

# XINJIANG UIGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION OF CHINA **- THE REPRESSION CONTINUES**

**Amnesty International has reported for many years on the longstanding repression of the Uighurs, a Turkic, mainly Muslim, people who make up the majority of the population in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of northwest China.**

## **Uighurs face serious human rights violations**

Ongoing ethnic tensions in the XUAR are fed by discriminatory government policies that foster inequalities and by the failure of the Chinese government to address widespread violations of Uighurs' civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. For example:

- the influx of millions of Han Chinese into the region has exacerbated high levels of unemployment among Uighurs
- there are increasing reports of Han Chinese property developers forcing Uighurs from their land without proper compensation
- tens of thousands of Uighur books have been banned and burned
- Uighur has been banned as a teaching language for most subjects in Xinjiang University
- as part of sweeping religious restrictions, the government has closed many mosques and has prohibited workers in the public sector from practising their religion
- opposing the government's policies can lead to arbitrary detention, torture and even execution

## **Human rights violations made worse by "war on terror"**

The human rights situation in the XUAR has deteriorated further following the events of 11 September 2001 as China uses the international "war on terror" as a pretext to justify its policies aimed at repressing all forms of political or religious dissent in the region. In an ongoing political crackdown on the so-called "three evil forces" of "separatism, terrorism and religious extremism":

- tens of thousands of people are reported to have been detained on grounds of "anti-terrorism", with many of them held in complete secrecy

- suspected "separatists, terrorists or religious extremists" have been subjected to imprisonment or execution after grossly unfair trials, as well as torture and long-term detention without charge or trial or access to lawyers or family
- in this climate of secrecy, there are reasons to doubt the credibility of the government's information about those it accuses of involvement in "terrorist" activities



*Prisoner of conscience Tohti Tunyaz, a 44-year-old ethnic Uighur historian is serving an 11-year sentence for writing a research paper deemed subversive by the Chinese authorities.*

## **Chinese authorities fail to distinguish between political dissent and "terrorist" activities**

AI is concerned that the levels of repression in the XUAR are severely narrowing down possibilities of independent expression of Uighur identity. Even peaceful expressions of Uighur ethnicity, culture or religion can be deemed as "separatist", "terrorist" or "illegal religious", and punished in line with China's Criminal Law.

The continued detention of Uighur prisoners of conscience (POCs) in the XUAR is evidence of repression stretching far beyond limits of combating violence or "terrorism". AI is urging that the Chinese authorities make a clear distinction between violent and peaceful acts of opposition, and that those expressing their political or religious views or their identity in a peaceful manner be guaranteed the right to do so.

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## States must protect their citizens... but not at the expense of human rights

Amnesty International strongly condemns all attacks on civilians and recognizes the duty of states under international human rights law to protect their populations from such attacks. However, security measures must be implemented within a framework of protection for all human rights.

The presence in any community of some violent groups or individuals must not be used as a pretext to curtail the fundamental human rights of the community as a whole. Indeed, experience across the world shows that such repressive policies are likely to lead to further violence, as those who wish to express their grievances peacefully find that all channels for such expression are closed.

## Chinese authorities harass Uighurs at home and abroad

Chinese authorities are reportedly intensifying acts of harassment:

- against relatives of Uighurs who flee abroad, for example, by tapping their telephones in the XUAR, detaining them, and denying them passports to join their family members abroad
- against Uighur activists living abroad, with increasing attempts to curtail peaceful political and human rights activities of individuals and organizations, for example, by pressuring other governments not to allow organization meetings to be held
- Rebiya Kadeer, a prisoner of conscience released in March 2005, continues to be targeted by the authorities to counter her influence as a Uighur activist abroad

## Forcible return of Uighurs who have fled China

There is evidence that growing numbers of Uighurs abroad, including asylum seekers and refugees, are being forcibly returned to China from countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan, Nepal and Pakistan.

Amnesty International opposes the return of any Uighur where there is a risk that they would face serious human rights violations, including torture, unfair trials, and execution.

- Muhammed Tohti Metrozi was forcibly returned to China from Pakistan in July 2003. At the time, he had

been recognized as a refugee by the UNHCR in Pakistan, and was awaiting resettlement to Sweden. According to reports, he was tried in Urumqi in April 2004 on charges relating to his application for refugee status and his work helping Uighur refugees in Pakistan. Amnesty International is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

All countries are bound by the principle of non-refoulement, which bars states from returning individuals to a country where their lives or liberty are at risk or where they are likely to face torture. This is a fundamental principle of customary international law.

Amnesty International welcomes the United States' decision not to send the Uighurs still held in Guantanamo Bay back to China because of fears they would be tortured or executed.



*Abdulghani Memetemin, a 40-year-old teacher and journalist, was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment, for reporting peacefully on human rights violations against the ethnic Uighur community in the XUAR.*

## Severe controls on information

The Chinese authorities continue to impose severe controls on the flow of information in the XUAR with devastating consequences for human rights in the region.

- Since 2002, the number of official reports on such subjects as death sentences and executions in the XUAR has fallen drastically
- Amnesty International and other human rights NGOs are prohibited from entering China to conduct independent research
- The real risk of arbitrary detention, torture and other serious human rights violations is silencing people who might otherwise come forward with information

**Amnesty International calls on the Chinese government to adopt a policy of openness and transparency as a step toward ending violations of the rights of the Uighur people.**

## Take action!

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