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نسخة الأمم المتحدة لعمان والقدس

UNHRC TOPIC 1

Addressing Humanitarian Concerns in the Xinjiang Region Relating to Chinese treatment of Uyghur populations.

Introduction:

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region lies in the far Western reaches of the People's republic of China. A vast, dry landscape; with snow-capped mountains and ancient trade routes at its borders. This region has served as a cultural crossroads for centuries; a home to Turkic people, Sufi mystics, and merchants making their way along the Silk Road - and among its people are the Uyghurs: a predominantly Muslim ethnic group with their own language, customs, and spiritual identity.

However, as seen in recent years, it seems as though the rhythm of life in Xinjiang has changed.

What seems to be sprawling, high-security compounds are shown by satellite images.

First-hand accounts tell of constant surveillance - from cameras in mosques and checkpoints at every corner, to AI systems capable of telling individuals apart by pace or expression.

Children speak of vanished fathers, parents of missing daughters, and unanswered letters. International organizations estimate that over one million Uyghur Muslims and other ethnic minorities have been detained in what the Chinese government refers to as “vocational education and training centers”. The purpose, according to official statements, is counterterrorism and deradicalization.

Reports from the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International confirm widespread allegations of arbitrary detention, forced political indoctrination, religious suppression, and systemic human rights abuses. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has identified and mapped over 380 detention facilities, many rapidly expanded since 2017.

In addition to detention, evidence suggests mass surveillance of the entire Uyghur population, facilitated through facial recognition, biometric data collection, and predictive policing algorithms. The Chinese government's Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) monitors behavior ranging from mosque attendance to phone usage, assigning “suspicion” scores based on algorithmic profiling. Many detentions appear to occur without formal charges or legal recourse.

Leaked internal documents, known as the “China Cables” (released in 2019 through the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists),

reveal detailed instructions on how to operate the camps - including orders to "never allow escapes," implement psychological indoctrination, enforce Mandarin-only communication, and classify detainees using strict point-based systems. The documents emphasize secrecy and offer insight into the scale and coordination of the campaign.

There have also been credible allegations of forced sterilizations, birth prevention policies, and family separations, prompting several governments and legal bodies - including the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands - to recognize China's actions in Xinjiang as constituting genocide under the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Economically, the Xinjiang region is a major supplier of cotton, tomatoes, and polysilicon, which is used in solar panels. Investigations have linked these industries to forced labor programs involving former camp detainees. As a result, multiple countries have imposed import restrictions or sanctions on Xinjiang-linked goods, while global corporations have faced scrutiny over supply chain ethics.

Of particular note is the role of "pairing assistance" programs, where state-owned enterprises and coastal provinces are assigned Uyghur communities to manage and economically "transform." These programs have created a state-backed pipeline between detention, ideological training, and labor placement, often without consent. They form part of China's broader strategy to integrate Xinjiang into its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by stabilizing the region through securitized development.

Despite growing international criticism, access to Xinjiang remains heavily restricted for foreign observers, journalists, and UN

investigators. Chinese authorities continue to deny any wrongdoing, framing global concern as politically motivated interference in internal affairs. Meanwhile, survivors who have fled to other countries speak of cultural erasure, psychological trauma, and family members who remain unaccounted for.

Key Terms and Definitions:

Uyghurs

A Turkic ethnic group native to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China. They are predominantly Muslim and possess a distinct language, culture, and history. The Chinese government classifies them as one of its 56 recognized ethnic minorities.

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)

A large administrative region in northwestern China. It is the country's largest province-level division and shares borders with eight countries, including Kazakhstan and Pakistan.

Despite its official designation as “autonomous,” it remains under strict control by the central Chinese government.

Vocational Education and Training Centers

The official term used by the Chinese government to describe facilities in Xinjiang where Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities are detained. These centers have been widely reported to operate as forced

indoctrination camps, involving ideological training, surveillance, and forced labor.

Mass Surveillance

The widespread use of technologies such as CCTV, biometric scanning, facial recognition, and data collection to monitor and control populations. In Xinjiang, mass surveillance disproportionately targets Uyghurs and is used to identify and detain individuals based on behavior, religion, or expression.

Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP)

A Chinese government surveillance database used to track individuals' activities in Xinjiang. It collects data from numerous sources - including phone records, utility usage, and facial recognition systems - to assign "suspicion" scores and flag people for detention.

China Cables

A set of leaked internal Chinese government documents obtained and published in 2019 by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The documents reveal the operational structure and objectives of Xinjiang's internment camps, including strict rules on secrecy, indoctrination, and control.

Forced Sterilization / Birth Prevention Policies

Practices reported by credible human rights organizations involving involuntary medical procedures - such as sterilizations, IUD insertions, or abortion - imposed on Uyghur women, often as part of a broader attempt to suppress population growth among ethnic minorities.

Genocide

Defined by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948) as acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group. This includes killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, or imposing measures intended to prevent births. Several governments have determined that China's actions in Xinjiang meet this definition.

Forced Labor

A situation in which people are coerced to work against their will, often under threat or punishment. In Xinjiang, many former detainees have been forcibly placed into labor programs tied to global supply chains in industries such as cotton, agriculture, and solar energy.

Polysilicon

A purified form of silicon used to manufacture solar panels. Xinjiang produces over 40% of the world's polysilicon, much of it allegedly linked to forced labor practices.

Pairing Assistance Program

A state-led policy in which wealthier coastal Chinese provinces are paired with specific towns and villages in Xinjiang. These partnerships involve economic investments and personnel deployments - often resulting in ideological control, mass relocation, and labor transfers of Uyghur populations.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

A global infrastructure development strategy initiated by China in 2013 to build trade and transport networks across Asia, Europe, and Africa. Xinjiang plays a strategic role in the BRI as a key gateway to Central and South Asia. The Chinese government views “stability” in Xinjiang as essential to BRI success.

Human Rights Abuses

Violations of fundamental rights and freedoms protected under international law, such as freedom of religion, freedom from arbitrary detention, and the right to a fair trial. Alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang include forced assimilation, torture, sterilization, and suppression of religious expression.

Major Parties Involved:

China:

The People's Republic of China stands at the center of the Xinjiang crisis. As both governing authority and architect of regional policy, it asserts that its measures - including the establishment of so-called vocational training centers - are legitimate tools of counterterrorism and poverty alleviation. Chinese officials consistently deny allegations of abuse, framing international concern as unwarranted interference in domestic affairs. In practice, however, the state has implemented expansive surveillance networks, imposed cultural restrictions, and refused access to independent observers.

Uyghur Population (and Other Muslim Minorities in Xinjiang):

The Uyghur population, along with other Muslim minorities such as Kazakhs and Hui, are the primary affected communities. While few within Xinjiang are able to speak freely, exiled Uyghurs and diaspora groups have reported mass detentions, forced labor, religious suppression, and family separations. Their testimonies have been central to global awareness campaigns, legal petitions, and advocacy before international bodies.

United Nations (UN):

The United Nations, particularly the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has acknowledged credible evidence of serious rights violations that may constitute crimes against humanity. Despite limited access to the region, UN agencies continue to call for

transparent investigations and adherence to international human rights obligations. Chinese authorities have so far resisted external scrutiny, stalling proposals for independent fact-finding missions.

Human Rights Organizations:

International human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, have played a critical role in documenting the scope and structure of alleged abuses. Drawing from satellite imagery, leaked documents, and survivor interviews, these groups have issued detailed reports that inform both policymaking and public discourse.

The United States:

The United States has adopted one of the most assertive positions, formally designating the situation as genocide in 2021. Through legislation such as the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, the U.S. has imposed import bans and sanctions on individuals and entities linked to abuses in Xinjiang. American officials continue to urge international action and coordination in response to the crisis.

The European Union and Member States:

The European Union, while unified in condemning human rights violations, has taken a more moderate approach. Targeted sanctions have been levied against select Chinese officials, though internal divisions among member states have somewhat limited the scope of

collective action. Diplomatic tensions escalated following retaliatory sanctions from China.

Muslim-Majority Countries (e.g., Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt):

Reactions among Muslim-majority countries have been notably subdued. Despite religious and cultural ties to the Uyghur population, many such states - such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt - have prioritized economic partnerships and political alignment with China. In some instances, Uyghur refugees have been forcibly repatriated, raising concerns about the erosion of asylum protections under bilateral pressure.

Implications:

The situation in Xinjiang confers serious challenges to the international legal order, global diplomacy, and humanitarian norms. Allegations of genocide and crimes against humanity invoke obligations under the UN Genocide Convention, yet jurisdictional limitations and political deadlock - particularly at the UN Security Council - have hindered international accountability mechanisms. This has raised concerns over the credibility and enforceability of global human rights protections when applied to major powers. Diplomatically, the crisis has deepened rifts within the international system. While some states condemn China's actions, others have defended its sovereignty, often due to

strategic or economic ties - especially under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This polarization has undermined consensus within bodies like the UN Human Rights Council, limiting coordinated responses and weakening the authority of multilateral institutions. From an economical perspective, the widespread use of forced labor in Xinjiang has disrupted global supply chains, particularly in cotton and solar panel production. Governments and corporations now face increased scrutiny over ethical sourcing, while sanctions and import bans have introduced new trade tensions. The reputational risk to firms connected to Xinjiang remains high. On a humanitarian level, the consequences are dire: cultural erasure, family separation, and widespread psychological trauma among affected populations. Access for aid groups remains restricted, and many survivors are left without recourse or asylum. The normalization of surveillance technologies tested in Xinjiang - such as facial recognition and behavioral scoring - has raised global concerns about the export of authoritarian governance models under the pretext of security. The broader implications extend well beyond China, challenging the principles of privacy, minority protection, and international cooperation in the 21st century.

Failed or Ineffective Solutions:

UN Human Rights Council Resolution Blocked (2022)

In October 2022, a draft resolution at the UN Human Rights Council that proposed a debate on the situation in Xinjiang was defeated. This marked the first time in the Council's history that a motion based on a

UN High Commissioner's report was rejected. Key OIC members, as well as developing countries aligned with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), voted against or abstained - highlighting the difficulty of passing rights-based measures when powerful states are involved.

Inaction by the International Criminal Court (ICC)

While lawyers and Uyghur groups submitted evidence to the ICC requesting an investigation into crimes committed against Uyghurs, the Court declined to open a case, citing lack of jurisdiction since China is not a party to the Rome Statute. This legal gap has prevented any meaningful international criminal investigation or prosecution of Chinese officials, revealing a structural limitation in the global justice system.

Weak or Symbolic Corporate Responses

Global corporations have issued statements or cut ties with select Xinjiang-based suppliers following public pressure; however, many companies continue to operate within the region or use intermediaries to obscure supply chain links. Voluntary corporate pledges have often lacked transparency and enforcement, allowing forced labor products to remain in global markets despite bans.

Ineffectiveness of Diplomatic Engagement

Several governments and international envoys have pursued private diplomacy with Chinese officials, urging transparency or improved treatment of minorities. These efforts have yielded no measurable

changes on the ground. China has consistently denied all allegations and dismissed criticism as “foreign interference,” using state media and diplomacy to counter international narratives.

Fragmented Sanctions and Trade Measures

While the United States, European Union, and a handful of allies have imposed targeted sanctions and trade restrictions, the impact has been limited by the lack of a coordinated global approach. Many major economies - including countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East - have continued normal trade relations with China, reducing the pressure such sanctions were intended to create.

Failed Attempts to Secure UN Investigative Access

Repeated calls by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and other international observers to gain full, unfettered access to Xinjiang have been denied or heavily

stage-managed. A 2022 UN visit to the region was tightly controlled by Chinese authorities, with no access to detention facilities or unsupervised contact with local Uyghurs—leading critics to label the visit as a public relations exercise rather than a genuine fact-finding mission.

Potential Solutions:

UN Fact-Finding Mission with Conditional Access

To advocate for an independent United Nations fact-finding mission granted access to Xinjiang under terms negotiated by a neutral intermediary state. This would enable international observers to assess the situation without overtly compromising China's sovereignty narrative. Such a mechanism balances investigative necessity with strategic delicacy, though its viability rests on China's willingness to entertain a third-party framework.

International Supply Chain Transparency Laws

Pushes for enhanced international regulatory frameworks requiring corporations to verify that their supply chains are free of forced labor, particularly in sectors such as textiles, electronics, and solar technology. By mandating due diligence and imposing penalties for non-compliance, such measures would compel corporate accountability while indirectly pressuring state actors engaged in systemic labor exploitation.

Uyghur Cultural Protection via UNESCO

The pursuit of UNESCO recognition for Uyghur cultural traditions as endangered intangible heritage. Framing Uyghur identity as a matter of global cultural preservation allows for international engagement that circumvents geopolitical deadlock. It empowers diaspora communities

and reinforces the legitimacy of Uyghur history, language, and spiritual life amid erasure campaigns.

Magnitsky-Style Sanctions on Officials

This proposes enacting targeted sanctions against specific Chinese officials credibly linked to human rights abuses under Magnitsky-style legislation. These sanctions, focused on travel bans and asset freezes, allow states to apply pressure without undermining bilateral economic frameworks. While symbolic in nature, such measures accrue long-term reputational consequences and reinforce the principle of individual accountability under international law.

Education and Asylum Partnerships with the Uyghur Diaspora

States could establish formal educational and humanitarian partnerships with the Uyghur diaspora, offering asylum routes, scholarships, and research grants to those displaced by repression. This strategy invests in the intellectual and cultural preservation of the Uyghur people, fosters international advocacy through lived experience, and builds a long-term infrastructure for resilience beyond China's borders.

Questions to consider:

1. If the international community only responds to crises when they breach economic thresholds, what message does that send about the hierarchy of human rights versus market stability?
2. Can a state simultaneously claim sovereignty and commit to international law, if its internal policies directly contradict the norms it has ratified?
3. If surveillance and re-education are justified under the guise of "counterterrorism," where should the line be drawn between national security and cultural genocide - and who gets to draw it?
4. What precedent is set when major powers refrain from action due to strategic interests - and how might this same logic be used to justify inaction in future atrocities?
5. Are UN mechanisms truly neutral when certain member states possess veto power over investigations into their own conduct?
6. If access to evidence is tightly controlled by the accused party, can any investigation be considered legitimate - or does the act of control become part of the crime?
7. What would effective international action look like if every nation were stripped of economic incentive or political bias - and is such action even possible under the current global order?
8. In framing this issue as one of religious or ethnic persecution, are we ignoring the wider technological and ideological apparatus enabling it - and if so, are we prepared to confront the system that allows it to happen anywhere?

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