



TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTER URGES CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF UYGHURS



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THE 35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TIANANMEN INCIDENT HAS BEEN MARKED INTERNATIONALLY

An iconic image of the 'tank man' halting the People's Liberation Army in Beijing in 1989. STUART FRANKLIN/MAGNUM PHOTOS



In 1989, blowback was swift; alienation today is 'systematic, progressive, long-term.'

The United States and other Western countries commemorated Tiananmen Square on June 4, and Taiwan's commemoration ceremony set a record high. More than 6,000 people attended the ceremony in Taipei.

According to the news of the Voice of America, the 35th anniversary of the crackdown by the Chinese Communist Party in Tiananmen Square on June 4 was celebrated with a candlelight vigil.

Currently, Taiwan is the only place in China's neighboring countries that can openly mourn the June 4 incident. On

the afternoon of June 4, a candle-lighting ceremony was held in Taipei Liberty Square.

According to the organizers' statistics, more than 6,000 people participated in the event. Among them were many Hong Kong residents and high school students from Taipei, who agreed that the June 4 incident must be remembered, and that Taiwan is also under threat from the Chinese Communist regime.

The commemoration of the massacre committed by China in Tiananmen Square 35 years ago has been organized in many countries, especially in Western countries such as the United States, England, Canada, Germany, and France. Currently, candlelight vigils commemorating the Tiananmen massacre are strictly prohibited in Hong Kong and China.



UYGHUR BROTHERS SHOT DEAD ON SAME DAY IN EAST TURKISTAN PRISON



People stand in a guard tower on the perimeter wall of the Urumqi No. 3 Detention Center in Dabancheng in Xinjiang, April 23, 2021. Mark Schiefelbein/AP



**They were involved in
a scuffle with
a security guard who
killed them,
officials and police
say.**

Two Uyghur inmates — biological brothers — were working in a vegetable field at Qarabughra Prison in Xinjiang's Kunes county in early May, when a security guard grabbed one of them by the leg and began dragging him.

The older brother, Sidikjan Ablikim, 35, rushed over to Ablehet, 33, to free him, according to police and prison officers with knowledge of the situation.

An argument ensued, and the brothers physically clashed with the guard, while a third inmate intervened.

The guard then pulled out his gun and shot and killed the Abilkims, the police and prison officials said.

Little is known about the brothers other than that they were from Atush, transliterated as Artux or Atush, the capital of the Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang.

RFA was unable to find out further details, the reasons for their arrest or the duration of their sentences.

“Situations like this come up rarely,” said an officer who has worked at the Qarabughra Prison for 25 years. “There hasn’t been anyone who died in the fields [while performing labor] due to a conflict, besides them.”

EXPANDED TO HANDLE MORE INMATES

Qarabughra is one of the oldest prisons and largest detention centers in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, the prison officer said.

In 2017, as Chinese authorities began detaining Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims en masse in Xinjiang in an effort to eliminate what they said was “terrorism” and “religious extremism,” Qarabughra Prison was expanded to handle inmates brought in from other parts of the region.

As part of the crackdown, Chinese authorities ordered Uyghur students studying in Egypt and other predominantly Muslim countries to return to Xinjiang where they were promptly arrested for the purported “crime” of studying abroad.

Some of the students were tried in Atush, their hometown, and sent to Qarabughra Prison in Kunes county. However, it is unknown whether the Ablikim brothers had studied abroad and were arrested upon return.

RFA contacted relevant authorities in Kunes county and Ghulja city, called Yining in Chinese and capital of Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, for more information on the brothers and their deaths.

A Kunes county police officer, who declined to be identified because he wasn’t authorized to speak to the media, said the prison had released the bodies of the two inmates.

The officer knew this because he worked as a security guard along the roads where the vehicle carrying the dead prisoners passed.

Because the brothers died the same day, the officer said he had assumed they had been involved in a fatal accident. However, he did not ask his boss about it, because it was not his job to inquire about the identities of the dead or their cause of death.

“Both are deceased, and they were both from Atush,” he said. “Another inmate was hospitalized from that conflict.”

Information about the incident was not reported at an official meeting, and because of the tragic nature, news of it was spread by word of mouth among the others who knew about the Ablikims’

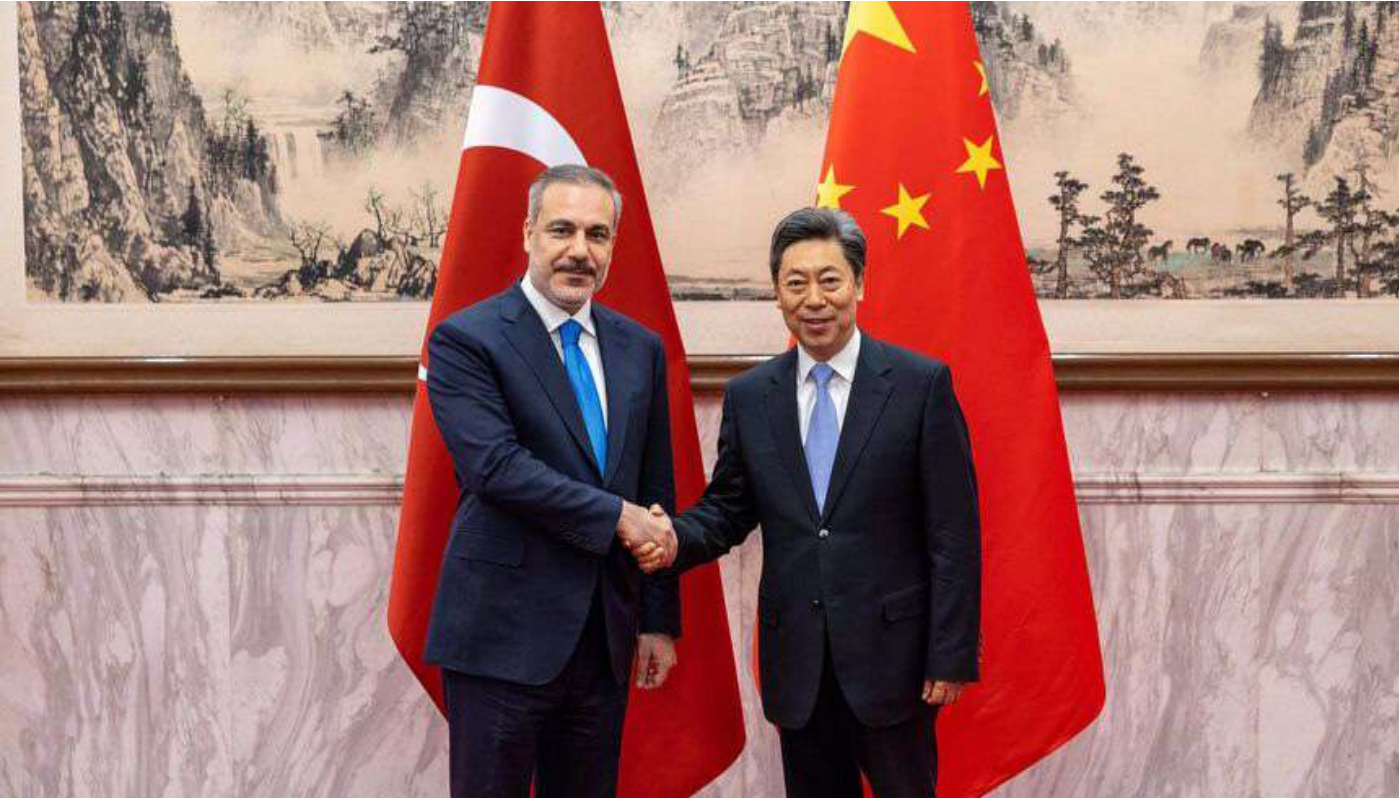
argument with the guard and their subsequent shootings, the officer from the Kunes county police said.

Other officials contacted by RFA declined

to comment, stressing that any matters related to the prison were confidential.

Translated by RFA Uyghur. Edited by Roseanne Gerin and Malcolm Foster.

TURKEY'S FIDAN ARRIVES ON FIRST VISIT TO CHINA WILL TRAVEL TO UYGHUR REGION



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan (L) met with Chen Wenqing, member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Head of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, in Beijing on June 3, 2024. - Turkish foreign ministry

ANKARA — Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan arrived on Monday to China in the first such trip for Turkey’s top diplomat, which will also include travel to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Fidan held his first meeting with Chen Wenqing, senior official of the Communist Party of China who oversees intelligence and police, as part of his three-day visit to the country. He then met with the Turkish business community in China, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

In addition to his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, Fidan is also set to meet with Vice President Han Zheng during the visit, Turkey’s state broadcaster TRT reported, citing Turkish diplomatic sources.

First high-level visit to Uyghur region since 2012

Following his meetings in Beijing, Fidan is also slated to travel to Urumqi and Kashgar in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China, marking the first high-level Turkish visit to the region since Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s visit in 2012.

Once an outspoken critic of Beijing over its treatment of its Muslim minority, Erdogan had accused China of committing “genocide” against the Uyghurs in 2009. He later toned down his criticism over the past years, eyeing to deepen trade ties with the global power.

Much of the international community, including the United States and the European Union, accuses China of oppressing the Uyghurs, incarcerating

tens of thousands of its largest Muslim minority in internment camps in an effort to strip them of their Muslim identity. Beijing, in turn, denies the accusations, claiming that the camps are designed to combat separatism and provide “training” to de-radicalize Islamist extremists.

Turkey is home to one of the world’s largest Uyghur diasporas. Turkish authorities in February arrested six people suspected of spying on behalf of Chinese intelligence, marking a rare public showdown against the Asian powerhouse.

COOPERATION IN NUCLEAR ENERGY AND OTHER FIELDS

In Beijing, Fidan and Chinese officials will discuss bilateral cooperation between the two countries, as well as regional and global issues during the visit, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said on Saturday.

Fidan’s visit comes only a week after Turkish Energy Minister Alparslan Bayraktar’s visit to China for talks involving a third nuclear power plant that Turkey has been planning to build in the country’s northwest region. Bayraktar said the two countries were close to a deal on the plant, speaking after the visit.

China remains Turkey’s largest trade partner in Asia and its third-largest trade partner in the world, with the trade volume between the two countries standing at more than \$47 billion last year. Ankara is seeking to increase its exports to China, as the balance of trade between the two countries is staggeringly in China’s favor, with Turkey’s imports from China

exceeding \$44 billion last year.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi traveled to Turkey in July in one of his first visits

abroad after his appointment to his post the same month.

TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTER URGES CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF UYGHURS



Fidan's visit to the Xinjiang province is the highest-level visit from Türkiye since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then-prime minister, visited the region in April 2012. / Photo: @MFATurkiye



Changing perceptions regarding cultural rights and lives of Uyghurs would benefit China, Türkiye, and the broader international community, says Hakan Fidan.



VISITING CHINA THIS WEEK, TÜRKIYE'S FOREIGN MINISTER HAKAN FIDAN HAS STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF CHANGING GLOBAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE CULTURAL RIGHTS AND LIVES OF CHINA'S UYGHUR TURKS.

Fidan addressed the Uyghur issue while speaking to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV on Wednesday and advocated considering it as a matter of cultural richness without the need for any problems.

“Changing the perception in the world and the Islamic world regarding the cultural rights and lives of the Uyghurs here is beneficial for China, for us, and for everyone. Therefore, what we always say is this: we support China's one-China policy, its territorial integrity, and its sovereignty,” he said.

Fidan on Wednesday visited Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, during which he toured

the Yanghang Mosque and International Grand Bazaar in Urumqi, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said in a statement on X. Xinjiang is home to ethnic Uyghur people, who are Muslims.

The tour of Urumqi is part of a three-day official trip to China by Fidan and his delegation. Fidan is expected to visit Kashgar city in the province as well.

STRENGTHENING TIES WITH ALL REGIONS OF CHINA

Addressing a news conference with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing on Tuesday, Fidan noted the importance of Kashgar and Urumqi cities, emphasising their role in the Sino-Turkish and Sino-Islamic world.

He said that Kashgar and Urumqi are two ancient Turkic Islamic cities that contributed to China's cultural richness.

The Turkish foreign minister also met with Chinese Vice-President Han Zheng.

Fidan's visit to the Xinjiang province is

the highest-level visit from Türkiye since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then-prime minister, visited the region in April 2012.

In recent times, Türkiye has taken steps to strengthen its relations with all regions of China.

In this context, Ankara reinforced its diplomatic presence in China by opening the Chengdu Consulate General last year, in addition to its embassy in Beijing and consulates in Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Hong Kong.



Turkish MFA 
@MFATurkiye

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Minister of Foreign Affairs [@HakanFidan](#) visited the Yanghang Mosque and the International Grand Bazaar in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China.



ECONOMIC TIES

During his visit, the foreign minister also put forth concrete proposals aimed at reducing the trade deficit between the two countries, emphasising Türkiye's role as China's largest trade partner in Asia and the third-largest globally.

He urged China to import more Turkish agricultural and food products.

Additionally, Fidan conveyed Ankara's wish for Beijing to encourage more Chinese tourists to travel to Türkiye and for China to cooperate in the field of energy, including nuclear energy.

Discussions also centred on encouraging more Chinese companies to invest in Türkiye and harmonising efforts on the Middle Corridor and the Belt and Road Initiatives.

Fidan's engagements in Beijing included meetings with high-ranking Chinese

officials, including Chen Wenqing, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and head of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, Vice President Han Zheng and Foreign Minister Wang.

'TWO-FACED' UYGHUR PRINCIPAL JAILED FOR 12 YEARS FOR SUPPORTING 'SEPARATISTS'



Erkin Tewekkul in an undated photograph.

He was arrested despite his stellar reputation as a teacher

Erkin Tewekkul, a Uyghur biology teacher at a school in Xinjiang's capital Urumqi, stood out among his peers for his excellent communication and leadership skills.

He was selected several times as teacher or school staffer of the year and promoted first to secretary of the school union committee and later to principal, according to people familiar with his background.

Yet, despite his stellar reputation at the No. 14 High School — one of the top Uyghur high schools in Urumqi known for its outstanding graduates — police summoned Tewekkul for questioning around mid-2017. They arrested him later that year and sentenced him to 12 years in prison, the sources said.

Tewekkul, now 54, was arrested because authorities said he “failed to excessively praise” the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP, and the government while in class and in school meetings, raising doubts about his loyalty to the state, said one source, who declined to be named for fear of reprisal.

He was charged with “supporting nationalist separatists” after comforting students whose parents had been detained by authorities, and in 2018 was also accused of being “two-faced” — a

term used by the CCP to describe Uyghur cadres deemed disloyal to the party — the source said.

MASS ARRESTS

Tewekkul's detention occurred amid the mass arrests of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, hundreds of thousands of whom were sent to “re-education” camps to purportedly eliminate their “terrorist” tendencies and “religious extremism.” Others were sent to prisons.

Authorities began jailing Uyghur intellectuals and teachers a couple of years before conducting mass arrests around 2017, and continued to do so afterward as part of the Chinese government's efforts to suppress Xinjiang's Uyghur population.

“Most of the people accused of being two-faced are Uyghur cadres who pay attention to Uyghur culture, virtue and education, and who work for the government,” said Abduweli Ayup, founder of Uyghur Hjelp. Also known as Uyghuryar, the Norway-based nonprofit engages in Uyghur human rights advocacy, documentation and humanitarian aid.

“Therefore, as someone who cared for his students, loved education and contributed to biology in the Uyghur language, I can understand the reason [authorities accused] him of being two-faced,” he said.

Around 2014, Tewekkul began to notice that some of the high school students became depressed after their parents were arrested.

These earlier arrests were part of a crackdown on Muslim Uyghurs by Chinese authorities who appointed party cadres to stay in Uyghur homes and report on perceived “extremist” behaviors, including fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.

At the time, authorities leveled thousands of mosques throughout Xinjiang that they claimed were poorly constructed and unsafe. Government officials in Urumqi began a campaign against halal food,

which is prepared according to Islamic law.

Uyghur women were subjected to forced sterilizations and the insertion of intrauterine devices, or detained for violating birth-control orders.

Amid the crackdown, Tewekkul called the depressed students into his office and suggested that the suppressive measures were only temporary, according to one person with knowledge of the situation.

He assured them that their parents were innocent and would eventually be vindicated, the source said.



INTERROGATION

During Tewekkul's interrogation three years later, authorities misrepresented his words, saying they demonstrated an "uncertain position on national issues," and that he was "covering for separatists" and "inciting their children," the person familiar with the situation said.

These statements were later introduced in political study sessions as "the manifestation of national separatism in the field of education," he added.

When contacted by RFA for more information, a staffer at the 14th High School said he had no knowledge of Tewekkul and suggested that the former principal left the school years ago.

An officer at the Ghalibiyet Police Station, which oversees the district where the school is located in Urumqi, said the current principal was a Han Chinese man and that Tewekkul had been "taken away for re-education."

"I don't know how long it's been since he stopped working — maybe around three years," she said. "I don't know the reason for his arrest," she added, referring further questions to school leaders.

A police officer at the Tengritagh District Police Department in Urumqi confirmed that Tewekkul was in prison, but said she could not provide information about the duration of his sentence or his location.

"I heard that he was arrested due to financial reasons, since he was a principal," she told RFA. "I didn't hear about him being arrested for comforting students."

Tewekkul graduated from North China University with a degree in biology in 1994 and began working as a teacher at a former school that was renamed the No. 14 High School in 2004, Ayup said.

The principal is on a list of detained intellectuals compiled by Ayup's organization.

Tewekkul's friends and former classmates said he loved art and calligraphy, and was especially good at drawing, according to Ayup.

Former students now living abroad said he cared deeply about the students, loved education and offered valuable advice about the future, he added.

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VOLKSWAGEN: ADDRESS UYGHUR FORCED LABOR

Supply Chain, Xinjiang Plant Risk Links to Labor Abuses

Update, May 28, 2024: After publication of this news release, Volkswagen responded to earlier questions from Human Rights Watch, saying that the small electronic part produced by a sub-supplier listed by US authorities in December 2023 as linked to Uyghur forced labor had been replaced “in all cars for sale globally.” Volkswagen also responded to a question about why Volkswagen’s previous investigations in 2020 and 2022 did not identify a link to the sub-supplier, stating: “We investigated as part of our processes if a direct business relationship exists. This was and is still not the case. The connection to one of our sub-suppliers was not identified, as no full supply chain transparency exists.”

(Berlin) – Volkswagen should inform shareholders at its May 29, 2024 annual general meeting how the company plans

to eliminate Uyghur forced labor in its operations and supply chains, Human Rights Watch and the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR) said today.

Since 2017, the Chinese government has perpetrated crimes against humanity in the northwestern Xinjiang region and subjected Uyghurs and other Turkic communities to forced labor inside and outside the region. Aluminum and other key materials used in car manufacturing are produced in Xinjiang by companies with links to government forced labor programs.

“Volkswagen’s ‘In China, for China’ strategy shouldn’t mean complicity in forced labor,” said Jim Wormington, senior researcher and advocate for corporate accountability at Human Rights Watch. “Shareholders should call upon Volkswagen to ensure that it will apply robust measures to tackle Uyghur forced labor in its supply chains.”

Volkswagen, which manufactures cars in

A plant operated by a subsidiary of SAIC-Volkswagen on the outskirts of Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, on April 22, 2021. © 2021 AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein



China through joint ventures with Chinese carmakers, is failing to adequately investigate potential links between its supply chains in China and forced labor. The company in 2023 also commissioned a deeply flawed audit at a plant in Xinjiang operated by a subsidiary of Volkswagen's joint venture with SAIC, a Chinese state-owned carmaker. The Chinese government's pervasive surveillance and repression in Xinjiang means audits cannot credibly verify whether the facilities in the region are free from forced labor.

Volkswagen sells one in three of its cars in China. Volkswagen's chief executive, Oliver Blume, on April 24 described China as the company's "second home market."

Blume also announced the company's updated "In China, for China" strategy, which includes expanded partnerships with Chinese car manufacturers, reduced manufacturing costs, and ambitious sales targets.

Volkswagen said in December 2023 that an audit overseen by Markus Löning, Germany's former commissioner for human rights, found "no indications" of forced labor at the Xinjiang joint venture plant, which is used to road test cars assembled elsewhere in China. Löning conceded, however, that the basis for the audit had been a review of documentation rather than interviews with workers, which he said could be "dangerous." He also said that "even if they [workers] would be

aware of something, they cannot say that in an interview.”

Following the release of the audit, the German newspaper Handelsblatt on February 14 alleged that a contractor of a SAIC-Volkswagen Xinjiang subsidiary had used Uyghur forced labor during the construction of a Xinjiang test track, which was completed in 2019. In response, Volkswagen said that the 2023 audit of the Xinjiang plant did not include the test track, but that “to date, we have had no indications of human rights violations in connection with the test site.”

Volkswagen also said in February that it is “currently in talks with the non-controlled joint venture SAIC-Volkswagen regarding the future direction of the JVs [joint ventures] business activities in Xinjiang Province. Various scenarios are currently being examined intensively.” Shareholders should ask Volkswagen about the outcome of those discussions and push for the company to end its joint venture operations in Xinjiang.

The production of key materials for car manufacturing in Xinjiang also creates a risk that Volkswagen is sourcing products or materials linked to forced labor, both in factories across China and globally. Nearly 10 percent of the world’s aluminum, for example, is produced in Xinjiang before being shipped out, melted down, and made into products and parts used by car manufacturers and other industries. Aluminum producers in Xinjiang, and in the coal mines and coal plants that supply them, have participated in coercive labor

transfers, a form of state-imposed forced labor.

In June 2023, ECCHR filed a complaint with the Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (Bundesamt für Wirtschaft und Ausfuhrkontrolle, BAFA), the German government authority overseeing the country’s Supply Chain Act. The complaint contends that Volkswagen, BMW, and Mercedes-Benz are violating their obligations under the law by failing to adopt appropriate measures to identify and prevent the risks of state-imposed forced labor in their supply chains. The BAFA has not yet responded publicly to the complaint.

Volkswagen in January told United States customs officials that a small electronic part was produced by a sub-supplier listed by US authorities in December 2023 as linked to Uyghur forced labor. US customs officials impounded vehicles containing the part while Volkswagen replaced it. Human Rights Watch asked Volkswagen on May 22 whether it has removed the part in vehicles sold outside the US but did not receive a response. A US Senate Finance Committee report in May found that Volkswagen had previously investigated the sub-supplier in 2020 and 2022 but found no connections to its supply chain.

Volkswagen is applying inadequate oversight to the supply chains of its Chinese joint ventures, such as SAIC-VW, which primarily manufacture cars for sale in China, the organizations said. Volkswagen contends that, under

Germany's supply chain law, it is not legally required to address human rights impacts in SAIC-VW's supply chain because its joint venture agreement cedes operational control to SAIC.

Volkswagen in November 2023 told Human Rights Watch that the company "assumes responsibility ... to use its leverage over its Chinese joint ventures to address the risk of human rights abuses." But when asked about potential links between SAIC-Volkswagen and an aluminum producer in Xinjiang, Volkswagen responded: "We have no transparency about the supplier relationships of the non-controlled shareholding SAIC-Volkswagen."

Volkswagen's updated China strategy continues to rely on joint ventures and includes partnerships with SAIC and Chinese electric carmaker XPENG. ECCHR's complaint said that cars

manufactured by joint ventures should be considered as being part of Volkswagen's supply chain, and therefore fall within the scope of its due diligence obligation under the German Supply Chain Act. Human Rights Watch asked Volkswagen on May 22 what steps it will take to ensure that strong human rights and responsible-sourcing standards apply to all current and future joint venture operations in China, but did not receive a reply.

"Volkswagen can't simply wash its hands of responsibility for its Chinese joint ventures in full knowledge of the risks of forced labor," said Chloé Bailey, senior legal advisor at ECCHR. "Shareholders should ask Volkswagen how it is responding to increased scrutiny over its operations in China and what steps it is taking to comply with its obligations under the German Supply Chain Act."



CHINESE TOMATO FROM XINJIANG ARRIVES ITALIAN FARMERS PROTEST

Forty containers of Chinese tomato paste arrived in Salerno, Italy, after a 10,000-kilometre journey from Xinjiang. The Coldiretti farmers' association protests against "unfair imports" and Chinese worker exploitation, noting that 90% of China's tomato paste comes from Xinjiang, where Uighur forced labour is reported

A recent investigation by the UK's Sky News has exposed China's escalating control over Islamic practices within the country. The report highlights the growing restrictions and surveillance imposed on Muslims, especially in areas with substantial Islamic populations. One striking scene in the report features a local Muslim leader standing alone in the courtyard of a small mosque in a cold, dusty region of central China.

"Religion is dying," he laments, emphasising the severe constraints the Chinese government imposes on religious activities. The report details the intensified efforts by Chinese authorities to monitor and restrict Islamic practices, including demolishing mosques, banning religious attire, and censoring Islamic

texts. This crackdown is part of a broader campaign to align religious practices with state ideology and suppress any potential dissent.

The Chinese authorities have implemented several measures to curb the practice of Islam- demolition of Mosques, banning religious attire and censoring Islamic texts

Numerous mosques have been demolished, especially those that fail to meet the government's architectural standards or are considered too conspicuous. Traditional Islamic clothing, such as headscarves and long beards, has been banned in certain regions. The government has censored Islamic texts, removing any content perceived as promoting extremism or dissent. This



MOSQUES DEMOLISHED TEXTS CENSORED CHINA IS REPRESSING MUSLIMS IN XINJIANG

The Chinese government's repression of the Islamic faith, especially targeting the Uyghur Muslim community in Xinjiang, has drawn widespread international criticism and condemnation due to allegations of human rights violations and cultural genocide.



includes altering the Quran and other religious literature to align with the state's narrative.

This is part of an effort to assimilate Muslims into the broader Han Chinese culture. The report also highlights the extensive surveillance network monitoring Muslim communities. High-tech surveillance systems, including facial recognition cameras, are widespread in areas like Xinjiang, home to a significant Uyghur Muslim population. These systems track individuals' movements and behaviours to ensure strict compliance with government regulations.

The restrictions have permeated all aspects of daily life for Muslims in China. Religious education for children has been

heavily regulated, leading to the closure of many religious schools. Additionally, community leaders and imams are required to attend government-run reeducation programs to ensure they propagate state-approved messages, according to the Sky News report.

The international community has responded with concern over China's treatment of its Muslim population. Human rights organisations have condemned these actions, calling for greater transparency and respect for religious freedoms. The Chinese government, however, maintains that these measures are necessary to combat extremism and ensure national security.

IN XINJIANG, CHINA'S SECURITY CHIEF CALLS FOR 'NORMALISATION OF COUNTERTERRORISM'



A crackdown on extremism among Uygurs and other Muslim minorities has been under way in Xinjiang for years. Photo: Reuters

On tour of the far western region, Chen Wenqing urges officials to ‘always give top priority to maintaining social stability’ A day after, on Monday, public security ministry says the country hasn’t seen a terrorist attack in more than seven years

China’s top security official Chen Wenqing has called for the “normalisation” of counterterrorism efforts in **Xinjiang**, where a crackdown on extremism among Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities has been under way for years.

During a visit to the far western region from Wednesday to Sunday, Chen said authorities must “insist on cracking down on terrorist crimes in accordance with the law and make efforts to promote the normalisation of counterterrorism”, state news agency Xinhua reported on Sunday.

Chen is a member of the Communist Party’s elite decision-making body the Politburo, and secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, which oversees the country’s law enforcement agencies.

In **Xinjiang**, Chen visited the region’s capital, Urumqi, as well as Kashgar and the Kazakh prefecture of Ili. He urged local officials to “always give top priority

to maintaining social stability” and to “accurately prevent and crack down on violent terrorist crimes”, according to Xinhua.

The report said Chen visited Khorgos, a town in Ili on the border with Kazakhstan, and the Tashkurgan Tajik autonomous county in the region’s southwest, which borders Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. He told law enforcement officials to “strongly defend border security”.

A day after the visit, the Ministry of Public Security said in a statement on Monday that China had not seen a terrorist attack in more than seven years.

Decades of ethnic tensions and unrest in **Xinjiang** prompted Beijing to impose measures in 2016 that it said were aimed at cracking down on terrorist attacks. But the measures have led to allegations of widespread human rights abuses, including that at least 1 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities were held in

mass internment camps. Beijing denies the claims and has said the centres were for “vocational training”.

Xinjiang authorities have claimed an “overwhelming victory” over terrorist attacks, but security remains a major concern.

In its annual work report in January, the Xinjiang government stressed that the region would maintain a “tough stance” to safeguard social stability, meaning combating terrorism.

A white paper released by the State Council Information Office the same month praised Xinjiang’s anti-terrorism measures as improvements in China’s legal system over the past decade.

It highlighted Xinjiang’s de-radicalisation regulations, introduced in 2017 and revised in 2018, which list behaviours considered extremist by the authorities including growing an “abnormal” beard and wearing a veil.

In August, President Xi Jinping said “social stability” was a top priority for the region’s authorities when he visited Xinjiang, and he called for more efforts to combat terrorism and religious extremism, as well as stressing the need for economic development.

In recent years, the Xinjiang government has tried to improve its image by touting economic development and inviting foreign media on carefully choreographed tours to promote the region.

Chen Wenqing told law enforcement officials to “strongly defend border security”. Photo: AFP



THAILAND ACCUSED OF SENDING UYGHUR AND OTHER REFUGEES BACK TO CHINA



Prime Minister of Thailand Srettha Thavisin meeting Xi Jinping in Beijing, October 19, 2023.

Source: PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

A report highlights how asylum seekers from China and other countries have been repeatedly kidnapped or arrested and sent back to their persecutors.

“Visit Thailand” is a suggestion smiling throughout the world from thousands of posters praising the natural and cultural beauty of the Asian country. Having been there more than once, it is a slogan I would gladly endorse. However, it seems that visiting Thailand is not a good suggestion when it is addressed to refugees fleeing China and other non-democratic countries.

A report published on May 16 by Human Rights Watch suggests that in the last ten years the Thai government, intelligence services, and police have constantly cooperated with China (and others) to intimidate, harass, and ultimately arrest or kidnap and deport back to their home countries dissidents who will be jailed and tortured there (or worse). Human

Rights Watch notes that Thailand has not ratified the Refugee Convention. However, it is a party to the UN Convention Against Torture, which has a provision on non-refoulement, i.e., prohibits the states from deporting asylum seekers back to countries where they are at risk of being tortured.

For China, the story starts with democracy activists Jiang Yefei and Dong Guangping, who were deported to China in 2015 despite having UNHCR refugee status, and after the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok had informed the Thai government that their resettlement in Canada had been approved. Dong was particularly unfortunate in his choice of countries where he escaped to. Having served a sentence of three and a half



years in China, he escaped to Vietnam in 2020, where he was arrested and once again deported back to China in 2022.

Gui Minhai, a Hong Kong-Swedish published and writer, was kidnapped in Thailand, also in 2015 and brought back to China. Also in 2015 there was the well-known case of 109 Uyghurs deported back to China despite the fact that they had been granted Turkish citizenship and were on their way to Turkey. Today, 43 Uyghurs remain in a detention center and can be deported at any time.

In 2018, human rights activist Xian Li also arrived in Thailand as a refugee. She was harassed and compelled to meet with Chinese representatives. Only the strong intervention of American diplomats

allowed her to fly to the United States, where she was granted asylum.

The report suspects that there are secret agreements between the Thai and Chinese governments for detaining and deporting back to China asylum seekers, or in some cases allowing Chinese agents to kidnap them. Similar secret agreements presumably exist with Cambodia and Laos, given the fate of several dissidents who escaped to Thailand from these countries, and perhaps with Vietnam, the report says.

It seems that keeping good relations with China and its allies is more important for Thailand than honoring its international human rights commitments and protect refugees from unlawful detention and



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Reporters Without Borders: China has the highest number of journalists in prisons



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Editor **Radwa Adel**

Caricature **Radwa Adel**

Editorial Board **East Turkistan Press And Media Association**

Publication Type **Monthly Journal**

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