that advocate terrorism,” even though there is no clear definition of what these materials may be.⁵¹

The Xinjiang Implementing Measures on the Counterterrorism Law and the Xinjiang Counter Extremism Regulations further prohibit a large range of activity relevant to ethnic, religious, and political expression, including “intimidating or inducing others to boycott national policy measures, or destroy[ing] state documents,” such as identity documents.⁵²

The Chinese government has also publicized – particularly in Xinjiang – a list of “75 behavioral indicators of religious extremism.”⁵³ While that list includes some reasonable examples of incitement to violence, such as “inciting the Holy War,” many if not most indicators are highly questionable. They include a range of vague and imprecise “behaviors” and “symptoms” that are considered “unusual” and thus warrant additional scrutiny, including people who “store large amounts of food in their homes,” “those who smoke and drink but quit doing so suddenly” or “those who buy or store equipment such as dumbbells...boxing gloves, as well as maps, compasses, telescopes, ropes, and tents without obvious reasons.”⁵⁴

Obtaining information about terrorism court cases in China is difficult. In March 2017, Human Rights Watch searched through all court verdicts available online through China Court Net, a general news site run by the Supreme People’s Court, and the Peking University Law Database in 2016 and found only four cases of terrorism convictions.⁵⁵ In addition to these cases, Human Rights Watch learned of about a dozen other individuals who were punished for terrorism-related offenses. None of these 2016 cases indicate that the offenders had perpetrated or were linked to violent acts, all of them were punished for possessing, accessing, and distributing terrorism-related videos or audios.

⁵¹ Article 3(2) of the Counterterrorism Law defines “terrorist activities” to encompass “the advocacy of terrorism, the incitement of others to commit terrorist activities, or the unlawful possession of items that advocate terrorism, or compelling others to wear or bear clothes or symbols that advocate terrorism in a public place.”

⁵² Measures of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region for Implementing the Counterterrorism Law of the People's Republic of China (新疆维吾尔自治区实施《中华人民共和国反恐怖主义法》办法), adopted at the 12th Standing Committee of Xinjiang Committee of the Communist Party of China(新疆维吾尔自治区第十二届人民代表大会常务委员会), effective since August 1, 2016.

⁵³ Nanchang Public Security Bureau, “75 behavioral indicators of religious extremism (识别 75 种宗教极端活动),” September 8, 2015, <http://www.ncga.gov.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=1256&id=5881> (accessed August 14, 2018).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ “China: Disclose Details of Terrorism Convictions,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 16, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/16/china-disclose-details-terrorism-convictions>.

An Action Plan to Uncover “Hidden” Extremists⁵⁶

An action plan issued by the Baluntai Town government in north-central Xinjiang provides some insight into the local implementation of the Strike Hard Campaign. The plan reflects some level of concern about insurgency or terrorism, such as imposing control over matchsticks and lathes for fear that they can be used for weapon-making, but much of it outlines draconian controls over the Turkic Muslim population.

The plan lists 20 categories of people as untrusted and as targets for detention, including people who have stayed abroad “too long” and those who have, independently and without state permission, organized Hajj pilgrimages.

People are evaluated not only for what they may think or do, but also according to the conduct of those whom they know. Among these 20 categories, there are also “families of individuals who were killed by the police in the past” and “families of those who have ... unusual communications with those abroad.” It also orders officials to subject three generations of relatives of those who are detained to heightened surveillance, to prevent them from “retaliating.” Elsewhere in the document, authorities say they are searching for “hidden” networks of extremism, which they say exist between Communist Party cadres, religious figures, business people, and “violent terrorists.” The directive orders the detention of followers of certain religious and cultural figures whom authorities consider to be “separatists.”

Officials are required to collect information – including on income, family members, and the religion – of people who have been abroad and log this into police databases. While this includes people who have joined ETIM and the Islamic State (also known as ISIS), targets of such surveillance also include anyone who has been to one of the listed 26 countries. Anyone whom the authorities say has crossed the border out of Xinjiang unlawfully is detained upon return, and family members with whom these

⁵⁶ “Baluntai Town Implementation Plan on Counter-Terrorism, Stability Maintenance, and on Winning ‘The Three Tough Wars’ and ‘the People’s War’ (巴伦台镇反恐维稳打好“三场硬仗”打赢“一场人民战争”的实施方案),” May 30, 2017. The document was posted on Hejing County Agricultural Anti-Corruption Net (和静县农廉网), a website run by the Hejing County Commission on Disciplinary Inspection (和静县纪律检查委员会) and Hejing County Agricultural Economics Bureau (和静县农经局), but has since been deleted. A copy is available upon request

people communicated while abroad are also detained. The action plan also requires police to subject people who “normally” study or do business abroad to additional entry/exit screening and requires them to report to local police immediately for interrogation after they return.

International Aspects of the Strike Hard Campaign

Xinjiang borders eight countries. An estimated 500,000 ethnic Uyghurs reside outside China; some have become naturalized citizens in these countries.⁵⁷ They are primarily in three countries in Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.⁵⁸ An estimated 136,000 ethnic Kazakhs have emigrated from China to Kazakhstan in the last three decades, where the government has encouraged them to return, and where they are put on a fast-track for Kazakh citizenship.⁵⁹ About 10,000 Uyghurs have also settled in Turkey; while other communities of over 1,000 Uyghurs are found in Australia, Canada, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the US.⁶⁰

Almost concurrently with an earlier Strike Hard Campaign in Xinjiang in 1996, China began encouraging security cooperation with Central Asian countries through the formation of the Shanghai Five group with a focus on cooperating against what they termed terrorism.⁶¹ In 2001, the Chinese government founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and in 2018, India and Pakistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has successfully secured support in these countries to suppress Uyghurs from advocating for an independent Uyghur nation, and to monitor, harass, and deport Uyghurs living there.

⁵⁷ J. Craig Jenkins, Esther E. Gottlieb, eds., *Identity Conflicts: Can Violence be Regulated?* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011).

⁵⁸ Ibid. See also Andoni Alonso and Pedro J. Oiarzabal, eds., *Diasporas in the New Media Age: Identity, Politics, and Community* (Reno, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2010).

⁵⁹ “Nearly One Million Kazakhs Returned to the Motherland Since Independence, Making Up 5.5% of Total Population (独立至今共有近百万哈萨克同胞回归祖国 占总人口 5.5%),” January 16, 2015, <https://www.inform.kz/chn/article/2737227> (accessed July 11, 2018).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The Shanghai Five consists of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan, and emerged from a series of border demarcation and demilitarization talks which the four former Soviet republics held with China. For more background, see Justin Hastings, “Charting the Course of Uyghur Unrest,” *China Quarterly*, no. 208 (Dec. 2011), pp. 893-912.

Some international businesses operate in Xinjiang. Human Rights Watch has documented US company Thermo Fisher Scientific's sales of DNA sequencers to the Xinjiang police, which the authorities appear to use in their abusive DNA collection and profiling efforts.⁶² One international investor, Deutsche Bank, has recommended that investors buy stocks in a Chinese artificial intelligence-driven video surveillance company specifically because of their contracts in Xinjiang.⁶³

⁶² "China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions," Human Rights Watch news release, December 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/13/china-minority-region-collects-dna-millions>.

⁶³ Rollet, Charles, "In China's Far West, Companies Cash in on Surveillance Program That Targets Muslims," *Foreign Policy*, June 13, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/06/13/in-chinas-far-west-companies-cash-in-on-surveillance-program-that-targets-muslims/> (accessed July 11, 2018).

II. Arbitrary Detention, Torture, and Mistreatment in Detention Centers and Political Education Camps

[A]fter [Party Secretary] Chen Quanguo came, the Xinjiang authorities divided people into three categories: those who can be trusted, “the general” category, and those who cannot be trusted. They say they need to put those “who cannot be trusted in trustworthy” places – where are the trustworthy places? Well, the detention facilities.

—Ilham, who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 2018

Under the Strike Hard Campaign, Chinese authorities have stepped up the use of arbitrary detention. Individuals taken into custody by the police are first interrogated, then either transferred to detention centers or taken directly to political education camps. In detention centers, they are held before being tried; those not convicted and sentenced to prison terms are sent to political education camps or released.

Human Rights Watch interviewed five people who provided first-hand accounts about being held in detention centers or political education camps. Alim, was detained in a detention center and released after several weeks; Nur was held in both types of facilities; the three others – Rustam, Erkin, and Ehmet – were held only in political education camps.



Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo (third from left) in a state press photo visiting a Turkic Muslim family in Xinjiang. © Xinjiang state media (天山网)

Abuses during Police Interrogations

Lack of Due Process

Police interrogate individuals taken into custody without regard to basic due process protections, including providing an arrest warrant, setting out a recognizable criminal offense, or allowing access to legal counsel.

Four of the five former detainees with whom Human Rights Watch spoke had entered China as foreign nationals; all had been Chinese citizens but moved to and became citizens of other countries. They returned to China for various reasons, including doing business and visiting relatives. The focus of Chinese police interrogations was on their lives abroad and their religious practices. Alim said:

[The interrogators] asked [me], “What do you do? Where have you been in the [foreign country]?” They checked my passport and saw I’ve never been anywhere else beside that [foreign country]. They started asking, “Who [do you] know who is Uyghur in that [foreign country]? Have you used any other

passport to visit any other countries? Do you pray, do you smoke, do you drink?”⁶⁴

Ehmet said the police asked him:

“Who are your friends in that [foreign country]? What are the people there like? Who do you know? What kind of business do you do? Are you a Muslim? Do you go to a mosque?” They asked lots of questions about [life in] [my country] and about the [people] there.⁶⁵

The police accused them of various offenses. The three who were sent to political education camps were accused of having dual citizenship, and of using an abbreviation of their country’s name in their WeChat ID, neither of which is a crime in China:

[T]hey said there's a problem with my *hukou* [household registration]⁶⁶....They said I have dual citizenship. I told them I know Chinese law says that once someone picks up a foreign citizenship they lose their Chinese citizenship, so I don't have dual citizenship. They say I was required to cancel my *hukou*. But I say, I've done so, I have properly cancelled my Chinese passport. I am a foreign citizen.⁶⁷

The police also accused the two men who were held in detention centers of “disturbing social order,” “endangering state security,” and “harboring terrorists.” However, the police did not provide evidence of criminal behavior. Nur said:

At 10 a.m., five police officers came to my home without any warrant. I refused to go [with them] and they forcibly took me. ... [T]hey told me I had “endangered state security” and that I had ‘harbored terrorists’ – a relative of mine had sought political asylum abroad, so they maybe referring to that, but they didn’t say. So, I said, ‘Where’s your evidence? How can you

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Ehmet (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁶⁶ Hukou, or a “household registration” permit, denotes where that person was born (or where that person’s parent was born) and determines one’s access to government services.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

detain me without reasons?’ They said, ‘You sign now.’ But I said, ‘I refuse to sign, you have no reasons.’⁶⁸

All five former detainees said they were required to sign various documents – some promising that they will not speak about the details of their detention, some promising that they will return to China. Only one held in a detention center, Alim, was asked to sign a detention warrant. But none of the five former detainees was given a copy of the paperwork involving their detention. When Alim asked for a copy of the warrant and other documents, the police refused, saying, “You don’t need that.”⁶⁹

The detention of people without recognizable criminal offenses, particularly for those in political education camps, was corroborated by interviewees with families who told Human Rights Watch that the authorities had not given them any official reasons or paperwork for the detentions.

Two interviewees said officials told them police must fulfill quotas for detaining people in Xinjiang. According to Ilham:

I have heard it myself from the local police.... They were having headaches about it.... So the police ... told people they caught that they have to tell the names of three to four people they know, people who’ve done the namaz [prayed five times a day] in the last three or four years, and [told them that], “If you come up with these names, we’ll release you.”⁷⁰

Torture and Ill-Treatment

Detainees described mistreatment during the interrogation, evidently to obtain confessions or information, that amounted to torture or other ill-treatment. Three of the former detainees said that they were strapped to a metal chair – also known as a “tiger chair”⁷¹ – during police interrogation. Two were subjected to sleep deprivation. Ehmet said:

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ilham (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 12, 2018.

⁷¹ Police officers in China regularly use restraints—known as the “tiger chair”—to immobilize suspects during interrogations. Former detainees told Human Rights Watch that they were strapped in this metal chair for hours and even days, deprived of sleep, and immobilized until their legs and buttocks were swollen. See Human Rights Watch, *Tiger Chairs and Cell Bosses*, May 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/05/13/tiger-chairs-and-cell-bosses/police-torture-criminal-suspects-china>.

They interrogated me for four days and four nights during which I was not allowed to sleep. I was strapped to an iron chair.... I was also chained for three hours, with my arms up like this, so that my toes were barely touching the ground for three hours.⁷²

Nur said:

I got very tired and fatigued from sitting in that [iron] chair and I really wanted to attack someone [because I was angry].... [In the iron chair] they didn't really wake you up, but you couldn't sleep either because everything hurts ... your knees, neck, and back hurts.⁷³

Abuses in Detention Centers

While some individuals convicted of crimes on politically motivated charges were held in detention centers prior to being sent to prison, others described being held without charge, without being informed of violating a recognizable criminal offense, and being subjected to various forms of torture and other ill-treatment.

Detention Without Charge

Alim and Nur told Human Rights Watch that in their cells there were only Uyghurs and Kazakhs, and a few Hui Muslims. Nur said the guards explicitly told the detainees that they were being held for being Turkic Muslims:

[The guards] told us that Uyghurs and Kazakhs are the enemies of China, and that they want to kill us, and make us suffer, and that there's nothing we can do about it. There were a few Hui, but they were held there for triad [organized] crime, later there were some Hui that came in for political crimes.⁷⁴

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Emet (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

Alim and Nur said fellow detainees told them they were being held in detention centers for religious or other peaceful activities that did not constitute crimes:

I know of a guy ... who was taken away for having set his watch to [the unofficial] Urumqi time⁷⁵ – they say that’s what makes him suspicious for terrorism. I know three restaurant owners ...[who] ran ‘Islamic’ restaurants – they got detained because they don’t allow smoking or drinking in their restaurants.... [The authorities] are banning everything Islamic. Not to talk about your clothing, or your beard; they think many things show you have incorrect thoughts.⁷⁶

Among those held in the detention centers were people held pending transfer to prisons upon conviction for peaceful actions:

When I was talking with people in the jail cell I heard the police are recovering their computer files and jailing them for religious stuff. There was a 21-year-old who went to Egypt to study Arabic.... There was a guy who got [convicted and imprisoned for] eight years – he said he had some e-books in Uyghur and he said the police counted that as religious materials, he was also convicted for teaching it to kids. Another 60-year-old had sent a *tabligh* audio – it is a form of Islamic religious teachings – to his daughter, and his daughter passed it to a friend. He got six years and his daughter got three years.⁷⁷

Nur said some fellow detainees were being held solely for having visited or having links with people abroad:

I met people who ... have friends who have gone to Australia or Turkey or [places] outside China. It’s not even that they have close relatives abroad. Having friends or neighbors who have gone abroad [is enough to get

⁷⁵ Despite China’s geographic size, the government has implemented only one time zone for the entire country. The official Beijing time is about two hours ahead of the natural, daylight schedule of the people in Xinjiang, so some people—particularly minorities— set their clocks two hours behind the official (Beijing) time.

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

detained]. ... [T]hey are detained without reasons....Like... because he told his neighbor that they shouldn't drink because they are Muslims. That got reported to the "shequ"⁷⁸ [neighborhood] office, and the man is detained. Or another person got detained because he had spoken too loudly to an official.⁷⁹

Torture and Ill-Treatment in Detention Centers

Detainees described torture and ill-treatment in detention centers that included beatings, being hung from ceilings and walls, and prolonged shackling.

Alim and Nur said that they and their fellow detainees were tortured or ill-treated. Said Nur:

I saw five people tortured and beaten. One was an 18-year-old, whose relative was in Egypt. That relative got into some trouble – taking pictures in places he shouldn't and got taken in by the Egyptian authorities who gave him a trumped-up charge. Then that 18-year-old, because of this, was beaten every week, terrible beatings to make him admit to the charge of terrorism.⁸⁰

Alim said fellow detainees were afraid of being taken out of the cell for interrogations, as they were afraid of being tortured:

[A detainee] showed me his scar from being hung from the ceiling. He didn't have any religious materials, but after being hung for a night, he said he would agree to anything.⁸¹

Alim and Nur said the detainees in detention centers were chained and shackled. Said Nur:

⁷⁸ "Shequ" (社区, translated as "neighborhood office") is the lowest level of government.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

I was chained to the bed. There was a hook in the bed, and I was chained and at most I could only stand up, and then sit down again. My legs still hurt from having been shackled... They told us we were treated that way because the legal procedures say those who have committed murders are being treated that way. But later...they changed the way we were shackled. They say there's a Xinjiang-wide order that all Uyghurs and Kazaks would have their feet shackled and their hands chained together. Like that, with just five to six rings apart making movement very difficult.⁸²

Both reported overcrowding. Said Nur:

There we were at first 24 people held in a 12-square-meter room.... By the time I left, 34 to 35 people were in that small space. We were like sheep being herded into a crowded space. There was no fresh air, there was only a tiny window up above, and we had to take turns to sleep and to eat.⁸³

Said Alim:

We had 21 people and sometimes 22 or 23 people [in a space meant for 12].... Sometimes we had to sleep on my side because if we slept on our backs there'd be no room.⁸⁴

Both men told Human Rights Watch that they were denied access to lawyers, their families, and their embassies. Said Alim:

The [detention center] rules said we should be allowed lawyers but that never happened.... I asked to see the guards.... "Can I talk to my family?" [They said], "No, no. You're not allowed to talk to anybody." [I said], "Not even a lawyer?" "No, no."⁸⁵

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

Abuses in Political Education Camps

[T]he training [and education] is to eliminate the hidden dangers affecting stability in our society and to put people whom we do not trust in a trusted place. It is to make them into people who are politically qualified...It is to let them learn legal knowledge ...[and] to learn Han Chinese.... In [the political education camps], they are clothed, given food and a place to live; under militarized management, they develop good habits and regular schedules ... so that later they can be role models for their children, family, and friends.

—A village Communist Party secretary in Ili, Xinjiang, in a speech to families of detainees, October 2017

They say this is a political education camp, but in reality, it is like a prison, it is surrounded by metal bars everywhere.

—Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam, May 2018

Our relatives told us that [my brother] is being held in a political education camp “because he’d gone to [a foreign country] and that his brain needs to be cleaned.”

—Human Rights Watch interview with Talgat, 29, whose younger brother was being detained in a political education camp, May 2018

Former detainees and official reports confirmed that political education camps are located in former schools, elderly people’s homes, production plants, and prisons. The authorities have also built, or are building, new political education camps.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Adrian Zenz, “New Evidence for China’s Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” *China Brief*, vol. 18, issue 10, May 15, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/evidence-for-chinas-political-re-education-campaign-in-xinjiang/> (accessed August 14, 2018).



A Chinese Communist Party chief in Ili, Xinjiang tells families of those held in political education camps that the camps aim to transform people into “politically qualified...role models” for society. On the wall are the slogans: “Love the Motherland and Be Grateful to the Party; Listen to the Party and Follow the Party.”
© Yili Normal University, Xinjiang

These political education camps focus on military-style discipline and pervasive political indoctrination of the detainees. Turkic Muslims are disproportionately represented in the detainee population compared to the general population of the region, though local languages and religious practices are banned or discouraged. Detainees are required to understand the “crimes” they have committed, though the actions were not criminal offenses under Chinese criminal law.

There have been reports of deaths in the political education camps, raising concerns about physical and psychological abuse, as well as stress from poor conditions, overcrowding, and indefinite confinement – but available information is limited.



Officials unveil a new political education camp in Bayingolin, Xinjiang. ©Yuli County, Xinjiang

Political Indoctrination

Authorities have enforced military-style discipline in the political education camps. Detainees described being required to “fold blankets neatly, like in the military”⁸⁷ upon waking, and learning how to stand and march in military style.⁸⁸

Detainees told Human Rights Watch that they had to participate in a flag-raising ceremony every morning; as part of this ceremony or afterwards, they had to learn to sing propaganda songs praising President Xi and the Chinese Communist Party:

We had to sing “Red” songs like “Without the CCP, There's No New China” (《没有共产党，就没有新中国》) [and] “Socialism is Good” (《社会主义好》). Depending on how the police officer standing at the gate [watching us] feels, we had to sing between one to three songs.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

Praising Xi and the Party was also required before every meal, Nur said:

Then, before meals, we had to stand and say; ‘We feel grateful for the Party, grateful for the Motherland, [and] grateful for President Xi;’ that ‘We wish President Xi good health, that the Motherland is prosperous, and that the ethnic groups are in harmony,’ before we were allowed to sit down and eat.⁹⁰

Detainees, some of whom only speak Turkic languages radically different from Mandarin Chinese, were required to learn to read and write over a thousand Chinese characters and speak Mandarin. Detainees are not allowed to speak their languages or talk about foreign countries. Erkin said:

We weren’t allowed to say *As-salaam alaikum*, a religious greeting, but *ni hao ma?* [how are you?] and speak Mandarin only, [like] *xie xie ni* [thank you]. And if I used [Turkic language] words, they would punish me.⁹¹

He continued:

They told me this is a political education camp I said, ‘Why am I in a political education camp? I’m a citizen of [a foreign country].’ They said, ‘You’re no longer a citizen [of that foreign country], and you will never use this term in your speech.’ We were all very fearful to speak about [that foreign country], all of us, we wouldn’t even say its name.⁹²

Detainees were told that their release was conditional upon their ability to “learn” Chinese and the propaganda songs. One nearly illiterate man said:

We had to learn songs and we had to learn Chinese.... [the authorities] understood that I could not understand any Chinese and that I could not learn [it], so the director of the camp came and told me, “You have all those

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

⁹² Ibid.

crimes ... you have to learn Chinese and you have to learn all those songs by heart. If you don't, you have to be here for one year, if you don't learn within a year, you'd have to be here for five years.”⁹³

The detainees have varying abilities to try to grasp a new, complex language:

In the classroom, we would come in, and there were two police officers right outside the metal door of the [classroom]. Among us there were illiterate people, there were also university graduates, scholars, even PhD graduates, [and] we were all mixed. We had to write down everything, copy everything and sat on hard chairs [for hours]. Some of the characters were very small and yet we had to copy them....There were lots of people in their 60s and 70s and they had to learn 1,500 Chinese characters ... and they say then you'd be released. But these old people, some can't even see! How can they learn the characters?⁹⁴

Political education camp authorities also made detainees memorize other rules as part of their “education”:

From 8 a.m. we had to learn about the rules and regulations, like ‘We are resolutely against ‘the three evil forces,’ the 32 rules that you must memorize like, ‘we are against religious extremism’ that we have to ‘support the Party.’⁹⁵

Ehmet described some of the rules he had to learn:

1. We can now no longer say Islamic greetings, but only [the Mandarin greeting] *ni hao*;
2. Uyghur restaurant signs cannot have Uyghur or Kazakh writings, only Chinese characters;
3. In public places you cannot use Kazakh or Uyghur to speak to each other;

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

4. Kazakh/Uyghur language schools are banned;
 5. You cannot communicate with people in 26 countries including Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkey;
 6. The [Chinese] third generation ID will not have one's ethnicities listed;
 7. On WeChat, QQ [a Chinese social media service] and websites, minorities cannot set up their own chat groups, and if anyone dared to do so ... they'd be given 2 ½ years in political education;
 8. There are rewards for Hans and Kazakhs to intermarry (90,000 RMB [US\$13,000] and that they can also apply for big loans);
 9. If ordinary people violate these rules and leak state secrets, they're going to be heavily punished; and
 10. If people sell their private properties, 50 percent of that will go to the state.
- Another rule was that for those who go abroad, their passports must be kept by the state for safekeeping.”⁹⁶

To ensure the detainees have memorized everything, the “teachers” in the camps checked the “students” periodically:

There were three teachers with 70 to 80 students and they'd test us every week on Sunday. There were written exams as well as homework, we had to write our thoughts after watching propaganda videos, saying stuff like ‘How I feel grateful for the Party, the Party is so great,’ this and that. It's all so stupid.... The teachers also pick a student to stand up and to memorize the rules, and if they don't manage they have to stand under the scorching sun. I also know that people get beaten because they'd be taken away and afterwards when they took off their clothes I could see they have bruises.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Ehmet (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.



Officials bring villagers on tour outside a political education camp in Hotan. ©Yutian County, Xinjiang

During their “education,” detainees were required to sit long hours on stools or chairs that were not comfortable, and not allowed to move. Rustam said: “During the day, we had to sit on stools...Between 8 a.m. to noon we weren't allowed to move freely... At 2 p.m. we would be made to study [sitting on stools] until evening.”⁹⁸

Similarly, Erkin told Human Rights Watch that: “I sat on this stool for 30 days and my bottom started to hurt.... I can no longer bear sitting on that stool.”⁹⁹

Former detainees also reported being watched closely. Said Rustam:

Nobody can move because they watch you through the video cameras, and after a while a voice came from the speakers telling you that now you can

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

relax for a few minutes. That voice also tells you off for moving. ...we were watched, even in the toilet. In political education camp we were always under stress. They chose one leader among us to watch us – the leader has privileges like smoking. ...Also, they selected three to five people among us to monitor others. If you whisper, next week you would not be allowed calls or showers. The problem was, because the quota for misbehavior was mandatory, even if people had not spoken, they would still be punished because if they couldn't come up with three to five names the monitors themselves would be punished.¹⁰⁰

Lack of Due Process

One element of the “education” in political education camps is “legal education”: detainees have to learn about their “crimes,” which are not criminal offenses under Chinese law. Said Erkin:

On day two of our lectures, it was about our ‘crimes.’ They told us about our ‘crimes’ in Mandarin Chinese but I didn’t understand. I asked my neighbor what they were talking about.... they said I was a citizen of [a foreign country] for 15 years and used both citizenships. That’s your ‘crime.’¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.



Government social media post in April 2017 shows detainees in a political education camp in Lop County, Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang. © Xinjiang Bureau of Justice WeChat Account

Interviewees told Human Rights Watch that their fellow detainees were held in political education camps for having relationships with people in the list of 26 foreign countries, or for having practiced Islam. Erkin told Human Rights Watch:

There was ... an [ethnic] Kazakh [next to me]. I asked why is he held? He said: 'I have a wife in Kazakhstan and she divorced me, and I missed my child so much I went to look for her, but I didn't find her. So, all I did was to see some relatives. ...I came home, and they detained me.' There was an [ethnic] Uyghur, who was our leader [in the cell], he'd been detained for having a beard.... [My neighbor] was an old man.... he is a retiree, he receives pensions [in Kazakhstan], but they lied to him and lured him into China. They told him if he came to China his pensions would increase. When he came they just detained him.... There were lots of people detained who were in the process of obtaining their Kazakhstan citizenship. They

were pressured to sign documents endorsing Chinese citizenship and to abstain from their Kazakhstan citizenship.¹⁰²

Said Rustam:

Nobody really knows why they were there. There was an imam of a mosque, who said a prayer for someone when that person came to a mosque requesting it, and someone else informed on the imam and he was detained. There were people who got fooled into selling their land and when they complained they were taken away for political education.... Some people had been imprisoned for 5 and 10 years already and then they were taken here to be detained again. I met someone who was in prison for 16 years and now he is being ‘educated.’¹⁰³

Rustam and Erkin said that some of their fellow detainees had already served prison sentences but were then sent to political education camps immediately upon release. Said Ainagul:

In September 2017, [my husband] was released after 13 years in prison. I heard from my relatives that he's been released.... But then he was transferred to a political education camp. How horrible it is to have already been sentenced to 13 years and now this? What is he guilty of?¹⁰⁴

Families interviewed also said that detainees have been held for having foreign ties. According to Medina:

I can understand if [my husband] did something wrong and he is punished, but he didn't do anything. [The authorities] ask him, ‘Why do you go to [this foreign country]?’.... My husband's cousin's brother has also been

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul, whose 63-year-old husband has been held in a political education camp after he was released from prison for “spying,” May 15, 2018.

detained...for going to Malaysia as a tourist. Just for that, he's been detained, I don't know how they can detain people for doing nothing.¹⁰⁵

Enlik said:

[T]he police came and checked my husband's phone and they found that he's been discussing the possibility of migrating to [a foreign country] and they said, 'Why are you talking about moving to [that foreign country]?'...15 days later they took him to the political education camp.... I don't understand why this is happening. He's not a criminal, but how come he's detained just for talking about [a foreign country]?¹⁰⁶

Dastan told Human Rights Watch:

[My wife] was about to go back [to a foreign country] but they took her passport. And when she went to ask to get her passport back, they told her she needs to be subjected to political education for 10 days, and then they will let her go. That was on July 20, 2017. Since then, she's been in political education camp.¹⁰⁷

The police appear to be checking, in particular, whether people are using certain software provided by foreign companies to communicate with those abroad, such as Virtual Private Networks (VPN, often used to circumvent China's Great Firewall) or WhatsApp. According to Omerjan:

I downloaded WhatsApp on my father's phone when he was here [in a foreign country] and I wanted to check if he can use WhatsApp over there [in Xinjiang], so I sent him a message and after he received it, he was taken away. And I didn't even say anything, I just sent a greeting. He was taken

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Medina (pseudonym), 42, with two children whose husband is in a political education camp, May 27, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Enlik (pseudonym), 41, with three children and whose husband is held in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dastan (pseudonym), 44, whose wife is in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

away for a day, during which they asked him all kinds of questions about his WhatsApp.¹⁰⁸

After this interrogation, Omerjan's father was taken to a political education camp, where he was being held at time of writing. Medina's husband also got detained for using WhatsApp:

[My husband] went to China and [the authorities] found WhatsApp on his phone and they accused him of speaking to someone in [a foreign country] through WhatsApp.... In a week's time ... without any reason or grounds, [the authorities] took him to a political education camp. He left when his son was just one year and three months old, and now he is nearly two.¹⁰⁹

Sofia said her daughter, a college student studying abroad, got detained for using a VPN:

She's visiting relatives [in Xinjiang] and needed to access her school's website for homework...and [she] used a VPN ... but throughout my daughter's detention, they never told us why they were holding her. I only knew about the VPN after my ex-husband made enquiries about why she was detained and those [who knew] told him.¹¹⁰

Former detainees also told Human Rights Watch that they were denied access to lawyers. Said Erkin:

I asked them [the authorities] if I can hire a lawyer and they said, 'No, you shouldn't need a lawyer because you're not convicted. There's no need to defend you against anything, you're in a political education camp. All you have to do is just study.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Omerjan (pseudonym), a teenager who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose father is in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Medina (pseudonym), 42, with two children whose husband is in a political education camp, May 27, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Sofia (pseudonym), whose daughter was held in a political education camp and then released, but not allowed to leave Xinjiang, June 7, 2018.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

Detainees said they were allowed brief calls to their families in Xinjiang, but their conversations were severely restricted. Rustan said that in the political education camps:

We weren't allowed to meet with relatives. But once a week we were allowed to make a call for five minutes during which we were not allowed to say anything bad about our situation or else your line would be cut. And police offices are standing right next to you.¹¹²

Detainees in some camps were allowed to have brief phone calls with their families. Medina said:

At the end of every month, my brother went to the government and asked for permission to see his brother-in-law, but they don't get to see him in person, only through the video. He can also call them every week.¹¹³

Deaths in Custody, Torture, and Mistreatment

Radio Free Asia English service has reported four deaths in political education camps in 2018 (see Table 2).¹¹⁴ While Human Rights Watch is unable to independently verify these four cases, one interviewee told us of the suspicious death of his father in a camp that shares many characteristics with those reported by RFA. Through a contact – whom he arranged to travel to meet his wife and mother – he learned that:

My father died last year [in 2017] in a political education camp in [southern Xinjiang].... my mother was given his corpse.... They delivered his body in the evening.... They told my mother that he should be buried that night without prayer. The next day at night, people close to us buried him. In the

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustan (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Medina (pseudonym), 42, with two children whose husband is in a political education camp, May 27, 2018.

¹¹⁴ "Uyghur Father of Two Dies After Falling Ill in Xinjiang Re-Education Camp," *Radio Free Asia*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/father-04122018153525.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); "Uyghur Man Buried Amid Strict Security After Latest Xinjiang Reeducation Camp Death," *Radio Free Asia*, June 8, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/gulja-burial-06082018164250.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); "Uyghur Teenager Dies in Custody at Political Re-Education Camp," *Radio Free Asia*, March 14, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/teenager-03142018154926.html> (accessed August 14, 2018); "Elderly Uyghur Woman Dies in Detention in Xinjiang 'Political Re-Education Camp,'" *Radio Free Asia*, May 24, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/woman-05242018164854.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

back, [five members of] the Chinese security services watched with the military.... The Chinese did not allow to bathe the body. Even the Muslim way to wash it was not given. Prayer ... was not even permitted to be read.... there were bruises on his body from beatings. But the authorities said that he died of heart failure. He was 63-years-old. He was very religious and a good person.¹¹⁵

It is unclear how many people have died in political education camps and under what circumstances. Chinese authorities have not acknowledged any of these deaths.

Table 2: Deaths in Political Education Camps in 2018 as reported by Radio Free Asia English Service					
Name	Age	Ethnicity	Location	RFA Reported Circumstances	RFA Report Date
Yaqupjan Naman	17	Uyghur	Yekshenbe Bazar township, Yopurgha (Yuepuhu) county, Kashgar	Authorities did not provide a cause of death and forced the family to bury his body under police supervision.	March 14, 2018
Abdughappar Abdujappar	34	Uyghur	Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture	Died after getting sick in detention.	April 12, 2018
Unnamed	Unknown (only that she was “elderly”)	Uyghur	Yamachang camp in Bayanday township, Ghulja (Yining) county, Ili Kazakh	Died as a result of being “unable to cope with the pressure and terrible conditions” at the facility.	May 24, 2018

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ismail (pseudonym), 40, whose father died in a political education camp and his brother is held in a camp, May 12, 2018.

			Autonomous Prefecture		
Abdulreshit Seley Hajim	65	Uyghur	Nilqa County, Ghulja (Yining) county, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture	Family quoted: “people who saw his corpse told us that he was hit with a blunt object on his head and his head was wrapped with a piece of white cloth. Our relatives were not allowed to see his head at all.”	June 8, 2018

Former interviewees told Human Rights Watch about the use of physical and psychological punishments; ill-treatment of or lack of medical care for people particularly vulnerable to harsh detention conditions; and suicide attempts.

All four former detainees who spoke to Human Rights Watch said they experienced a high level of psychological stress in the political education camps. This is partly because of the lack of clarity over how long they would be held there. Said Rustam:

[T]he worst thing was there was no clarity for when this will all end, and it was the same for others. Some people in the political education camps have been there for over a year even when they were told at the beginning that they would just be there for 20 days.... You either die there, or you go crazy. Two people did go mad, including a young man in his 20s. Every day, I had to tell myself that I have to survive, I must not go crazy, I pray silently inside myself.¹¹⁶

Two of the detainees – Erkin and Ehmet – said they had attempted suicide. Erkin said:

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Rustam (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

I had Chinese clothes with a collar and I said, ‘I’m going to go to the bathroom,’ and I cut a piece of the clothes and tried to strangle myself with it. But my hands weren’t as strong as they used to be, so I didn’t expect that I wasn’t able to tighten it enough [to kill myself]. They must be watching me through the camera as they came in within one minute.¹¹⁷

Ehmet said he also tried to kill himself:

I couldn't bear it anymore. I hit my head on the wall and I had the feeling of powerless, helplessness, and rage. I lost consciousness and when I woke up I was in a doctor's room. They had taken me to a hospital. So, they examined me and said my head was seriously injured. The guard said, ‘We're going to sentence you for another seven years for having attempted suicide.’ I wailed.¹¹⁸

All four former detainees told Human Rights Watch they experienced or witnessed physical or psychological punishments throughout the course of enforcing “education,” or to punish those who resist it. Said Nur:

I resisted their measures and insisted that I'm a foreigner. They put me in a small solitary confinement cell (禁闭室) ... in a space of about 2x2 meters. I was not given any food or drink, my hands were handcuffs in the back, and I had to stand for 24 hours without sleep.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Ehmet (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

Ehmet said:

When they came to take me to the political education camp, they made me take off my clothes and they made me walk 50 meters naked, with my legs chained and my one hand holding the chains.... [Later] I had to make the bed in a very precise manner, like in the military. The head of the facility had an inspection in the morning and he told me to redo the bed three times. I then threw my blanket onto the floor. Four guards came, and they took me to [a room] where I was put in a metal outfit. In that outfit you can't bend your head for 12 hours and it was hot and horrible and after that, I became very obedient.¹²⁰

Erkin was repeatedly punished for challenging the authorities over his being wrongfully detained and about the treatment of others:

I was so angry, I hit one of the men [in the political education camp], and they put me in solitary confinement which is basically a well about 1.8 meters deep and maybe 80 or so centimeters wide. It's very narrow and you can't move. It was cold in winter and they poured water. My hands were chained, and I couldn't lower them. I fainted. They took me out of there and put me in bed....

We were instructed to learn a song in seven days. And if you don't learn it within seven days then you'll be given no food for another seven days. I said, I already lived through seven days [while] chained, I should be able to survive seven days without food. The Han guard says, 'Do not even say you've been chained, because you're lying, you've never been chained.'

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Ehmet (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.



Satellite imagery of a political education camp in Hami, Xinjiang. It was converted from a disease control center. © 2018 Shawn Zhang

[The guards] then cut the hair of the girls. There were some girls with long braided hair [but it was] all cut. [The girls...] thought they were going to be released. The girls were all smiling and happy [when they went out] ... but they came back crying and wailing. I was crying with them. I was against this, and I said, ‘Why did you do this?’ The guards said, ‘Why do you care about women’s hair?’ I must have cursed the guards and ... they made me stand up straight for 24 hours.... There were many days when I was punished by standing up for 24 hours.

[T]he guards then moved 580 people to another camp. They put black hoods on us as we were transferred to another political education center.... The guards started kicking me once I entered the other facility....

I saw [other people being beaten] but I didn't know their names. I saw a mix of people, including a Han ... being kicked.¹²¹

All five former detainees who spoke to Human Rights Watch said that elderly people, in their 60s and 70s, and even 80s, were held in the camps. One reported that there were children in their teens; another saw women who were pregnant or breastfeeding. Two said people with disabilities – people with difficulties walking or seeing, particularly among the elderly – were being held in the camps. Erkin said:

People with walking sticks and can't walk – and they would be carried around. There was a woman with a young baby she would breastfeed her baby and they would take the baby away and she would continue her education. There was another woman ... and she was pregnant.¹²²

Some detainees are held even though they were very ill. Detainees said the political education camps do provide some basic level of health care, though they did not find it adequate. Nur said:

In the political education camp, there was this one guy who was so ill – he had a kidney condition in which his urine turned red and needed to be operated on, and he had a surgery scheduled but they wouldn't let him out. My brother too, is seriously ill, but they haven't released him.¹²³

Said Sophia:

My daughter has [details omitted] tumors and she had to have surgery to remove them ... but they still detained her.... I sent them her medical record, and they brought her for a medical checkup, but the hospital didn't give her adequate treatment. They just said she's OK, and she was brought back to detention.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Sofia (pseudonym), whose daughter was held in a political education camp and then released, but not allowed to leave Xinjiang, June 7, 2018.

Two detainees reported overcrowding to Human Rights Watch. Erkin said:

Suddenly the number of detainees increased and there were times when I had to share beds with another person on the same bed.... [T]he room was as big as this [about 18 square meters] with 25 people.... There were not enough dishes, so we fought for plates and cups and fights were frequent there.¹²⁵

Nur said:

Initially there were 700 to 800 people but a few weeks later it became 1,500.... [I]n the last couple days I was there from the morning until the night they kept bringing people in, young and old people wearing uniforms.... It was crowded – some of the people were made to keep watch while others slept, and we took turns sleeping.

It appeared to the interviewees that the authorities have been moving detainees to newly built political education camps because of increased detainee population and overcrowding.¹²⁶

The former detainees said that the combination of arbitrary detention, stress, and physical and psychological punishments had left lasting health impacts on them. Said Erkin:

There were many people there who told me that my beliefs were wrong. The facility was very cold and I was wearing light clothes. I lost weight and I was like skin and bones.... My health was very good [before] ... after the political education camp, my health has deteriorated. I [now] have headaches and my legs ache.... I developed memory problems: I would remember some things today, but I would forget them tomorrow.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

¹²⁶ For additional evidence that authorities are building new facilities, see Adrian Zenz, “New Evidence for China’s Political Re-Education Campaign in Xinjiang,” *China Brief*, vol. 18, issue 10, May 15, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/evidence-for-chinas-political-re-education-campaign-in-xinjiang/>.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

Erkin told Human Rights Watch that the faces and scenes in the camps kept haunting him:

I want not to think about it, I don't want to recall it. Because once I start thinking about it I can't stop it. I want to push it out.... I can't work, and I'm incapacitated. My mother is old, and I have to look after her, and we have no money and I have memory loss.

Said Nur:

After all that, it's as if I've changed into another person. My memory has gotten poor. I do not want sex anymore. I have inflamed joints and nose, as well as high blood pressure.... My psychological health was particularly impacted. There was this horrible noise inside the detention center and the political education camp that made me feel very bad. They said it was the transmitter, but it made me feel really bad, and I can still hear it in my ear.¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018.

Entire Families Taken

Some people from Kashgar and Hotan told Human Rights Watch that half, or all, of their immediate family members were in some form of political education, detention, or imprisonment.

Hoshur, who is originally from southern Xinjiang, was studying abroad in one of the 26 countries listed as problematic by the Xinjiang authorities. Two of his five siblings had been sent to political education in 2017. They are a 29-year-old farmer and a 21-year-old fruit seller. His mother was detained for peaceful behavior five years ago:

My mother was arrested [in March 2018]. According to information from my family, she's in a detention center and [was] charged with 'attending a religious gathering' at our neighbors'. When my neighbor passed away, women gathered at the neighbor's house, maybe they cited the Quran ... the gathering happened in 2013. About 20 elderly women in their 60s were arrested by the authorities....

My sister's husband was sentenced to prison in the summer of 2017 to five years. He was among 60 people in a small village, and their crime was 'listening to religious speech at a mosque.' The speech was delivered by an 'illegal religious scholar.' [My brother-in-law]'s not a religious person. He smokes, and he rarely prays, but just for attending one religious speech three, four years ago, he was sentenced.¹²⁹

Members of Turkic Muslim communities who spoke to Human Rights Watch conveyed a heavy sense of fear. Ainagul, 52, told Human Rights Watch, "Right in front of my eyes, people were being disappeared."¹³⁰ Some Xinjiang residents said they would prepare warm clothes in a go-bag: "if anyone knocks on the door I'd put on my clothes first before opening the door."¹³¹

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Hoshur (pseudonym), a 31-year-old student, June 25, 2018.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul (pseudonym), 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 20, 2018.

III. Everyday Repression in Xinjiang

We have no rights in Xinjiang.... They scare us so much. Living there changes your way of being. You become afraid of [people in] uniforms, you're afraid of telling the truth, you're afraid of praying, you're afraid of being a Muslim.

—Gulshaim, mother of two, who left Xinjiang in October 2017, May 2018

In my entire life I've been scrutinized.... But the implementation of all the high-tech things and swiping IDs everywhere, that was new.... In 2016, they would check your ID in big crowded places....if you see officers ahead, you take a different route and they don't bother crossing the road to check you. That's been upgraded to something you can't escape.

—Alim, former detainee, May 2018

The extraordinary restrictions on personal life for Turkic Muslims throughout Xinjiang is not limited to detention facilities. The government imposes pervasive and constant surveillance alongside persistent political indoctrination.

Restrictions on Freedom of Movement

When my driver and I travelled, I had to inform the police in the locations where our *hukous* [household registration permits] are registered to get written permissions. We'd have to tell them where we're going, what we're doing, who we're seeing, how many days we're gone, and the information of the families we're visiting. They'd have to investigate before they'd issue the permissions. I'd also have to tell my family where I'm going to, [for them] to inform the police and get authorized by the neighborhood office there. And if the authorities there also agree, [only] then we can go.¹³²

—Tohti, who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 2018

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with Tohti (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 23, 2018.

In Xinjiang, the authorities arbitrarily restrict the movements of Turkic Muslims' through a combination of administrative measures, checkpoints, and controls over access to passports.

Several people told Human Rights Watch that they had to apply for permission from the police or the neighborhood office – the lowest level government office – to leave the area where they reside:

Even to leave the village we had to apply to the neighborhood office, and in addition, there are checkpoints along the way [to where you want to go].¹³³

Every Uyghur from southern Xinjiang has to 'apply to go on holiday' from the neighborhood office if they have to travel outside [of their locales]. In spring of 2017, my mother came from [a city in southern Xinjiang] to visit me. She was able to take 15 days of 'holiday.' But then in June, she was only allowed three days upon permission. And my mom is a retired worker in her 70s.¹³⁴

My mom has a heart condition and she needs to go to the hospital in Urumqi, but the officials in the neighborhood office wouldn't let her leave.¹³⁵

It is unclear whether this approval system is applied across the whole region, though interviewees from both northern and southern Xinjiang described being subjected to similar requirements. In some cases, the approval requirement appears to be applied more stringently to former detainees and families of detainees:

[My daughter's] been released but since then she has not been allowed to leave the location where her *hukou* is registered.... She has to report to the neighborhood office regularly.... When my daughter was in there, my ex-

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Inzhu (pseudonym), 50, a former teacher with three daughters who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose husband is in a political education camp, May 20, 2018.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 20, 2018.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Omerjan (pseudonym), a teenager who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose father is in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

husband had to go every day to the neighborhood office to report because he too became a ‘focus personnel’ [a catchall term for those whom authorities deem threatening]; if he had to go and visit his mother – who lives three hours away, he had to get permission from the neighborhood office.¹³⁶

Checkpoints augmented with access to police databases act as another system to control movements:

When my family and I were entering Urumqi after I was released.... the machines went ‘dududu’ when our IDs were swiped. They called me into the office and asked us what crimes we have committed and why we are flagged, and they called our police station; our police explain that I and my family have been blacklisted because I was a [foreign] national and because I was detained. [My family] said their ID cards start making noise when going through the checkpoints ever since I was taken away.¹³⁷

Checkpoints allow the authorities to control where exactly someone can go. Former detainee Alim reported being barred from public places, in addition to not being allowed out of his hukou area:

Everywhere in Xinjiang there were checkpoints.... I was entering a mall, and an orange alarm went off ... I didn’t feel that well. I have a bit of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder ... [so] I said [to my friend], ‘I’m going home.’ But at the exit, the police already arrived, and they escorted me to the police station. I said to them, ‘I was in the detention center and you guys released me because I was innocent...’ The police [at the police station] told me just ‘don’t go to any public places.’ I said, ‘It was fine for the first week and I was able to go places.’ The police said, ‘They update the list every day.’ I

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Sofia (pseudonym), whose daughter was held in a political education camp and then released, but not allowed to leave Xinjiang, April 10, 2018.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Nur (pseudonym), March 22, 2018.

said, ‘What do I do now? Just stay home?’ He said, ‘Yes, that’s better than this, right?’¹³⁸

Similarly, Tohti, who left Xinjiang in 2017, told Human Rights Watch:

Once I went out of [the city where I live] in late 2016. When I swiped my ID card through the machines, they gave out a warning and a light. The police told me to come over, where I was subjected to body check and they questioned me, asking me why I had to go there and who I was ... when I got to the neighboring city I had to report to the police there. The police there called to the police responsible for me to check if I was a dangerous person.¹³⁹

Tohti said police did not explain to him why he was stopped, and he was too afraid to ask.

The interviewees’ descriptions of the way these checkpoints function dovetail with previous Human Rights Watch findings that these checkpoints are connected with the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) big data system, which flags a range of “unusual behaviors” along with a focus on people’s relationship networks.¹⁴⁰ According to official reports, these checkpoints transmit information to the IJOP, and “receive, in real time, predictive warnings pushed by the IJOP” so they can “identify targets ... for checks and control.”

The movement restrictions described by interviewees appear to be an extension of a previous system instituted in Xinjiang between May 2014 – at the start of the Strike Hard Campaign – and May 2016. During that period, Xinjiang residents over the age of 16 were required to apply for “convenience cards” (便民卡) to travel and stay outside of areas in which their hukous are registered.¹⁴¹ This internal passport system was abolished in May

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Tohti (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 19, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ “China: Big Data Fuels Crackdown in Minority Region,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 26, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/26/china-big-data-fuels-crackdown-minority-region>.

¹⁴¹ “Xinjiang Comprehensive Management Office Explains in Details the ‘Convenience Cards’: Those on Business, Travel Do Not Need These Cards (新疆综治办详解“便民联系卡”：出差、旅游无需办卡), *Tianshan Net (天山网)*, August 15, 2014, http://news.ts.cn/content/2014-08/15/content_10417098_all.htm (accessed August 14, 2018).

2016 and replaced by the current systems of administrative approval and automated checkpoints.

Restrictions on Access to Passports

The Xinjiang authorities have, since around October 2016, prevented Turkic Muslims from leaving the country by requiring that they hand in their passports. Some did so without “thinking much of it”¹⁴² while others were very reluctant as they were already making plans to flee Xinjiang. While it is possible to get them back, people described the process as a bureaucratic nightmare:

In June 2017, they took away ... passports.... I said my daughter was ill and I had to apply to get my passport back and I paid the police. Many people gave police money to get their passports back. They refused to give it back the first time.... I went to every connection of mine to try to get my passport back.... The doctors were scared as well.... Eventually I got a medical certificate proving my daughter’s illness, but they still refused to let us have our passports back.... Later, they allowed some exceptions ... and I applied again, and eventually, they approved my application.¹⁴³

And in a number of cases, those who got their passports back were only allowed leave for a short period of time and they had to promise to return:

My passport was taken, but we got them back to travel. We had to go to the neighborhood office to sign various papers saying that we won’t participate in any religious activities and afterwards we were allowed 10 days away from the country.¹⁴⁴

In a number of cases Chinese authorities confiscated people’s residency documents issued by foreign governments, in addition to their PRC passports:

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview with Enlik (pseudonym), 41, with 3 children and whose husband is held in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 20, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Omerjan (pseudonym), a teenager who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose father is in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

They took away his passport and his residency card [of a foreign country]. He went to the police who said maybe tomorrow we'll give them back to you, and again, but eventually they told him they're not going to be giving it back.¹⁴⁵

A number of interviewees – who have long resided abroad but still hold PRC passports – said Chinese authorities took away their passports without explanation and prevented them from leaving. Aynur said:

When I went to the Chinese authorities in my hometown, they collected our passports and found YouTube and WhatsApp on my phone.... They took our passports and they said, 'Why don't you stay here [in China] for a while?' But I told them I can't because my two kids have to go back [to foreign country] to attend school. 'Don't worry about your kids, we'll arrange the matter'.... The kids are Chinese citizens and they just told me that the kids aren't allowed to go, without any explanation.¹⁴⁶

Aynur was eventually allowed to leave with her children after spending months in Xinjiang against her will.

Rayana, a 21-year-old student studying abroad, went home to Xinjiang for a summer holiday and, the neighborhood office called her in and took her passport away. She managed to leave after begging the police:

Every day I went to the police station and cried.... Finally, I got through to the head of the local police who said I could go and he authorized the release of my passport, and I was able to leave.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Enrshat (pseudonym), whose elderly father has been unable to leave Xinjiang after his passport has been arbitrarily confiscated, May 19, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Aynur (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 14, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Kausar (pseudonym), 21, a student studying abroad and whose mother has been held in a political education camp, May 20, 2018.

A number of interviewees described their departures from Xinjiang as escapes requiring evading authorities or hiding in a distant family's home for fear that they would be detained despite trying to leave China legally:

I wanted to come back [to foreign country] and I started the procedures to get my passport back, [the officials] gave me a stack of paper to fill in and get permission to get it back. At the last step, however, they asked me if I had a permanent residency from [a foreign country] and I lied to them [and said no] and they said, 'OK, you can go'.... I signed my [last document] in the afternoon and right then I left. That day, I ... went straight to the border leaving all my clothes [in my home in Xinjiang], and left immediately.¹⁴⁸

Controls of Long and Short-Term Rentals

It is unclear which official documents underpin Xinjiang authorities' restrictions on people's movements, but the "369 Limited Time Work Plan" ("369 限时工作法") implemented since 2015 may inform them.¹⁴⁹ It refers to the requirement that anyone who hires or hosts anyone from outside the locale – including businesses, hotels, and landlords of rental homes – must, within three hours of a person arriving, report and register that person with the police. Within six hours, the officials from the community office and police officers must meet with that person, collect their information, and check for anything "suspicious." Within nine hours, officials must check the person's background on the network and report the person's presence to the police where their hukous are located. There are similarly timed requirements for when that person leaves the locale. Anyone who violates this policy faces a monetary fine.

Across China it is often difficult for Turkic Muslims to find a place to stay, either temporarily or more permanently. Hotels – the registration systems of which are connected to police databases – frequently refuse to allow anyone who comes from Xinjiang, particularly Turkic Muslims, to book rooms, citing excuses such as having no

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Inzhu (pseudonym), 50, a former teacher with three daughters who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose husband is in a political education camp, May 20, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ "369 Limited Time Work Plan (369 限时工作法)," Public Security Bureau of Dushanzi District, <http://www.dsz.gov.cn/topic/20150820369/default.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

available room. They have also reported that police would pressure landlords to evict them from their homes. Ilham told Human Rights Watch that, when his family travelled for vacation to another part of China in 2016, not only did they have to obtain the approval of the Xinjiang authorities prior to travel, but when they arrived:

The authorities there dispatched a bus for all the Uyghurs on the plane. They bused [my family] to the police station to verify their identities, took their fingerprints, and took photos of them and their luggage. They interrogated them, asking them about their hotel address, when they were planning to go home.... then, when [my family] arrived at the hotel, the police were already there, the owner had to come over too. The authorities told my family, ‘If you go anywhere else from here, tell us first. If you leave to go back, tell us as well.’ That was how they managed us.

Political Indoctrination

The Chinese government has a long tradition of considering those whose thoughts differ from those of the government as suffering from “ideological defects” or as “mentally ill,” and force them to undergo political indoctrination.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Dangerous Minds: Political Psychiatry in China Today and its Origins in the Mao Era*, August 13, 2002, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/chinao2/>; “China: End Crackdown on Tibetan Monasteries,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 12, 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/12/china-end-crackdown-tibetan-monasteries>.



Village officials swear allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party in Kashgar, Xinjiang.

© State WeChat account (新疆访惠聚)

Under the Strike Hard Campaign, Turkic Muslims are required to attend a variety of political indoctrination gatherings. Many interviewees said everyone in their community has to attend flag-raising ceremonies with the People's Republic of China's national flag on a weekly or daily basis:

[W]e had to attend the flag-raising ceremony every Monday. They made us take off our head scarves for the ceremony and if you didn't, you'd be taken to the political education camps. If you skipped it, or if you disobeyed them you'd be sent to political education. We were required to attend the flag-raising ceremony starting April 2017.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Auken (pseudonym), a middle-aged woman with two children who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 17, 2018.



Over 5000 students pledge loyalty to the “Motherland” in a July mass ceremony in Hotan, Xinjiang.
© Hotan Prefecture state television

On Monday flag ceremony, you have to show your ID, or if you miss several times in a row, someone would tell on you and then you’d be punished.¹⁵²

Interviewees also said that following ceremonies are often political meetings during which participants might be required to denounce their families or praise the Communist Party. Said Ilham:

There were flag-raising ceremonies, not only every week, but every day. After that, there would be a meeting, and the neighborhood office would gather everyone. They’d talk about all the good things the government has done for the people ... and people have to tell the crowd what their families did, just like during the Cultural Revolution. If your attitude isn’t good, you’d be sent to the political education camp.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul (pseudonym), 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.



Students sign their names on a banner that reads, among other slogans, “Love the Motherland” in Hotan, Xinjiang. © Hotan Prefecture state television

Ilham also described to Human Rights Watch examples of these denunciations:

[There was a] wife denouncing her husband, an imam who was imprisoned for extremism, ... saying something about him propagating Wahhabism¹⁵³; and then a kid who denounces his father for having prayed and read the Quran. [There were also] people who have exceeded the birth quotas, the couple and their kids were crying as the authorities announced the huge fines against them. This is called a ‘Looking Back’ (回头看) exercise, looking back at what bad things people had done in the past 20 years.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Historically, “Wahhabism” is a branch of Sunnism practiced in Saudi Arabia and named after its founder, Islamic scholar Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. The eighteenth-century movement known as “Wahhabism” advocated a conservative agenda of purifying the Muslim faith and simultaneously encouraged independent thinking, a potentially liberal stance.

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Ilham (pseudonym), June 7, 2018, who left Xinjiang in 2017.



People denounce the “three evil forces” in a mass political meeting in Hotan, Xinjiang.
©Hotan Prefecture state television

Alim told Human Rights Watch that the neighborhood office made him deliver a pro-government speech at one such meeting:

People had to read out their speeches, they call it ‘Speak up and Show your Sword’ (发声亮剑), I had to too. It was different people every time. [I wrote] some bullshit: China’s been developing rapidly, that no other country has managed to do that in modern history, we have to thank the Party for our prosperity, we have to fight ‘the three evil forces.’¹⁵⁵

It appears that additional “educational” or propaganda meetings are arranged for certain categories of people. Alim, released from a detention center, was required to attend meetings on a regular basis together with other college students in Xinjiang. “The content of the meeting varied,” Alim said, including persistent questioning concerning “information about me and my family.”

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), June 17, 2018.



Turkic Muslim villagers attending Mandarin classes. For some, attendance is compulsory.

© State WeChat account (新疆访惠聚)

Sofia, mother of a detainee released from political education, said that her daughter was required to attend regular meetings:

She's been released but since then ... [she has to] attend the weekly flag-raising ceremony, and "talks" that brainwash her.... They take photos of her ... as evidence of the success of their work [and education].

In rural areas, since late 2016, the authorities have also started "peasants and herders' night schools" (农牧民夜校).¹⁵⁶ According to the authorities, these schools – to be established in every Xinjiang village – aim to teach people Mandarin, government policies, and skills training, so that people can "leave behind ignorance and backwardness" and is a major program that fulfills the purpose of "social stability and enduring peace" in the

¹⁵⁶ "Xinjiang Authorities to Run 'Night Schools for Farmers and Nomads' Across Xinjiang, Construction to Complete by End of the Year (新疆决定在全疆所有行政村开办“农牧民夜校”年底前完成建设)," *Guancha* (观察网), December 10, 2016, http://www.guancha.cn:8080/local/2016_12_10_383650.shtml (accessed June 28, 2018).

region.¹⁵⁷ There is some evidence that participation is not voluntary, at least for certain types of villagers. According to three interviewees who recently arrived in two different regions in Xinjiang, women under the age of 45, housewives, the self-employed and the unemployed are required to attend these classes, and other individuals as determined by the authorities.¹⁵⁸

According to a 2018 Kashgar Prefecture government policy plan¹⁵⁹, authorities in Kashgar describe different types of political indoctrination programs at different levels of deprivation of liberty and movement with a policy term called “the Four Batches (四个一批).” People who “pose [political] danger” are placed in four “batches” or levels:

- “detention according to the law (依法收押),” which refers to formal detention and imprisonment;
- “political education (教育培训);”
- “custodial control (强制管控);” and
- “in-situ control (原地盯控).”

According to an interviewee familiar with the government’s policies in southern Xinjiang, the government considers political education camps established at county level as “proper” or “formal” political education camps.

For those compulsory political indoctrination programs run by the lower-level governments including at the township and village levels – some allow people to go home afterwards (some Turkic Muslims call these programs “open” political

¹⁵⁷ “The ‘Visit the People, Benefit the People, and Get Together the Hearts of the People’ Activity Leading Group of the Grassroots Office of the Uyghur Autonomous Region Chinese Communist Party Committee’s Notice on the Operations of Night Schools for Farmers and Nomads across Administrative Villages in Xinjiang (“访民情惠民生聚民心” 活动领导小组办公室自治区党委基层办, 关于在全疆行政村开办‘农牧民夜校’的通知),” November 15, 2016, <http://andecig.com/html/ztczjzsztcwzjh20163982328.html> (accessed June 28, 2018).

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Aynur (pseudonym), May 15, 2018; Auken (pseudonym), May 17, 2018 and Ilham (pseudonym), June 28, 2018, who left Xinjiang in 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Kashgar Prefecture Administrative Office (喀什地区行署办公室), “Notice Concerning the Publication of ‘Proposal on Allocating Responsibilities of the Supervision Duties in 2018 in Kashgar Prefecture 关于印发《喀什地区 2018 年督查工作要点责任分解方案》的通知,” March 2, 2018, <http://www.kashi.gov.cn/Government/PublicInfoShow.aspx?ID=2851> (accessed August 30, 2018).

education camps), and some do not – authorities refer them the latter as “custodial control.”

Finally, “in-situ control” refers to restricting people to the area in which their hukous are registered.

Heightened Religious Restrictions

Xinjiang inhabitants have long known heavy religious restrictions (see Section I, p.18). However, the current level of control is unprecedented as Chinese authorities have effectively outlawed the practice of Islam in the region. Interviewees said there have been increasing restrictions over religion and expressions, though the timing and severity of their implementation differ from locale to locale.

In addition to detaining and imprisoning individuals for their peaceful practice of religion, people told Human Rights Watch that the authorities have torn down mosques while converting others into lay uses, removed Muslim crescents from burial sites, and confiscated religious items such as prayer mats and Qurans:

They also confiscated religious items like carpets.... they destroyed the mosque.... There were three mosques in the village – one for Uyghur, one for Kazakh, one for Hui – and they destroyed them all. There is no [longer] Friday prayer and people stop praying because doing so is no longer safe.¹⁶⁰

They were shutting down mosques, even Hui mosques, which were traditionally more tolerated. When the imam there was unhappy about it, he was taken away, and that was surprising to all the Huis.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Auken (pseudonym), a middle-aged woman with two children who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 17, 2018.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

Some said they had to stop praying, either in the mosques or at home, or do so secretly because they fear official reprisals. Inzhu said, “You couldn’t pray, and you couldn’t fast. We obeyed everything they say. My mother prayed, and [even] she stopped doing it.”¹⁶²

Ainagul said:

I used to pray five times a day. But I heard they were making a list of people who do, so when I pray I close my curtains. The authorities came and asked how many times I prayed, and I said five times a day. But then my sister-in-law nudged me, and I said, “Only once.”¹⁶³

Interviewees said that the neighborhood office kept watch during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan to register those who fast, by spotting those who wake up early in the morning for “suhur,” the pre-dawn meal:

When we were there, it was Ramadan – the authorities watched people even [in the middle of the] night. They watched who turned on the lights and would go into the homes [of those who did].

The neighborhood office ... rented an office in every apartment block and during Ramadan watched whose lights were on [in the early morning] and if your lights are on, then you’re in trouble.¹⁶⁴

Social customs, such as the religious aspects of burials, are being increasingly prohibited. There is also some evidence that Turkic Muslims are being pressured to partake in Han Chinese holidays and traditions, such as the Chinese New Year¹⁶⁵:

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Inzhu (pseudonym), 50, a former teacher with three daughters who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose husband is in a political education camp, May 20, 2018.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul, 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Alim (pseudonym), May 29, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ Darren Byler, “Images in Red: Han Culture, Uyghur Performers, Chinese New Year,” *The Art of Life in Chinese Central Asia*, February 23, 2018, <https://livingotherwise.com/2018/02/23/images-red-han-culture-uyghur-performers-chinese-new-year/> accessed August 18, 2018).

People could visit each other but that didn't mean they would. Everyone became secretive and secluded. The crackdown affects the way people behave – so instead of bearing gifts and stay for a long time during visits ... people bring money instead, and they stay for a short time and they quickly go.... They prohibit crying and wailing and traditional grieving songs at funerals; you can have a big gathering for the occasion, but you have to first submit an application to the neighborhood office first, and the neighborhood office will dispatch people to watch you.¹⁶⁶

Language and other expressions are policed. The authorities gave some of these orders during the flag-raising ceremony, as well as when they visit people's homes, according to Auken:

We have also not been allowed to say, '*As-salaam-alaikum*' [the Islamic greeting] but only '*nihao*' [the Mandarin greeting]. You also can't speak freely about Kazakhstan or write in Kazakh or wear Kazakh clothing or wear Kazakh jewelry.... Arabic scripts are replaced by Chinese.... Kazakh chocolates and candies can no longer be sold, but alcohol ... consumption is encouraged.¹⁶⁷

Ainagul said that they are not even allowed to put "Kazakh or Turkish desserts on the table."¹⁶⁸ Similarly, Daniar, 19, said that:

At school we changed from having both Kazakh and [Mandarin] Chinese languages to having all subjects in Mandarin only except Kazakh language. Even Kazakh literature is being translated into Chinese and taught.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Auken (pseudonym), a middle-aged woman with two children who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 17, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul (pseudonym), 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Daniar, 19, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose parents are not allowed to leave Xinjiang, May 16, 2018.

Interviewees said that people destroyed items that maybe considered disloyal to avoid getting into trouble:

You're not allowed to wear clothes with signs of Kazakhstan and my son has a t-shirt with it, so we had to burn it.¹⁷⁰

We heard, in May 2017, that they have started to [punish people for religious items] so we've burned the books ourselves.... It was this neighboring community that's old, and one day we saw lots of police vehicles led by neighborhood office workers who came and searched the homes ... for two hours, and so we got scared because we heard it was about religious articles.¹⁷¹

Mass Surveillance

The authorities in Xinjiang closely watch people through pervasive and overlapping digital surveillance systems. They also encourage people to spy and report on each other, heightening fear and suspicion in many communities. Nurmuhemmet said:

Before I left, I wanted to go to [my hometown] to say goodbye to my parents, but I didn't because I was worried that I would bring them trouble. I was worried that neighbors would see me and remember that I was detained many years ago. Because the authorities encouraged neighbors to report on each other, I was worried that they'd see me and report to the authorities.¹⁷²

Ainagul said:

People didn't visit each other. People didn't want to talk to each other and they avoided each other. If someone – say, another old lady – crosses the

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul, 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 20, 2018.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 20, 2018.

street to come to talk to me I'd run away. I was afraid I'd have a slip of tongue.¹⁷³

A source familiar with government policies in southern Xinjiang said authorities encourage people to report on those who fit the following categories:

- 1) Have welder machines, matches, knives, books, prayer mats, chemical fertilizers, chemicals;
- 2) Have violated the family planning policy;
- 3) Without official approval, teach religion or polices others' religious expressions;
- 4) Have more than one wife;
- 5) "Two-faced" officials;
- 6) Influential individuals;
- 7) Tax evaders;
- 8) Do not obey local officials;
- 9) Do not participate in the flag-raising ceremony or other official activities;
- 10) Have families abroad;
- 11) Communicate with others in foreign countries;
- 12) Have downloaded dangerous content or foreign social media software;
- 13) Have mobile phones suspended by the police;
- 14) Have families considered to be "focus personnel";
- 15) Are recommended by the IJOP;
- 16) Are deemed untrustworthy by the local authorities; and
- 17) Submit petitions complaining about local officials.¹⁷⁴

People are aware that they are being watched all the time, including by the ubiquitous surveillance devices – most visibly, CCTV cameras:

There were lots of cameras everywhere. I used to cover my entire head in traditional style but when I noticed the cameras I changed it to a modern style. The rules are that women under age 45 should show their hair

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul, 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, name and other details withheld.

[without scarf]. On Monday flag-raising ceremonies, you cannot wear a scarf, and you have to wear pants. Once, there was an old woman who wore a scarf to the ceremony and a police officer wacked her back and told her to remove it.¹⁷⁵

In some locales, authorities have put QR codes on every home.¹⁷⁶ Xinjiang is not the only region in which the Chinese authorities have put QR codes on residences, however, and authorities claim these “smart” doorplates help with both population control and service delivery.¹⁷⁷ In Xinjiang, officials scan the doorplates with their mobile devices when they enter to monitor the inhabitants:

Starting from spring 2017, every ... home, where one enters, there’s a QR code. Then every two days or every day, the cadres come and scan the QR code, so they know how many people live here, and starting around then, they would ask [our] visitors ‘Why are you here?’... In the evenings the cadres would check as well.¹⁷⁸

Interviewees also confirmed that authorities have collected their biometric data – from DNA to voice samples.¹⁷⁹ Authorities collect this data when people apply for passports or ID cards, and during police interrogations:

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul, 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

¹⁷⁶ The requirement started in 2013 in Urumqi purportedly for the management of internal migrants, see “Yanerwo Stret Introduces QR Code Services (燕儿窝街道推广二维码服务 入户登记只需“扫一扫”),” *Urumqi Online*, December 18, 2013, <http://roll.sohu.com/20131218/n392014824.shtml>. In 2014, during a tour of Xinjiang, the then-minister of public security, Guo Shengkun, praised these “smart” doorplates as an effective means of using technology for population control in the region, see “Guo Shengkun Stresses Efforts to Build Grassroots Foundation for Xinjiang’s Social Stability, Law and Order(郭声琨在新疆调研时强调 着力夯实基层基础 不断提升实战能力 为确保新疆社会稳定和长治久安作出新贡献),” PRC Ministry of Public Security, April 22, 2014, <http://www.mps.gov.cn/n2254314/n2254315/n2254317/n2254375/n2254379/c4764069/content.html>.

¹⁷⁷ See, for example, “Jinan Welcomes the Era of ‘Smart Street Signs’; QR Codes Perform Many Functions include Renting Apartments (济南开启“智慧门牌”时代 二维码门牌功能多 竟然还能租房子 快进来看看……),” *Phoenix New Media*, July 21, 2017, http://finance.ifeng.com/a/20170721/15544011_o.shtml; “Fujian Gradually Introduces QR Codes on Street Signs (福建陆续换发二维码门牌 扫一扫 门儿清),” April 11, 2017, *People Daily*, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2017-04/11/nw.D110000renmrb_20170411_1-04.htm; and “You can now Find Your Way Home by Using QR Codes (扫二维码就能准确到家! 厉害了, 在我们高埗洗沙就有!),” October 6, 2017, http://www.sohu.com/a/196536031_479454 (accessed August 14, 2018).

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 20, 2018.

¹⁷⁹ “China: Minority Region Collects DNA from Millions,” Human Rights Watch news release, December 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/13/china-minority-region-collects-dna-millions>; “China: Voice Biometric Collection

[Yes] they did take our DNA samples, [and] iris scans.... When we applied for the passports. For those who can read, they read out from a paper but for those who cannot, [they said,] ‘You can sing a song or tell a story and we will record you.’... You aren't in a position to argue with them [about the collection].¹⁸⁰

Since 2016, there are cameras in front of every home ... which is connected to the police station; they collected the voice samples from everyone, even their gait – I have seen them collect people’s gait in the police station, they asked people to walk back and forth several times. They collected the biometrics of anyone between age 15 to 70, without reasons, including their blood samples.¹⁸¹

Interviewees also said police and neighborhood officers check people’s phones for “problematic” content, messages, or apps, confirming earlier media reports.¹⁸² This is done without explanation or any official documentation. Officials check phones manually and with handheld devices:

I was driving when I was stopped by the traffic police.... Then a few SWAT police officers came and demanded that I give them my phone. I did, and they plugged the phone in.... There were different kinds of cables for different types of phones. They plugged in my iPhone, but I didn’t see what they were searching for. They handed the phone back to me after five minutes, and I was allowed to leave.... Earlier, the neighborhood office told residents that they can go to the police to get their phones checked ‘for free’ to see if there’s anything ‘problematic.’ And we went, and it was fine.... Lots of people did that.¹⁸³

Threatens Privacy,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 22, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/22/china-voice-biometric-collection-threatens-privacy>.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Auken (pseudonym), a middle-aged woman with two children who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 17, 2018.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ilham (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 7, 2018.

¹⁸² “Police Increase Checks of Uyghur Smartphone Users in Xinjiang,” *Radio Free Asia*, January 8, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/police-increase-checks-of-smartphone-users-in-xinjiang-01082016133532.html> (accessed August 14, 2018).

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Nurmuhemmet (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 20, 2018.

The descriptions of these checks raise concerns that police may be extracting, copying, and retaining all data and communications stored on mobile phones during these checks.

Nurmuhemmet said people were scared because it is unclear to them what exactly was being banned:

People didn't know if what they have on their phones – apps, website content – is considered 'unlawful' or 'terrorist.' I don't know what they are either – I've heard about them, but I haven't never seen them.¹⁸⁴

Tohti said:

We don't really know [what specific unlawful content] to delete, so police officers would provide the service to delete such unlawful content and check your phones, for 500 RMB.... I do not use smartphones anymore, like Samsung or iPhone.¹⁸⁵

Interviewees described a sense of paranoia as a result of the surveillance. Auken said:

People were very fearful because we heard there were bugs inside the house, inside the cars, we don't really know if there are, but everyone is scared and if they have to say something they sign rather than speak.¹⁸⁶

Interviewees also described being closely monitored by government officials, particularly those from the neighborhood office and the police. They consider officials visiting and staying in their homes under the compulsory programs “fanghuiju” and “Becoming Families” as intrusive. This is in sharp contrast to the authorities' official reporting, which generally describe grateful minorities embracing their officially assigned “relatives.”

Ainagul said:

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tohti (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, June 19, 2018.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Auken (pseudonym), a middle-aged woman with two children who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 17, 2018.



A state press photo showing Chinese officials sharing sleeping quarters with Turkic Muslim families during compulsory homestay “Becoming Family” program in Xinjiang. © State-owned enterprise WeChat Account (国电新疆)

Since early 2017, twice a week, officials came. Some people even stayed for a night. A man and a woman came for dinner. They come, and they don’t go. The authorities came in advance and made a list and assigned new ‘relatives’ to you. And they said, ‘This is your new relatives, accept it.’ We could not ask them why, we were too afraid.... [The officially-assigned ‘relatives’] talked to my son, my grandkids, they took pictures, they sat at the table, they asked, ‘Where’s your husband, where did he go?’ They’d say, ‘Let’s have a meal.’ I was really frightened, and I pretended to be busy looking after my grandkids. I was worried that if I spoke I’d let slip that my husband had gone [abroad]. So, I stayed silent.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Ainagul (pseudonym), 52, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose son is in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.



A State press photo showing Chinese officials staying with Turkic Muslim families during compulsory homestay “Becoming Family” program in Xinjiang. © State WeChat account (新疆访惠聚)

Official reports about these programs say the length of the stays depend on the political trustworthiness of the families. Those who are considered suspicious are subjected to lengthier, or more frequent, stays:

When my daughter was in the political education camp, two neighborhood office workers lived in my ex-husband’s home because he was considered as family of ‘focus personnel.’ You know, in China, the apartments are very small, and he has his own child too.... I asked him, ‘Where did you sleep?’ He said, ‘I stayed on the sofa and I gave them my bedroom.’ I thought, ‘This is ridiculous!’.... they said it was to help educate him, but my ex-husband has worked in a work unit for years and is very stable, what education does he need?¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Sofia (pseudonym), whose daughter was held in a political education camp and then released, but not allowed to leave Xinjiang, April 10, 2018.

In one case, the interviewee said she was held under effective house arrest by these officially assigned “relatives” for months, as she was not allowed to leave without permission:

A total of five officials ... took turns to watch over me [at home]. And they had to document that they’d checked on me.... But they were humans after all ... so they took photos of me in different settings in one go and in the next couple days they just called in to check.... These photos were all setup. The photos show them reading political propaganda together [with me] or show me moving a pillow on a bed to prepare for them to stay overnight; or them lying down on sofa.¹⁸⁹

A few other interviewees also said their families in Xinjiang have been subjected to house arrest. One told Human Rights Watch that after her mother was released from political education camp, officials have been stationed in her home:

[S]he contacted me again, she used to be very healthy, but when she called she [looked terrible and she said] ... She had to be given intensive care in the hospital. She’s now at home resting, but the Han officials come every day. I asked her, ‘Are you at home?’ She said, ‘Yes.’ But she also said Han people are at her home to ‘eat and live’ with her every day and that she cannot go out on her own.¹⁹⁰

Interviewees said male cadres have been dispatched to homes, including when there are only women or children at home. Aynur, who was subjected to house arrest, said three of the five officials tasked with watching her were men:

There were three men and two women; they were supposed to stay overnight but they didn't; the men were particularly embarrassed to do so. So, they only spent several hours with me [instead].

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aynur (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, May 14, 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Kardina (pseudonym), 36 with one child, June 6, 2018.

A state press report about these visits also confirms that in some cases, cadres are sent to the homes of members of the opposite sex.¹⁹¹ The danger of abuse is particularly high during these compulsory “Becoming Family” homestay programs, which often involves Han Chinese government officials in a dominating power relationship with Turkic Muslim families who are required to host them overnight. This makes women and girls particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Uyghurs in exile have reported that Uyghur children are being detained in boarding schools or orphanages under terrible and overcrowded conditions, especially if their parents are in political education camps. Residents in Urumqi and Kashgar confirmed such draconian practices to the Financial Times in a July 2018 report; the *Financial Times* also found evidence that 18 new orphanages were built in 2017 in one Kashgar county alone.

One Uyghur from southern Xinjiang told Human Rights Watch that his 10-year-old nephew had not been allowed to live at home because his father has been subjected to political education. The boy, who is only allowed to see his mother briefly once a week, had threatened to jump out of a window of his boarding school unless he was allowed to live with his mother.

Interviewees also alleged that authorities have forcibly taken children between 5 and 15 in their extended family in southern Xinjiang and placed them in orphanages, while relatives were allowed to care for the younger children. Another interviewee – a Kazakh from northern Xinjiang – said the authorities had subjected her to house arrest instead of sending her to a political education camp because she was the sole caregiver of her children.

Human Rights Watch is concerned that the use of indefinite arbitrary detention in the campaign also has violated the rights of children and their parents and guardians.

¹⁹¹ “Advice to ‘Becoming Family’ Cares from Those Who Have Spent 50 Days in Their Relatives’ Homes (在亲戚家住过 50 天他们给 “结亲周” 干部职工一份攻略),” *Tianshan Net*, December 14, 2017, original has been deleted, a copy is available at: http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:HG_B1G2Y2CoJ:haoshuangqiao.com/html/zttztwtz....info6625174369.html+&cd=2&hl=zh-TW&ct=clnk&gl=hk (August 14, 2018).

IV. Strike Hard Campaign's Impact Abroad

The Strike Hard Campaign has had a major impact on ethnic Uyghurs and Kazakhs outside China who have family members inside the country. Families have suddenly found themselves divided. They have had great difficulty communicating with their loved ones in Xinjiang, because the Chinese government has barred Turkic Muslims from contacting people abroad. The government has also pressured some ethnic Uyghurs and Kazakhs to return to China, while requiring others to provide detailed personal information about their lives abroad.

Divided Families

It was 2 a.m. and my daughters [in a foreign country] were chatting with their father [in Xinjiang] on the phone. You know, they're daddy's girls and they were telling him all their secrets ... when suddenly my daughters ran in to tell me, '[The authorities] are taking away daddy!'

—Inzhu, 50, who resides outside China but whose husband is being held in a political education camp in Xinjiang, May 20, 2018

I'm doing okay, but my young girl is suffering a lot. She's nearly three now. She would wake up in the middle of the night and look for her mother... When I go to work, my daughter says, 'My mom already left me; I don't want you to leave me, too.'

—Dastan, 44, who lives outside China but whose wife is held in a political education camp in Xinjiang, May 19, 2018

Many families who spoke to Human Rights Watch said they have been divided by the crackdown, either because their family members who have travelled to Xinjiang for a visit are detained in China, or because these family members are unable to leave Xinjiang due to the authorities confiscating their passport or refusing to issue one. Said Dastan:

Our family has been separated not only in two, but in three ways, as I'm here [outside China] with my youngest daughter, my wife is in detention [in

Xinjiang], and my [other] daughters are back at home [in Xinjiang] with my younger brother. But I haven't heard from him since September 2017.¹⁹²

The Chinese government's campaign has caught many people off guard, particularly those who were used to crossing Xinjiang's borders frequently for trade and for visiting families. Raikhan, 41, said the Xinjiang authorities suddenly barred her husband from leaving Xinjiang in the fall of 2017:

[The authorities] said, 'You haven't registered your passport with the village authorities.' But we have never had to do that when we went back and forth in the past.... So my husband went back to the police in his village to register and they took his passport and said, 'We'd give it back in a few days.' But then it was another few more days, and again and again and until 2018 they still hadn't let him get it. ¹⁹³

Amina said:

On March 20, 2017, my husband went to China because his Chinese passport was about to expire. He submitted his passport to the Chinese consulate [in the country we reside] but they told him he had to go back to China to renew it.... When he went there, they told him they'd stopped issuing passports ... and they took his passport.¹⁹⁴

A few interviewees said their families became divided when police issued passports for only part of the family. In some cases, it was because a family member had failed to apply for passports before the authorities tightened control over passports; in others, the police gave no explanation. In one case reported to Human Rights Watch, the authorities stated that denying a passport to one family member was a deliberate policy. Enlik said: "We

¹⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Dastan (pseudonym), 44, whose wife is in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Raikhan, 41, whose husband passed away under suspicious circumstances after the Xinjiang authorities confiscated his passport and would not let him leave, May 17, 2018.

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Amina, 37, with three children, whose husband has been unable to leave China due to passport confiscation, May 18, 2018.

wanted to move to [a foreign country] together but the local police said one person from each family must stay behind, so they kept my husband's passport.”¹⁹⁵

The separations also risk immiserating families, particularly when one parent has been prevented from leaving Xinjiang, leaving the other to both work and look after small children:

I found a job sorting apples in winter.... But I've been sick, and I can't go to work, and my son has gotten sick. I've been unemployed, and I've been unable to pay the rent. In the winter, it's between 30 to 40 degrees below zero, and I don't have any [money for] coal in the oven. But if I switch it off, I know the kids and I are all going to freeze.... I'm sick and I can't buy any medicine because I'd spent all my money on my son's treatment.¹⁹⁶

Erzhan said he has to lock his two young children – ages 2 and 4 – at home alone so he can go to work because his wife has been held in a political education camp in Xinjiang:

It is horrible.... I can't leave the kids with others because everyone has their own problems, also my son is quite restless.... If my business is good, we can hire someone to look after the children, but it is too expensive, so I lock them up. My boy cries for his mother.¹⁹⁷

Madina, a PhD student, is separated from her 3 and 5-year-old children. She moved abroad with her oldest child, age 6, and had intended to bring the other two, but then it became impossible for them to leave. The authorities did not issue a passport for one of the children and recalled the passport of the other. The last time Madina had contact with her young children was more than a year ago, in May 2017:

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Enlik (pseudonym), 41, with three children and whose husband has been held in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Amina, 37, with three children, whose husband has been unable to leave China due to passport confiscation, May 18, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Erzhan, 32, with two children and whose wife has been held in a political education camp, May 17, 2018.

I can't sleep. I heard a few days ago that kids without parents have been sent to orphanages and now they're being sent to the mainland [outside Xinjiang]. My husband passed away and I'm my kids' only parent. If something happens to my parents.... I don't know where my kids are, where my parents are. The kids are innocent, and I haven't committed any crimes ... this is too difficult to bear.¹⁹⁸

Asel, 21, and her brother, 14, have lived abroad for years. Their grandparents have been looking after the siblings, but when they went back to Xinjiang for a funeral and got detained in political education camps, Asel found herself alone having to struggle to provide for and look after her brother. Asel is studying in a city many kilometers away from her brother; she is only able to go visit him every three to four months:

My brother is small, and nobody is here now to look after us ... we have no means to make money. I was able to obtain a scholarship last year, which tided us over but then I have two more years to go; I don't know what's going to happen this year.¹⁹⁹

In some cases, extended families have stepped in to care for the children stranded outside China without their parents, but with difficulty. Akmetzhan says he has been struggling to provide for his three children and two nephews from Xinjiang:

I'm unemployed with a disability and [a total of] five kids to support. So, I go to the municipality and I get US\$88 a month to support me. The [two] kids only want to have their parents back, and that they have their passports, we are not criticizing the Chinese government, until six months ago the government policy was fine, but then it changed all of a sudden and a lot of families are now separated by the border.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Madina, June 5, 2018.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Asel, 21, a student, whose grandmothers have been held in political education camps, May 15, 2018.

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Akmetzhan, May 16, 2018.

Restricting Private Communications with People Outside China

Chinese authorities have ordered people not to communicate with those abroad and have investigated or punished people for doing so. Baykt said, “We can’t speak to [my husband] for more than three minutes. He says the rules say you can’t speak with people in foreign countries.”²⁰¹

Gulshaim said, “I called my aunt, but she told me to call another day. When I called the other day, she said, ‘Don’t call me because the other day when I spoke with you [an official] came to our house immediately.’”²⁰²

Many interviewees said they have had little to no contact with their families for many months. As a result, it has been very difficult for their families outside to learn what is happening to their loved ones back home:

My kids [in Xinjiang] used to call me ... they said they were told by officials not to call us [in a foreign country].... What a torture, to know nothing [about my family]. It is better to know if they are dead or alive, then to know nothing at all.²⁰³

I’m scared, I’m very stressed. I don’t know what I can do for them. I don’t know [my family’s] situation, I can’t contact them. It’s so hard. I think about them every day. I dream about them every day. I really want to go back, but I know even if I did, I wouldn’t be able to see them. I haven’t done anything wrong or illegal. I go to work, I take care of my child. What have I done? ²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Bakyt, 52, whose husband has been unable to leave Xinjiang due to passport confiscation, May 19, 2018.

²⁰² Human Rights Watch interview with Gulshaim, who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose brother has been held in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.

²⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Dastan (pseudonym), 44, whose wife has been in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

²⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Kardina (pseudonym), 36, with one child, June 6, 2018.

Pressure to Return to China and to Provide Personal Information

They give a signal, that even if you're in a foreign country, they can 'manage' you. It may be that they want to try to stop people from participating in demonstrations.... I'm scared.... I didn't join any terrorist or any organization against China. I didn't join any demonstrations. I didn't carry any East Turkestan flag. I have no criminal record in China ... why are they doing stuff like that [to me]?

–Murat, a 37-year-old student living outside China whose sister is in a political education camp, June 2018

Ethnic Kazakhs and Uyghurs living abroad have told Human Rights Watch that Chinese authorities have pressured or told them to return. It appears that this is happening to those holding PRC passports, including those in Western democracies. Dastan, a PRC passport holder living abroad, told Human Rights Watch that Chinese police contacted him and told him to return to China: “First, the village police called, and then a higher-level police bureau called. Their numbers were hidden – they didn't show where they were calling from.... The police told me, ‘If you don't come, we'll come get you.’”²⁰⁵

Tohti said:

They called many times. In the beginning they were nice.... When I got to [a foreign country], they called me and they said, ‘You didn't tell me you were going to [that country]. I'm your boss.... You've grown brave now that you've gone to [that country], eh? You just wait and see, we can catch you there. Your kid is in our hands. Don't you look down on us China. You see how no other leader can compare with President Xi Jinping!... You have to come back to Xinjiang.’²⁰⁶

In many cases with which Human Rights Watch is aware, the authorities told families in China to press their relatives abroad to return, usually under the threat of harming them or

²⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Dastan (pseudonym), 44, whose wife has been in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Tohti (pseudonym), who left Xinjiang in 2017, March 19, 2018.

confiscating their properties. In one case reported, the police threatened to rape the man's daughters. According to Zara, 37, who lives outside China and is married to cross-border textile trader, Mehmet:

Munire [Mehmut's first wife] called me [from Xinjiang] ... and said that the police together with the city authorities came to them. They said that Mehmet needs to return home [from abroad].... The [officers] got tired of having to visit her. The last time they came, they began to threaten her with violence, that they could burn her house or rape the girls.... I told Mehmet about our call. Mehmet sat and cried....Two days later Mehmet said goodbye to me and left.... two days later, Munire called and said that Mehmet was already in a political education camp. As soon as he crossed the border, the policemen immediately took him from there.... The conversation lasted about a minute. Then the connection ended. Since then, Munire has never called.²⁰⁷

Many interviewees told of having to make heartbreaking choices. Talgat said:

I also have a 13-year-old younger sister and she is studying in China. She was here in [this foreign country] but three of our relatives called and told us that we had to make sure she goes back to China; if not, they'd be detained themselves. So, we had no choice but to send her back. She is studying in the sixth grade and the authorities took her passport. Her passport is about to expire and that means ...she risks being stuck in China forever.²⁰⁸

Weeks after this interview, Talgat learned from his relatives in Xinjiang that his sister has also been taken to a political education camp.

²⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Zara, 37, whose husband has been held in a political education camp, June 3, 2018.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Talgat, 29, whose younger brother has been detained in a political education camp, May 18, 2018.



An interviewee says that his younger brother and sister have both been taken to political education camps.
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In some cases, it is the former employers who convey the message. Garri, 78, residing in a country bordering China, told Human Rights Watch that four close family members have been told to go back to China that way:

In March 2017, [their respective work units called] and said, ‘We need you to fill some paperwork, so the four of them went [to Xinjiang] and the authorities took their passports and did not give them back. Those from their work units had said, ‘If you don’t come, we will stop your pensions.’ [They] keep calling, so [my family] went.’²⁰⁹

In some cases, when authorities returned people’s passports to allow them to leave Xinjiang, they required people to sign a letter promising they will return within a particular timeframe. Said Omerjan: “We had to go to the neighborhood office to sign various papers

²⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Garri, 78, May 19, 2018.

saying that we won't participate in any religious activities and afterwards we were allowed 10 days away from the country."²¹⁰

Some decide against returning, but some did out of concerns for their families. Dilraba said:

My sister went back to Xinjiang ... and she had to give [the authorities] her passport. [They gave it back but made her] write a guarantee letter saying that when she finishes her master's degree she'll go back to China. I told her not to go again, but she said, 'I'm worried about our parents ... even if I die, I want to die there with them. I can be [sent to political] education, it's okay, it's [just] three months or six months in there.'²¹¹

Dilraba's sister returned to Xinjiang and has not been heard from since. A few other interviewees have told Human Rights Watch that, despite knowing the likelihood of detention and torture in political education camps, they intended to return to Xinjiang. Said Adil:

I am going back to Xinjiang. I know I will not reach home. [The authorities] will take [me] directly at the border, as they did with other people who returned.... I'm afraid for the lives of my family, my children, and wife. For their sake I am ready for anything.²¹²

Some interviewees said they had been asked by Chinese authorities for detailed information about their lives abroad. This seems particularly common for those who have become naturalized citizens of democratic countries. According to Kardina, "My sister-in-law asked me to send her information, but I didn't. The police then threatened my mother, so I sent them 10 items of information." The police had requested the following information:

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Omerjan (pseudonym), a teenager who left Xinjiang in 2017 and whose father has been in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dilraba, whose sister has been held in a political education camp, June 6, 2018.

²¹² Human Rights Watch interview with Adil, a cross-border trader living abroad whose brother and sister-in-law have been held in political education camps, June 30, 2018.

1. Information about the person abroad;
2. When the person applied for a passport;
3. The reason for applying for the passport;
4. When was the departure and why;
5. How long is her visa?
6. Why has she not returned?
7. Has she applied for [a foreign] passport?
8. When us she back?
9. Has anyone else in the family had passports? and
10. How do you contact her?²¹³

Hoshur, a 31-year-old student, told Human Rights Watch:

[M]y parents contacted me, and they said if I send my personal information, my brother and sister can be released [from political education]. If I do anything anti-China, there would be trouble to us. My dad said the police told them this. I had to send them my residential address, my phone number, and my school address to prove that I'm in [a foreign country] and in a school.²¹⁴

Many interviewees said they were afraid to discuss the situation in Xinjiang. In some cases, authorities have explicitly warned them against speaking about it. Erkin, a former detainee, said:

They said, 'You're going to be freed, but you have to sign this paper stating that you'll never speak of what happened here. We have our spies out there and we will know if you're talking to people.'...I was subjected to another interrogation, and signed another statement saying I will never speak about the number of people in the political education camp.²¹⁵

²¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Kardina (pseudonym), June 6, 2018.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Hoshur (pseudonym), a 31-year-old student, June 25, 2018.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with former detainee Erkin (pseudonym), May 18, 2018.

An ethnic Kazakh woman who worked as an educator in a political education camp, and who later fled to Kazakhstan where her husband and two children live, was put on trial by the Kazakh authorities for “illegally crossing the border.” She was released after the court gave her a six-month suspended sentence. In court, she testified that Xinjiang authorities made her sign an agreement she would not disclose “state secrets,” which she said she was violating by speaking about the conditions in the camps.²¹⁶

Those who live in countries in which governments have close relations to the Chinese government are particularly frightened of speaking out. Said Enlik:

I have heard rumors that they can take you to China. People tell me, ‘Be careful, lay low, because you're still a Chinese passport holder, they can still get you back, even snatch you from here.’²¹⁷

Said Abduweli:

You have to pay local officials a bribe so that we can live peacefully. Otherwise, [the authorities] threaten deportation to China. Soon everyone will be deported, or they will leave completely.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Asylkhan Mamashula, “Kazashka from Xinjiang Saigagul Sauytbay asks court not to extradite her to China (Казашка из Синьцзяна Сайрагуль Сауытбай просит суд не выдавать ее Китаю),” *Radio Azattyk*, July 13, 2018, <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/29361141.html> (August 14, 2018).

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Enlik (pseudonym), 41, with three children and whose husband has been held in a political education camp, May 19, 2018.

²¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with cross-border textile trader, Abduweli, 52, June 30, 2018.

V. Applicable Legal Standards

The Chinese government's actions in Xinjiang are contrary to China's constitution and violate China's obligations under international human rights law. These include basic protections on freedom of expression, religion, family life, privacy, and to movement as well as from being arbitrarily arrested, detained, and subjected to torture and ill-treatment. China's actions against the ethnic minority populations in Xinjiang also violate international legal protections against racial and ethnic discrimination. Those denied their fundamental rights have no adequate avenue for redress, including for the most serious violations.

Right to Liberty

The Xinjiang political education camps violate numerous fundamental rights. Article 37 of China's Constitution states that all arrests must be approved by either the procuratorate, the state prosecution, or the courts.²¹⁹ Yet neither agency appears to be involved in detentions to the political education camps.

While some Chinese laws – including the Counterterrorism Law, the Xinjiang Implementing Measures of that law, and the Xinjiang Counterextremism Regulations – envision authorities “educating” people about extremism, none of those laws allow authorities to deprive people of their liberty.²²⁰

International human rights law instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),²²¹ which is generally considered reflective of customary international law, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),²²² which China has signed but not ratified, prohibit arbitrary detention. Detention is arbitrary when it is not possible to invoke a legal basis justifying the deprivation of liberty consistent with

²¹⁹ Constitution of the People's Republic of China, art. 37, <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/constitution-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china>.

²²⁰ For a longer discussion about the legal basis of political education camps, see Jeremy Daum, “XJ Education Centers Exist, but does their legal basis?” China Law Translate, August 14, 2018, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/xj-education-centers-exist-but-does-their-legal-basis/?lang=en> (accessed August 23, 2018).

²²¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), G.A. res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc A/810 at 71 (1948).

²²² International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, *entered into force* March 23, 1976.

fundamental rights, or when the detaining authority fails to observe basic due process rights, such as to be informed of the reasons for arrest, to contest the detention before a judge, and to have access to lawyers and family members.

China's political education camps are arbitrary detention facilities because they detain people in violation of their basic rights to expression, religion, and other grounds, and because they do not afford detainees adequate due process protections.

Non-Discrimination Guarantees for National Minority Groups

China's Constitution states that, "[a]ll ethnic groups in the People's Republic of China are equal." The constitution prohibits "[d]iscrimination against and oppression of any ethnic group" and especially protects these groups' use of language, "folkways, and customs."²²³ It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion.²²⁴

The protection of minorities from discrimination is a core element of the international human rights framework. China has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).²²⁵ However, many of the government's policies in Xinjiang have violated its obligations under the convention.²²⁶ The ICERD states that governments "undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law," notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:

- Right to equal treatment before the courts and other tribunals;
- Right to security of person and protection by the state against violence or bodily harm, whether inflicted by government officials or by any individual group or institution; and
- Other basic rights, in particular: freedom of movement within the border of the state; to leave any country, including one's own; freedom of thought, conscience,

²²³ Chinese Constitution, art. 4.

²²⁴ Chinese Constitution, art. 36.

²²⁵ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), 660 U.N.T.S. 195, *entered into force* Jan. 4, 1969. China ratified the ICERD in YEAR.

²²⁶ "Submission to the CERD review of China," Human Rights Watch news release, June 21, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/21/submission-cerd-review-china>.

and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and access to any place or service intended for use by the general public.²²⁷

Freedom of Thought, Expression, and Religion

China's Constitution guarantees people's rights to expression, including the right to publish, gather, associate, protest freely.²²⁸ However, at the same time, it also promotes the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party. Numerous provisions in China's criminal law criminalize free speech, including "inciting subversion" (article 105)—a crime used against dissidents—inciting "ethnic hatred" (article 249), and "separatism" (article 193)—a crime often used against ethnic minorities.

While the Constitution also protects the right to freedom of religion, it undercuts that right by prohibiting the use of religion to "disturb social order."²²⁹ The Chinese government has imposed pervasive and comprehensive restrictions on religion through numerous laws, regulations, and directives (see Section I, p. 18).

China currently recognizes as "lawful" only those religious activities that are sanctioned and controlled by the government. Such activities must be conducted by officially accredited religious personnel and take place in government-approved places of religious activity; any other religious activities are considered unlawful.

The government audits the activities, employee details, and financial records of religious bodies, and retains control over religious personnel appointments, publications, and seminary applications. The government also requires prior governmental approval before anyone can publish, print, reprint, issue, sell, or distribute religious material, including the distribution of leaflets.

Forcing people to undergo political indoctrination, along with many of the Chinese government's policies in Xinjiang to restrict people's religious and ethnic expression, are violations of the rights to freedom of expression, thought, and religion.

²²⁷ See ICERD, art. 5.

²²⁸ Chinese Constitution, art. 35.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, art. 36.

The UDHR and the ICCPR guarantee the right to freedom of thought, belief, and religion. This right includes the freedom to have or adopt a religion of one's own choice and freedom to practice one's religion or belief either individually or in a community, privately, or publicly, in worship or in performing religious or spiritual practice and teaching.²³⁰

International law imposes restrictions on the freedom to practice a religion or belief in certain instances established by law and cases, when it is necessary to protect public safety, public order, health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others. Absent any intent to cause such harm, the possession of religious material is protected under international law.

The UN Human Rights Committee has determined that the concept of belief and religion “should be interpreted broadly.” It expresses concern “about any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief on any grounds, including because they are newly created or that they are professed by religious minorities, to which the predominant religious community may be hostile.”²³¹

Freedom of Movement

The passport recall by Xinjiang authorities has no basis in Chinese law. Article 2 of China's Passport Law states that “no organization or individual should illegally ... seize passports.” Article 15 states that the courts, the procuratorates [office of the prosecutor], the police, the state security, and administrative supervisory authorities can seize passports only “where necessary for handling a case,” and only the passports “of the parties of a case.” While there are rules – jointly issued between state organs and the Party – requiring that government employees and party members hand in their passports for “safekeeping” by the authorities, such rules do not apply to the general population, including in Xinjiang.²³²

²³⁰ UDHR, arts. 18-19; ICCPR, art. 18.

²³¹ UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 22, Freedom of Thought, Conscience or Religion, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4 (1993), <http://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fb22.html>, paras. 2, 9.

²³² Notice of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection of the CCP, the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Supervision, Ministry of Personnel and the Ministry of Commerce on Further Strengthening the Administration of Party Members Traveling Abroad (中共中央纪委、中共中央组织部、外交部、公安部、国家安全部、监察部、人事部、商务部《关于进一步加强党员干部出国(境)管理的通知》), 2004.

The UHDR and the ICCPR prohibit governments from taking actions that would interfere with everyone’s right to be free to leave any country, including their own.²³³ That right is only subject to restrictions that are provided by law and are strictly necessary for national security, public safety, or public order, and are consistent with the other rights. A blanket restriction without basis in the law does not meet that standard. The disparate impact of the policy on the Uighur Muslim population is also discriminatory.

The UDHR and the ICCPR both also protect the right to freedom of movement and residence within a country’s borders.²³⁴ Limitations of this right must be according to law and be necessary – and the least restrictive measure possible – for the achievement of the aims of protecting national security, public order, public health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.²³⁵ Any such restrictions on a person’s free movement must be proportionate in relation to the aim sought to be achieved by the restriction, and carefully balanced against the specific reason for the restriction being put in place.²³⁶ These restrictions must not have a discriminatory effect.²³⁷

The Chinese government’s various restrictions on the movements of Turkic Muslims described in this report do not meet these international legal requirements.

Rights to Privacy and to Bodily Integrity

Chinese law authorizes the collection of people’s biometrics for certain specific purposes. The Identification Card Law, for example, authorizes the police to collect people’s fingerprints and photos.²³⁸ Otherwise, Chinese law authorizes police collection of people’s biometric samples – “fingerprints, blood, urine, and other biological samples” – only when they are connected to the investigation of a specific criminal case.²³⁹

²³³ UDHR, art. 13; ICCPR, art. 12.

²³⁴ Chinese Constitution, art. 13.

²³⁵ UDHR, art. 13; ICCPR, art. 12.

²³⁶ Manfred Nowak, *U.N. Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: CCPR Commentary* (Kehl am Rein: N.P. Engel, 2d ed., 2005), pp. 274-75.

²³⁷ UDHR, art. 7; ICCPR, arts. 2 & 26.

²³⁸ Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Identity Card of Residents (中华人民共和国居民身份证法), promulgated by the NPCSC in June 2003 and amended in October 2011, art. 3.

²³⁹ Criminal Procedure Law (CPL), art. 130. However, the CPL give no legal guidelines or limitations on how long biometric samples can be stored, shared, or used, or how their collection or use can be challenged. While there are Ministry of Public Security internal departmental rules that focus on the administrative and technical aspects of voice pattern collection, most are not publicly available. See also, “The Legitimacy of the Collection of Basic Personal Data by Public Security (浅析公安基

The UDHR and the ICCPR provide that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home, or correspondence, and that everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference. Any interference with the right must be necessary and proportionate for a legitimate aim.²⁴⁰

Biometrics can reveal sensitive information about individuals and enable broad tracking of populations. Collection, retention, and use of biometrics can be highly intrusive and needs to be comprehensively regulated, narrow in scope, and proportionate to meeting a legitimate security goal.

Coercing people to give biometrics, particularly blood samples, or taking them without informed consent, justification, or a choice to opt out can violate an individual's privacy, dignity, and right to bodily integrity; it can also, in some circumstances, constitute degrading treatment. Compelled sampling of DNA and other biometrics of an entire region or population for purposes of security maintenance cannot be justified as necessary or proportionate and amounts to a serious violation of international law.

The use of various forms of mass surveillance in Xinjiang is also particularly problematic considering that there are few checks nationwide on police surveillance powers, or effective privacy protections against government intrusions. The police do not have to obtain any sort of court order to conduct surveillance or collect personal data or provide any evidence that the people whose data they are collecting are associated with or involved in criminal activity.

Police bureaus are not required to report surveillance activities to any other government agency, or to publicly disclose this information. It is very difficult for people to know what personal information the government collects or how the government uses, shares, or stores their data. There are also no meaningful avenues for redress where violations of the right to privacy occur, nor institutions that can provide independent oversight and prevent future violations.

基础信息采集的合法性),” *Sina*, July 2, 2016, http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_15440725c0102wodk.html (accessed August 14, 2018).

²⁴⁰ ICCPR, art. 17.

Prohibitions against Torture and other Ill-Treatment

The Chinese government adopted legal prohibitions on the mistreatment of persons in custody as early as 1979, ratified the United Nations Convention against Torture in 1988, and launched official campaigns to curb torture. In 2012, for example, the National People's Congress revised the country's Criminal Procedure Law to require law enforcement officials to improve access to legal counsel for criminal suspects and to exclude their confessions and written statements obtained through torture.²⁴¹

These reforms notwithstanding, the use of torture and other ill-treatment against persons in state custody is still routine. Legal protections against torture and other ill-treatment remain weak. Chinese law, for example, does not clearly prohibit the use of torture except for the purpose of extracting confessions. The laws only prohibit torture by judicial officers and officers of detention facilities, and do not cover torture by all "others acting in an official capacity," such as torture in political education camps. In addition, the pervasive lack of accountability for torture and mistreatment in custody mean that rarely are perpetrators punished.²⁴²

Under international law, governments have the obligations to protect all those in their custody from harm to their person and uphold the right of detainees to be held in humane conditions and treated with dignity.²⁴³ The Convention against Torture prohibits the use of torture, which is basically defined as the intentional infliction of pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, for the purpose of obtaining information or a confession, or as a

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch, *Tiger Chairs and Cell Bosses*, May 13, 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/05/13/tiger-chairs-and-cell-bosses/police-torture-criminal-suspects-china>.

²⁴² The Chinese government has in recent years become concerned about the public's lack of trust in the judicial system and has taken actions to review and overturn a few prominent cases of wrongful convictions and execution. However, none of those cases involved members of ethnic minorities. See the list of such cases, Zhu Yanli, "Why it is Difficult to Seek Responsibility for Wrongful Cases (冤案追责何以难追到底)," *Bandao Dushibao (Qingdao)*, May 15, 2014, <http://news.163.com/14/0515/11/959JU44V00014Q4P.html> (accessed August 23, 2018).

²⁴³ See, for example, ICCPR, art. 6; Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990, art. 6; Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners, G.A. res. 45/111, annex, 45 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49A) at 200, U.N. Doc. A/45/49 (1990); Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, G.A. res. 43/173, annex, 43 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 298, U.N. Doc. A/43/49 (1988); UN Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions ("Principles on Extrajudicial Executions"), E.S.C. res. 1989/65, annex, 1989 U.N. ESCOR Supp. (No. 1) at 52, U.N. Doc. E/1989/89 (1989).

punishment, by a public official or agent.²⁴⁴ Also prohibited is cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, referred to as “ill-treatment.”²⁴⁵

Arbitrary and Unlawful Interference in Family Life

While the Chinese Constitution protects “families ... and children,” it and related Chinese laws contain no details, leaving unclear what these protections afford.²⁴⁶

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the Chinese government, states that no child should be subjected to “arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence.”²⁴⁷ Under international law, governments should ensure that children are not separated from their parents, unless that separation lies in the child’s “best interests.”²⁴⁸

The Chinese government’s various compulsory home visits and homestays programs, as well as its practice of separating children from parents and placing them in orphanages, are in violation of international human rights law standards.

²⁴⁴ Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (“Convention against Torture”), adopted December 10, 1984, G.A. res. 39/46, annex, 39 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 51) at 197, U.N. Doc. A/39/51 (1984), entered into force June 26, 1987. Article 1 defines torture as: “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.”

²⁴⁵ Convention against Torture, art. 15.

²⁴⁶ Chinese Constitution, art. 49.

²⁴⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), *entered into force* Sept. 2, 1990, art. 16.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, art. 9.

VI. Recommendations

To the Government of the People's Republic of China

- Close immediately all political education camps in Xinjiang, and release all individuals held;
- Cease immediately the “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism” in Xinjiang, including the “*fanghuiju*” teams, “Becoming Family” and other compulsory programs aimed at surveilling and controlling Turkic Muslims;
- Respect the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, association, religion, and culture to ensure that Turkic Muslims are able to engage in peaceful activities and raise concerns and criticisms;
- Impartially investigate Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and other senior officials implicated in alleged abusive practices associated with the Strike Hard Campaign, and appropriately hold those responsible to account;
- Review all cases of those detained or imprisoned on state security, terrorism, or extremism charges and drop all wrongful charges, and seek fair retrials in cases in which those convicted did not receive trials that met international due process standards;
- Suspend the collection and use of biometrics in Xinjiang until there is a national and comprehensive law that protects people's privacy; delete biometric and related data that has already been collected under current policies;
- Refrain from the collection and use of biometrics unless according to law and demonstrated as necessary and proportionate for legitimate government aims;
- Cease the operation of the big data program, Integrated Joint Operations Platform;
- Return immediately passports to Xinjiang residents and cease the policy of recalling passports;
- Stop pressuring Turkic Muslims abroad to return or collecting information about them. Stop pressuring host governments to forcibly return Turkic Muslim nationals abroad unless pursuant to an extradition request for legitimate law enforcement purposes;
- Provide prompt and adequate compensation, including medical and psychological care, for people arbitrarily detained and mistreated under the Strike Hard Campaign; and

- Grant access to Xinjiang as requested by several United Nations special procedures.

To the National People’s Congress Standing Committee

- Substantially amend the Counterterrorism Law to make it consistent with international law and the protection of human rights. Revoke overly broad or vague definitions of terrorism and extremism, including provisions that criminalize acts that fall short of direct incitement of terrorist or violent extremist offenses; and
- Review and revise legislation relevant to biometric data collection to ensure they are compliant with international human rights standards:
 - These standards must be part of a legal framework that ensures collection, use, dissemination, and retention of such data is necessary in the sense that less intrusive measures are unavailable; appropriately restricted to ensure the action is proportionate to a legitimate purpose such as public safety; and does not impair the essence of the right to privacy and other related rights.
 - To ensure these standards are enforced, any biometric data program should also include independent authorization for collection and use, public notification, and means of independent oversight, as well as avenues for people to challenge abuses and have access to remedies.
 - The authorities should also publish information about the collection and use of biometric-based recognition technology, including disclosure about databases that have been created and specific searches they conduct.

To the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Regional People’s Congress

- Revoke the Xinjiang Implementing Measures on the Counterterrorism Law and the Xinjiang Counterextremism Regulations; and
- Revoke the Xinjiang Regulations on Religious Affairs and all other regulations, rules and directives that restrict people from engaging in peaceful religious practices and beliefs.

To the Government of Kazakhstan

- Urge the Chinese government to end its abusive campaign against Turkic Muslims, including ethnic Kazakhs, and to release everyone detained in political reeducation camps in Xinjiang;
- Do not forcibly return (refoule) refugees and asylum seekers to China. Expedite the asylum process for ethnic Kazakhs and other asylum seekers from Xinjiang who have a well-founded fear of persecution if returned to China;
- Approve citizenship for ethnic Kazakhs from China in accordance with the government's fast-track citizenship program; and
- Expedite the asylum process for ethnic Kazakh children in Kazakhstan who are at risk of persecution in China because their parents or guardians have been detained under the Strike Hard Campaign and allow them to apply for citizenship in accordance with the government's fast-track program. Ensure their access to education.

To the Government of Turkey

- Ensure that ethnic Uyghurs in Turkey are protected from forced return to China, and that those living on short-term humanitarian residency permits in Turkey have the right over time to apply for long-term residency on the same basis; and
- Allow unaccompanied Uyghur children access to humanitarian residence permits. Ensure their access to education.

To Concerned Governments

- Publicly and privately urge the Chinese government at the highest levels to end the Strike Hard Campaign;
- Raise concerns about Xinjiang during the 2018 Universal Periodic Review of China at the Human Rights Council;
- Impose targeted sanctions, such as the US Global Magnitsky Act and other visa protocols, against Party Secretary Chen Quanguo and other senior officials linked to abuses in the Strike Hard Campaign;
- Impose appropriate export control mechanisms to deny China access to technologies used to violate basic rights.

- Do not forcibly return ethnic Uyghurs, Kazakhs, or other Turkic Muslims to China without providing a full and fair individualized examination of their risk of being persecuted, tortured, or ill-treated in China;
- Investigate the Chinese government’s intimidation of Turkic Muslim diaspora communities and invoke domestic law as appropriate;
- Expedite asylum claims to Turkic Muslims at risk of being forcibly returned to China;
- Advocate for the establishment of special mechanism through the United Nations to investigate abuses in Xinjiang. Until that is established countries should independently gather information on arbitrary detentions and other abuses in Xinjiang; and
- Monitor changing human rights developments in Xinjiang, including increased government repression of the Turkic Muslim population, to provide a rapid international response, including public condemnations and targeted sanctions.

To Chinese and International Companies Operating in Xinjiang

- Ensure business operations are not supporting the Strike Hard Campaign, in particular, surveillance and biometric profiling systems run by the Xinjiang Bureau of Public Security;
- Ensure business arrangements with the Xinjiang police or other security forces do not contribute to abuses and promptly act to end such relationships;
- Establish effective grievance mechanisms so that individuals adversely affected by business operations or investments can seek redress; and
- Adopt explicit policies in support of human rights and establish procedures to ensure that their operations do not result in, or contribute to, human rights abuses. Analyze the human rights impacts of proposed investments or operations, and implement strategies to mitigate adverse impacts. Such “human rights impact assessments” should be conducted in coordination with civil society groups.

Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Maya Wang, senior China researcher in the Asia Division at Human Rights Watch. The report was edited by Sophie Richardson, China director. James Ross, legal and policy director, and Danielle Haas, senior editor in the Program Office, provided legal and program review respectively. An associate in the Asia Division provided editing and production assistance. The report was prepared for publication by Fitzroy Hepkins, administrative manager.

We are particularly indebted to the external reviewers, including James Leibold, associate professor at La Trobe University, who commented on an early version of the report. We are very grateful to the activists and local NGOs who assisted our research, in particular, Aina Shormanbaeva, head of the International Legal Initiative; Orazuly Kydyrali, of Kazakh Human Rights, and others whom we have decided not to name due to security concerns.

Above all, we thank all the interviewees who shared their stories with us, many of whom decided to speak up despite a great sense of fear.

Appendix I:

Letter to Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo

August 13, 2018

Chen Quanguo
Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
Chinese Communist Party Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Party Committee
2 Jiankang Road, Tianshan Qu, Urumqi, Xinjiang
People's Republic of China, 830003

Fax: +86 0991-2391440
+86 0991-2398037
+86 0991-2827065

CC: Guo Shengkun
Party Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission
14 Beichizi Street, Dongcheng Qu, Beijing,
People's Republic of China, 100006

Fax: +86 010-85099004

Re: Human Rights Violations in Xinjiang

Dear Secretary Chen,

Human Rights Watch is an independent international human rights organization that monitors human rights developments in more than 90 countries around the world, including in China.

I am writing to inform you that we are preparing a report on human rights violations committed by the Chinese government in Xinjiang under the “Strike Hard Against Violent Terrorism Campaign.” We kindly request the Chinese government’s response to several questions related to our report, which we list below.

We would greatly appreciate your response to the questions below, as well as any additional relevant information you wish to provide us on this issue, so that it can be

reflected in our forthcoming report. Human Rights Watch strives to ensure the accuracy of our research and we look forward to being able to include your response in our findings.

In light of our publishing schedule, we would highly appreciate receiving your response by August 31, 2018. Please send your response to Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, by email at XXX or by fax at XXX.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richardson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sophie Richardson
China Director
Human Rights Watch

Questions:

1. In state media reports, Xinjiang authorities have acknowledged the existence of “political education camps” and characterize them as correctional or rehabilitation facilities for “[incorrect](#)” or “[sick](#)” thoughts. Yet, Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokespersons, when asked by foreign journalists, have repeatedly [denied that these facilities exist](#). Can you clarify whether these camps exist in Xinjiang?
2. Can you clarify the legal basis for these camps?
3. Please provide the number of individuals subjected to political education camps for any period of time from January 1, 2017 to the present, broken down by ethnicity, age, gender, duration of and reasons for detention.
4. Human Rights Watch has learned that local authorities require that police officers and other government officials are required to meet detention quotas for political education camps. Can you confirm whether such requirements exist?
5. Human Rights Watch found that teenage children under 18, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and people with mental disabilities are held in these political education camps. Can you confirm that this is the case?
6. Please provide information on the number of individuals who died while in political education camps since January 1, 2017. Please provide information on the outcomes of investigations into these deaths, including the causes of death, and whether any officials have been held accountable for these deaths.
7. What specific measures have Xinjiang authorities taken to prevent torture and other ill-treatment in official detention centers, and to ensure that detainees have access to lawyers of their own choosing?
8. Human Rights Watch found on official websites that the Xinjiang government [maintains a list](#) of “75 behavioral indicators of religious extremism.” Can you confirm that this is a government list?

9. Human Rights Watch found on official websites that the Xinjiang government maintains a list of 26 “sensitive countries.”²⁴⁹ Can you confirm that this is a government document?
10. International media have reported that children are being detained in boarding schools or orphanages, under terrible and overcrowded conditions, especially once their parents are in political education camps. Can you confirm whether these reports are accurate? If so, what is the legal basis of such a policy?
11. We have received information that in some locales in Xinjiang, authorities have forced Uyghur women to marry Han men. Are these reports accurate? Human Rights Watch also learned that, in some cases, local authorities are giving monetary rewards for intermarriages between Uyghur or ethnic Kazakh people with Hans. Can you clarify whether such policies exist?
12. What is the legal basis for the [recall of passports](#) from residents across Xinjiang, which began in late 2016?
13. What is the legal basis of the Xinjiang government’s restrictions of movement in Xinjiang, particularly of Turkic Muslims, including by requiring that they apply before they can travel outside of the area in which their hukous are registered?
14. Human Rights Watch has [documented](#) the Xinjiang government’s compulsory collection of DNA samples, fingerprints, iris scans, and blood types of all residents in the region between the age of 12 and 65. What is the legal basis for such mass biometric collection program?
15. Human Rights Watch has [documented](#) the use of a predictive policing program based on big data analysis in Xinjiang called the Integrated Joint Operations Platform. Can you confirm the existence of such a program?

²⁴⁹ Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen.

Appendix II: Letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Kairat Abdurakhmanov

August 3, 2018

Kairat Abdurakhmanov
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
31, Kunayev str.
010000 Astana
Republic of Kazakhstan

Fax: +7 (7172) 72-05-16

Re: Human Rights Abuses in Xinjiang, China and the Role of Kazakhstan

Dear Minister Abdurakhmanov,

On behalf of Human Rights Watch, please accept my regards.

I am writing to inform you that we are currently preparing a report on human rights violations committed by the Chinese government in Xinjiang, China, under the “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism.” We kindly request the Kazakh government’s response to several questions related to our findings, which we list below.

As you may know, Human Rights Watch is an independent international human rights organization that monitors human rights developments in more than 90 countries around the world, including in China and in Kazakhstan.

Human Rights Watch’s forthcoming report finds that the Chinese government is responsible for mass arbitrary detentions, torture and mistreatment in various detention facilities in Xinjiang, including in unlawful “political education camps”, as well as forced political indoctrination, movement restrictions, heightened religious restrictions and mass surveillance throughout the region. These abuses are discriminatory because they disproportionately target Turkic Muslims, including ethnic Kazakhs and Uyghurs.

A part of this report discusses the role of the Kazakhstan government in handling cases of Kazakh citizens and ethnic Kazakhs facing arbitrary detention and persecution in Xinjiang.

Human Rights Watch is grateful for the constructive dialogue with the Kazakh government on a range of mutually important human rights issues over the last two decades. We hope to expand our engagement to include the topic of the rights of Kazakh citizens and ethnic Kazakhs in China as well.

We would greatly appreciate your response to the questions below, as well as any additional relevant information you wish to provide us on this issue, so that it can be reflected in our forthcoming report. Human Rights Watch strives to ensure the accuracy of our research and looks forward to being able to include your response in our findings.

In light of our publishing schedule, we would highly appreciate receiving your response by **August 27, 2018**. Please send your response to Sophie Richardson, China director at Human Rights Watch, by email at XXX, or by fax to XXX.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Sophie Richardson
China Director
Human Rights Watch

Questions:

1. What is the nature of the Kazakh government's interaction with the Chinese government concerning Xinjiang's Strike Hard Campaign? According to publicly available information, your government has sought the release of Kazakh citizens from political education camps, and is discussing with the Chinese government the cases of 625 ethnic Kazakhs, asking that they be allowed to leave China. Is this description accurate?
2. How many Kazakh citizens are being detained in Xinjiang's political education camps, and how many have been released and returned to Kazakhstan? Does the government of Kazakhstan track the number of ethnic Kazakhs—regardless of their citizenship—being held in political education camps and, if so, what is the number?
3. Has the Kazakh government publicly or privately called on China to end abuses in its Strike Hard Campaign, and called for the release of ethnic Kazakhs detained in political education camps in Xinjiang?
4. Has the Kazakh government asked China to compensate Kazakh citizens for any physical and psychological harm they have endured from China's Strike Hard Campaign?
5. The Xinjiang government maintains a list of 26 "sensitive countries," including Kazakhstan. The government persecutes and detains people in China who have links to these countries, including people who live in or have visited Kazakhstan, or who have families in Kazakhstan, or who express their Kazakh identity? Is Kazakhstan aware of this list and taking any action in response?
6. In response to the escalating persecution of Turkic minorities, including ethnic Kazakhs in China, has the Kazakh government expedited the process of approving citizenship for ethnic Kazakhs and asylum requests for Uyghurs from Xinjiang living in Kazakhstan?

7. Some ethnic Kazakh children are living in Kazakhstan without their parents or guardians as a result of the Strike Hard Campaign. Is the Kazakh government aware of this, and if so, has the Kazakh government taken any steps with regard to their citizenship status?
8. Has the Kazakh government provided financial and other support to Kazakh families in Kazakhstan affected by the Strike Hard Campaign, particularly those with dependent children and older people?
9. Has the Kazakh government investigated claims by some Kazakhstan citizens and residents that they are under surveillance or are being threatened by Chinese security agents while in Kazakhstan?

Response Email from Minister's Office (Unofficial Translation)

August 25, 2018

Dear Sophie Richardson,

My name is Azamat Ayap. I am a Counselor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

With regard to your appeal [case no. redacted], it is my pleasure to inform you that cooperation with the People's Republic of China is one of the foreign policy priorities for the Republic of Kazakhstan. Thanks to personal friendship and regular contacts between the Heads of the two states, the quality level of our interstate relations is gradually increasing based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, a high level of trust, mutual understanding, and good-neighborliness.

The fruitful cooperation is developing between our countries in the political, trade-economic, and cultural-humanitarian fields. The nature of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China in the context of security forces, law enforcement, and special services on all topical issues is developing dynamically.

Against the background of strong ties of friendship and good neighborliness between our countries, a large Kazakh diaspora in the PRC, constantly showing its loyalty to the Central Government of the PRC, is considered by Kazakhstan as a kind of human "bridge of friendship" between Kazakhstan and China. As reported, at present, the number of the Kazakh diaspora in China is about 1.6 million people, with the majority living in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (*about 1.58 million people*).

It should be noted that the Chinese authorities treat the Kazakhs as one of the indigenous peoples and pursue an appropriate policy to support ethnic minorities. There are a number of Kazakh publishing houses and editorial offices, periodicals, television channels, and radio stations broadcasting in the Kazakh language in Xinjiang. In 2016, the Chinese Government allocated significant funds for the development of the editorial office of Kazakh radio and television programming, as well as the translation and printing office. At

the same time, all issues related to the development of language and cultural heritage of ethnic minorities are officially regulated by the state.

According to representatives of the Kazakh diaspora, officials in Beijing in recent years have been generally pursuing a consistent policy with respect to the Kazakh diaspora, supporting representatives of political and business circles of the ethnic group in Xinjiang.

In particular, in 2016, many representatives of the Kazakh elite were promoted and appointed to responsible offices in the People's Government, the People's Political Consultative Council of the Autonomous Region. In the districts of the Ili-Kazakh Autonomous Region, Altai, and Tarbagatai, representatives from the younger generation of the Kazakh diaspora were appointed as mayors.

On the whole, issues concerning the situation around ethnic Kazakhs in China are under constant control of the MFA of the RK and are regularly included in the agenda of bilateral negotiations and consultations between representatives of the Kazakh foreign-policy services and the state bodies of the PRC.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan periodically receives appeals concerning ethnic Kazakhs living in the PRC.

In accordance with Article 55 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963, interference in internal affairs of another State is not permitted. Therefore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan conducts negotiations with the Chinese party with regard to such appeals, and sends relevant notes to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

According to the data from the Chinese party, in most cases, there are violations of Chinese law.

It should be noted that our countries on the basis of the key documents signed between the Heads of states in recent years (*the Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, December 2002, Beijing, Joint Statement on Establishing and Developing a Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, July*

2005, Astana; Joint Statement on Developing Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, June 2011, Astana; Joint Declaration on New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, August 2015, Beijing)
continue deepening comprehensive strategic partnership relations and filling them with new content.



(above) A government official scans the QR code on the wall of a home in Xinjiang, which gives him instant access to the residents' personal information.

Source: Xinjiang state radio

(front cover) Over 10,000 students and teachers in Hotan pledge loyalty to the "Motherland" in a mass ceremony.

Source: Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang

“Eradicating Ideological Viruses”

China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims

Since 2014, the Chinese government has waged a “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Extremism” in Xinjiang, an ethnic minority region in northwestern China. Repression has increased dramatically since late 2016, after Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo relocated from the Tibet Autonomous Region to assume leadership of Xinjiang.

“Eradicating Ideological Viruses”: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims, is based primarily on interviews with 58 former residents of Xinjiang, including 5 former detainees and 38 relatives of detainees; analysis of recent changes in Chinese law and policy in Xinjiang; and extensive review of secondary sources. It documents the Chinese government's systematic campaign of human rights violations against Turkic Muslims, including mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment in custody. The report details the increasingly pervasive controls on daily life that subject the region's Turkic Muslim population of 13 million to forced political indoctrination, collective punishment, restrictions on movement and communications, heightened religious restrictions, and mass surveillance.

Authorities have sought to justify harsh treatment in the name of maintaining stability and security in Xinjiang, and to “strike at” those deemed terrorists and extremists in a “precise” and “in-depth” manner. But the state's responsibility to ensure public security does not justify the increasingly systematic repression in Xinjiang. The Strike Hard Campaign is being used to punish and control Turkic Muslims there because of their identities in violation of international human rights law.

Human Rights Watch calls on China to immediately end its Strike Hard Campaign, close the “political education camps,” and unconditionally release those detained for exercising their basic human rights. Foreign governments should impose targeted sanctions on senior Chinese officials most responsible for abuses in Xinjiang.