

SIMULATION COMMITTEE GUIDE

HRC



HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Topic 1: *Protecting the rights of the Uyghur people*

I. History/Context

Who are the Uyghurs?

The Uyghurs are an ethnic group of Turkic heritage with a population of approximately 12 million people. Although there are many theories about their origin, it is believed that they were descendants of more than one group of nomads who came from Mongolia and who lived in Xinjiang in the 8th Century AD. They established their empire and capital in Ordu-Baliq (today Mongolia), but over the centuries the empire weakened through bad management, and the land was taken over. Eventually, it came under the control of the People's Republic of China.

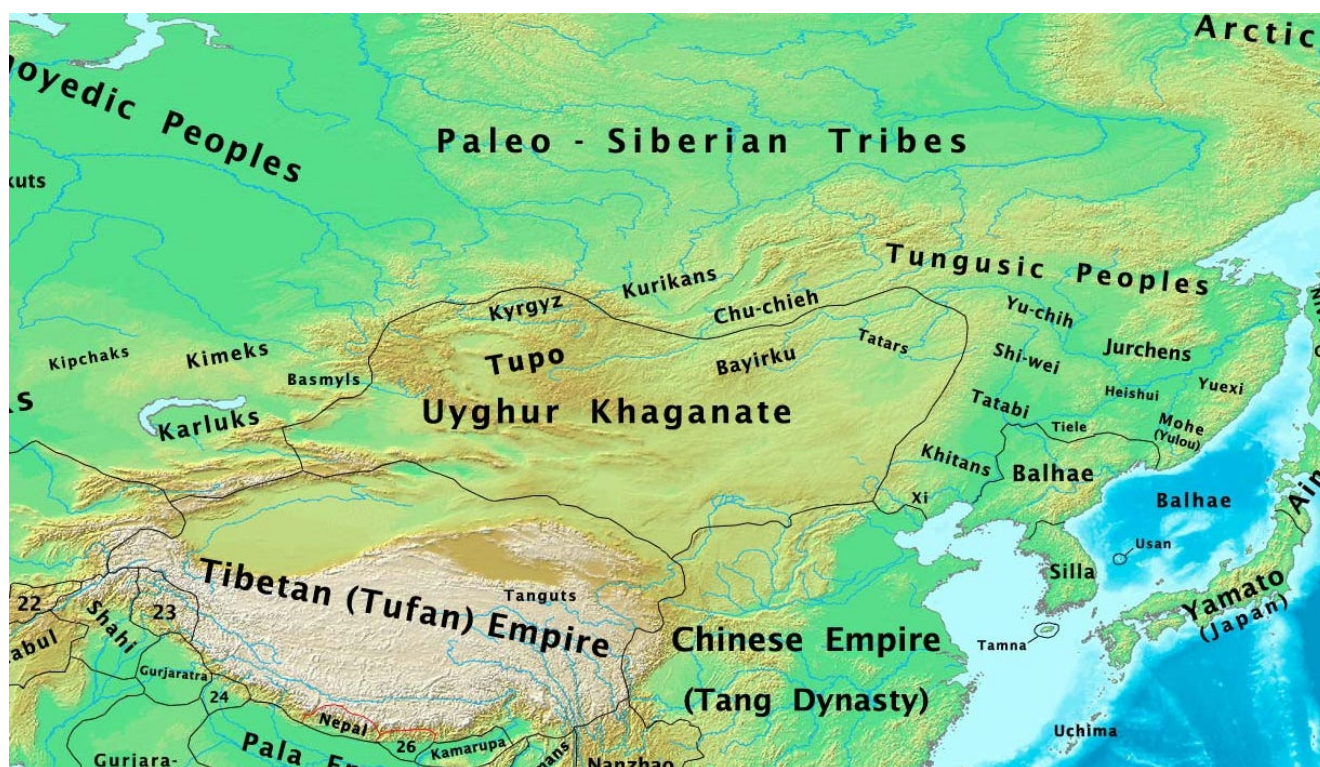


Figure 1: map of Uyghur Empire.



Xinjiang is now the home of the Uyghur people, who are Muslims. Han are ethnically Chinese or people of Chinese culture, and are the majority in the country. The conflict between these two groups began years ago with a fight over this territory, but since the Uyghurs were still nomads and had moved a lot from the area, parts of their history were missing, so it was hard for them to prove to the Han they were the first inhabitants of that specific area.

The Uyghur community in Xinjiang became a minority to the Chinese when the Qing Empire's Xinjiang was made an official province of China in 1884. In the province, the Chinese adopted aspects of the Uyghurs' previous political structures, but the Han people eventually removed the Uyghur local leaders from their authority and reduced them to mere citizens. The Han insisted that Mandarin be taught in schools, and gradually the culture and language of the Uyghur was suppressed.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region



Figure 2: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is located in northwest China, where various ethnic groups live. The Uyghur people are the largest group in this region making up about half of the population. Originally, the Chinese government implemented measures of “unity”, such as changing the official name of Xinjiang to Xinjiang Uyghur and giving the Uyghurs minimal political roles. Gradually, the Uyghurs were subjected to more and more crackdowns by the government, whilst more Han people were moved into the area.

To read more about the history of the Uyghurs in China, please click on the following link: [China's oppression of the Uyghur](#)

Uyghur population in Xinjiang

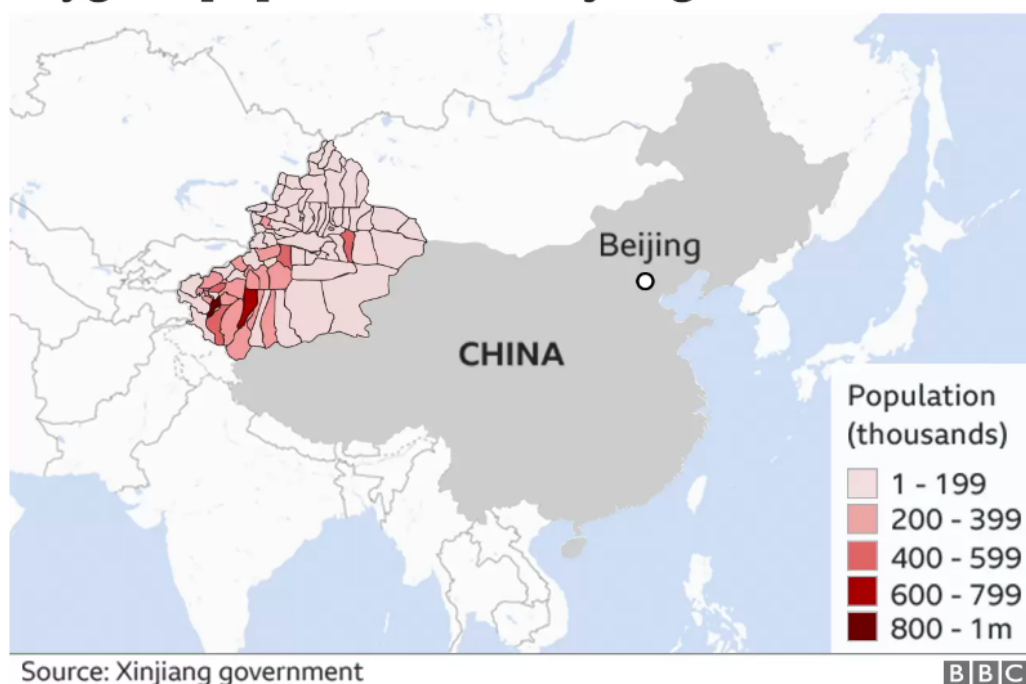


Figure 3: Uyghur population in Xinjiang (BBC News, 2022)

The Uyghurs have faced lots of challenges and discrimination around the world, and have currently been facing human rights violations including mass arbitrary detention, restriction on religion, and cultural suppression. Their language, culture, and beliefs are distinct, which is what identifies them, and what has made

their culture permanent throughout history, despite all the changes that have occurred over the centuries.

Detention camps have been created in China where cases of forced labor, torture, and “re-education”, among other violations, have been alleged. Many of these camps state their goal is to re-educate these citizens by teaching them Mandarin and Chinese laws. They are designed to stop terrorism, which the Chinese government says is a problem in the region. These camps have attracted global attention and condemnation towards the countries that are involved in harmful practices against this ethnic group.

Uyghur terrorist acts

Violent extremism has been observed in the Uyghur community with attacks in different parts of the country. However, as in every community, some people do not agree with the laws or with the actions being taken by the government and therefore opt for violent actions; these actions are carried out by a small section of the Uyghur community. As an example, in 2014, there was a terrorist attack in the city of Kunming. The attack was perpetrated by a group of Uyghur extremists armed with knives at a station, threatening the lives of those who were there. This attack left at least 100 people injured and 28 people dead.



Figure 4: Kunming attack (Dynon 2014)

This was not the first collective attack with knives that has taken place in China by Uyghur extremists. In December 2012, a man stabbed 22 children and one adult at a school in Henan province. Moreover, similar examples have occurred all over China, where Uyghur extremists attacked Chinese Han citizens.

Another important example that led the Chinese government to start this anti-terrorist campaign is that throughout the conflict between China and the Uyghurs, several Uyghurs have joined ties with various militant groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda. There are currently up to 5,000 Uyghurs fighting for military groups in Syria, and this has led to the problem not only occurring in China, but also in other countries, where governments are dealing with Uyghurs who have allied themselves with these groups, and who are carrying out acts of banditry and terrorism.

What are detention camps/centers?

Authorities may forcefully detain people in detention camps or institutions, frequently under severe circumstances. Those that the current government considers undesirable or who they believe to be a threat are usually part of the detained groups. Detention camps can be used for several things, like housing political prisoners, refugees, or members of particular racial or religious communities. While conditions in prison camps could vary significantly, they frequently include restricted freedoms, limited access to some necessities, and overcrowding.

Between 2015 and 2018, satellite photos showed vast constructions being carried out in a deserted and inhospitable area of western China. A huge high-security compound had been built, which was surrounded by a 2km-long outer wall that was guarded by 16 watchtowers. Drastic changes in the appearance of these camps have now also been reported, which alarms the international community as it means that more and more Uyghurs and other ethnic groups are being held in these camps.





Figures 5 and 6: China's Hidden Camps

How have detention camps ended cultures throughout history?

Throughout history, prison camps have had a significant effect on various societies. Repressive governments have utilized them as a tool for controlling and suppressing culture. Detention camps have been used historically to destroy cultural identities, languages, and traditions, the most famous being those set up by the Nazis in Germany. In the case of the Uyghurs, detention camps have been utilized to repress cultural identities. The survival of Uyghur culture and legacy is at risk due to forced assimilation and the prohibition of cultural traditions in these camps.

What is mass arbitrary detention?

Mass arbitrary detention is when many people are detained in a prison or detention camp by the government without the right to a trial or without evidence that a crime has been committed. In these cases, the detained person is not given a reason as to why he/she is being detained and the government does not give the detained person the right to argue in favor of their freedom.

II. Current Situation

The Chinese government's Belt and Road Initiative was introduced to bring benefits to the entire nation. However, the people who are benefiting from this development scheme in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region are mainly the Han Chinese living in the region, not the Uyghurs. Rapidly developing industries, such as the energy services sector, construction, resource extraction, and government jobs, are dominated by Han Chinese living in the region, while Uyghurs are largely excluded from benefits and employment opportunities on ethnic and linguistic grounds. Native Uyghur language teachers, for example, have lost their jobs in large numbers, as Han Chinese teachers from outside the region are preferred.

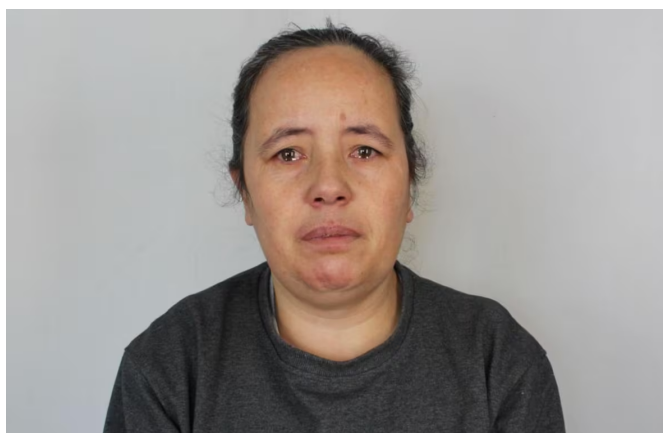
Uyghurs live disproportionately in the rural and southern areas of the region, while Chinese citizens reside in the northern and more populated areas and the cities. Uyghurs rely heavily on agriculture for employment and have reported high rates of poverty and unemployment, with nearly 80% living below the poverty line. Land degradation, lack of water, and land grabbing by Chinese settlers aggravate their situation. Uyghur emigration to the north has made the Uyghur community prone to taking low-paying, labor-intensive jobs. In addition, they are paid significantly less than Han Chinese workers.

The situation of the Uyghurs in China is currently very worrying; since 2017 the Chinese government has been detaining more and more Uyghurs in detention camps, where the Chinese authorities have reportedly committed numerous human rights abuses. An article published by Human Rights Watch in 2021 revealed that around 1.3 million Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities are in these camps. Violations such as arbitrary detention, torture, brainwashing, forced re-education, violations of religious freedom, forced labor, family separation, and forced sterilization have been reported.

In addition to these abuses in re-education camps (the Chinese government's term for the camps), the Uyghurs who are not already in these camps are



subjected to extreme surveillance by the Chinese government. In an interview made by the BBC, it was revealed that Uyghurs dare not talk to each other on the phone. If they ever say anything inappropriate or are seen to be not following the Chinese government's religious rules, they may be arrested and sent to the camps. In the interview, it was stated, *"They could never call each other directly. Instead, a middleman phoned Alim and his mother from two separate mobiles. He held the phone screens to face each other, so the pair could see wobbly images of each other, and hear muffled sound from the speakers"* (Judah, 2023). In addition to monitoring calls, if they ever try to defend their religion or language in public spaces, they will be sent to the camps that are distributed throughout Xingang.



Figures 7 and 8: Leaked Photos of Uyghurs Interned at Xinjiang Detention Centres

This system of arbitrary detention and forced disappearances has been ongoing for several years, with Uyghurs having less and less freedom to live, whilst being detained for reasons as simple as practicing their religion, having international contacts or communications, or attending a Western university. The Chinese government has defined the camps as "vocational training centers" aimed at combating violent extremism. Leaked government documents, however, reveal that the state is persecuting people for their religious observance, such as praying or growing a beard, as well as for their family background.

In the detention camps, the detainees are subjected to forced re-education work in which they must renounce their beliefs and religion to join the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese Government says that this is for their welfare and for their personal and professional life, as once they leave the re-education camps they will be able to get better jobs.

Several media sources, however, have revealed that what happens inside these camps is very different from what the Chinese government says is happening. People who are detained in these camps are not subject to any criminal investigation or fair trial; this goes against Article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which emphasizes the presumption of innocence. The article says, *"Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him"*. (United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

The UN wrote a report in 2022 in which it was concluded that China's actions *"may constitute crimes against humanity,"* (Wang). However, in the Human Rights Council, several countries that have economic ties with China rejected a motion to debate the situation. Some of these countries were Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia.



Figure 9: Amnesty International (2022)

Uyghur people are also being persecuted in other countries where they reside. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has strong ties with many countries which rely on China economically. The CCP puts pressure on these governments to monitor and even arrest Uyghur citizens, who may be deported to China, where they are sent to detention centers. Crimes that these residents have allegedly carried out may be as simple as selling Uyghur literature in a bookshop or criticizing China's policies online. Uyghur students who are studying abroad may be forced back to China through government threats of something happening to their family, whilst other students have been deported from countries such as Saudi Arabia for no specific reason, at the bequest of the Chinese government.

III. Key points of the debate

- Mass detention of Uyghurs since 2017 in concentration camps
- Human rights violations in the camps
- Forced renunciation of beliefs and religion
- Extreme surveillance against the Uyghurs at home and abroad
- Chinese government justification of "vocational training" centers to combat violent extremism.
- Uyghur extremism and terrorism
- Economic inequality and discrimination against Uyghurs
- Reactions of different governments to the situation

IV. Guiding questions

1. What is your country's policy on religious and cultural freedom for its citizens?
2. What is your country's policy towards political activists who challenge the government?



3. What is your country's relationship with China in terms of politics and the economy?
4. Is there a Uyghur population in your country? If so, what is your government's position towards them?
5. What is your country's position about the detention camps for Uyghur citizens in China? If they were present for the voting to debate alleged human rights violations in the UN, how did your country vote, and why did they vote in that way?
6. Has your government supported or participated in international sanctions or statements on Uyghur human rights violations?
7. How can Uyghurs be protected in China and in the rest of the world?

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