



EAST TURKISTAN AUTHORITIES INTENSIFY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR UYGHUR VISITORS



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UYGHUR RIGHTS ORGANISATION URGES INT'L COMMUNITY TO RECOGNISE ONGOING GENOCIDE IN EAST TURKISTAN



Representative Image (Image credit: X/@SUyghurCommitte)

**Stockholm [Sweden],
July 28 (ANI): Svenska
Uyghur Kommitten,
a Uyghur rights
organisation, has urged
the Swedish government
to recognise the ongoing
Uyghur genocide in East
Tukistan.**

In the statement, Svenska Uyghur Kommitten has called on the Swiss government and international community to acknowledge the expansionist policies of China in East Turkistan and demand transparency and accountability from China.

In a post on X, the Svenska Uyghur Kommitten stated, “We call on the Swedish government and the international community to not overlook these grave injustices. It is imperative that Sweden recognizes #China’s systematic campaign of genocide against the Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, and acknowledges the unlawful #occupation of East Turkistan. Silence and inaction in the face of such profound suffering are unacceptable”.

<https://x.com/suyghurcommitte/status/1817533293866156320>

Svenska Uyghur Kommitten further said, “The world must stand united in demanding transparency, accountability, and an end to these egregious human rights violations. We honour the memory of our martyrs who died in Yarkand and pledge to continue our fight for

independence, justice and freedom”.

Uyghur rights organisation urged political leaders, human rights organisations, and people around the world to raise their voices against the ongoing atrocities in the East Turkistan region. The statement came on the sidelines of the Yarkand Massacre.

In the statement, Svenska Uyghur Kommitten stated, “Yarkand Massacre was a brutal and dark chapter in the history of East Turkistan. On July 28, 2014, Chinese government forces began ruthlessly massacring thousands of innocent Uyghurs in Yarkand County, occupied East Turkistan. This tragic event serves as a reminder of the depths of violence and oppression the Uyghur and other Turkic peoples are facing at the hands of the Chinese government”.

“The massacre began when Chinese police brutally invaded a wedding in Yarkand’s Ilishqo, East Turkistan, killing around 150 young innocent Uyghurs in the most brutal ways. In response, their relatives from four villages in Yarkand took to the streets, peacefully protesting against the horrors, torture, and dehumanization they endured. Their demands for freedom and justice were met with a brutal response. The Chinese government, in a gross display of force, unleashed a wave of violence that resulted in the loss of at least 3,000 innocent Uyghur lives,” it added.

In the statement, the Uyghur rights organisation said that Uyghurs were tortured further, as after the

demonstration, a three-day purge ensued, during which Chinese police carried out house-to-house searches, shooting the Uyghurs who had participated in the demonstration as well as those who had not.

The number of arrests made during this massacre remains unknown to this day. It is said that after all this, there was almost no one left in Yarkand's Ilishqo, as many had disappeared and gone missing. (ANI)

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LAMENTS CHINA FOR IMPRISONMENT AND TORTURE OF UYGHUR ACTIVIST



Representative Image. (Photo: Reuters)

Bangkok [Thailand], July 24 (ANI): An international human rights watchdog called upon the Chinese authorities on Tuesday for the illegal imprisonment and further torture of Ilham Tohti, a renowned Uyghur activist and intellectual, Amnesty International said in a statement.

Tohti had advocated for understanding and dialogue between Uyghurs and Han people in China.

The same statement by Amnesty International mentioned that all attempts to resolve the issue between China and Uyghurs are faced with life sentences on baseless charges of “separatism.”

According to the Amnesty International statement, “Ilham Tohti, a renowned Uyghur intellectual, has spent the last ten years unjustly imprisoned for his peaceful advocacy. His relentless calls for understanding and dialogue between Uyghurs and Han Chinese have been met with a life sentence on baseless charges of “separatism.”

The statement further mentioned that “the charges against Ilham Tohti stem from his writings and teachings, which explained the systemic discrimination faced by Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Tohti’s life sentence, handed down on September

23, 2014, after a trial lacking fairness and transparency, is a blatant violation of his rights. During his imprisonment, Tohti has reportedly been subjected to torture and ill-treatment, including wrist and ankle shackling, prolonged solitary confinement and denial of adequate medical care and food, as well as political indoctrination.”

The statement called Ilham Tohti’s imprisonment, egregious and a signal towards the suppression of most non-violent forms of advocacy for human rights.

The statement also mentioned that Tohti’s case exemplifies the Chinese government’s broader crackdown on Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic groups, including mass arbitrary detention, forced assimilation policies, and crimes against humanity.

While appreciating the efforts of Ilham Tohti, the Amnesty International statement mentioned that his approach offered a path towards understanding and cooperation and promoted peaceful coexistence. His freedom would be a crucial step for advancing human rights and justice in China, while his ongoing imprisonment is a stark reminder of the ongoing human rights crisis faced by Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic Muslim groups living in China. (ANI)

**EAST TURKISTAN
AUTHORITIES**

**INTENSIFY
REPORTING**

**REQUIREMENTS
FOR UYGHUR VISITORS**



THE MEASURE ALLOWS CHINESE AUTHORITIES
TO MONITOR UYGHURS' MOVEMENTS IN EAST TURKISTAN

Authorities in at least two areas of Xinjiang have aggressively ramped up a requirement in recent months that Uyghurs report guests in their homes to police in as little as 10 minutes to two hours of their arrival, three Uyghur township government cadres told Radio Free Asia.

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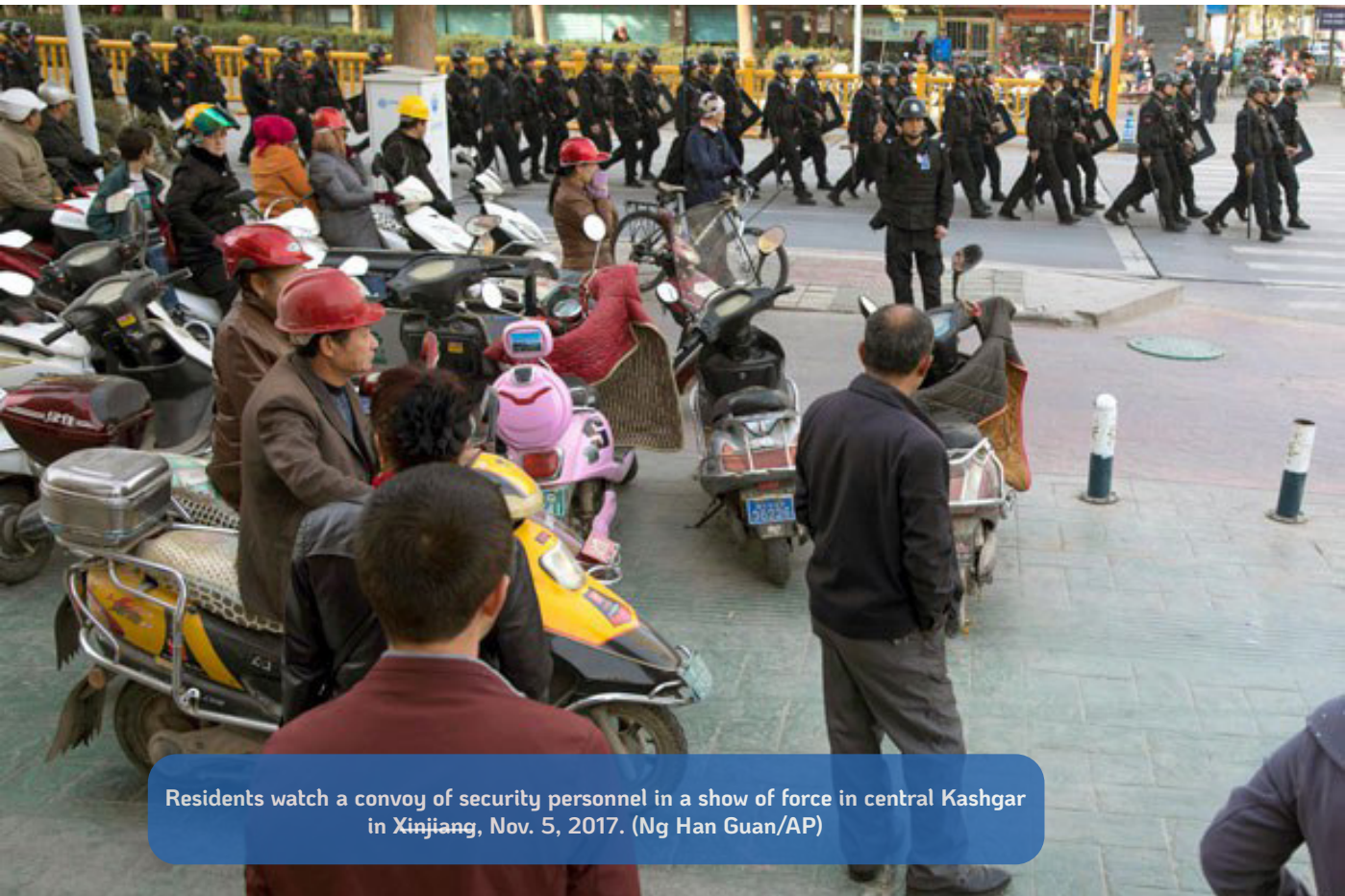
The requirement was first implemented in June 2015 and has been increasingly emphasized by the government of Ma Xingrui who took over as Communist Party secretary of Xinjiang in December 2021, they said.

The requirement is one of several draconian surveillance policies implemented by

Chinese authorities to monitor Uyghurs' movements amid ongoing human rights abuses in Xinjiang that the United States and some Western parliaments have said amount to genocide and crimes against humanity. China has denied the accusations.

Comments posted online by some Uyghur netizens attributed Chinese authorities' concern about Uyghur gatherings to the government's tyranny, while others say they believe the main reason is to conceal information about the ongoing genocide in Xinjiang.

A resident of Yengisheher county in Kashgar prefecture was detained at the



Residents watch a convoy of security personnel in a show of force in central Kashgar in Xinjiang, Nov. 5, 2017. (Ng Han Guan/AP)

Yapchan village police station with his wife for forgetting to report a relative from Ghulja who arrived for a visit earlier this month, said a person with knowledge of the situation, giving a recent example of the stepped-up measures.

The pair were released the next day after a night of interrogation, and their guest ended the visit earlier than planned and returned home, he said.

The guest said, “It’s like this everywhere,” implying that similar practices are in effect in Ghulja where he lives, the person added.

A local police officer contacted by RFA acknowledged the couple’s arrest and release.

Police in Guma county of neighboring Hotan prefecture said the system of reporting newly arrived guests to police was being more rigorously adhered to than it was in the past.

A police officer in the county’s Kokterak

township said residents there must report out-of-town guests to authorities within two hours of their arrival and neighbors within one hour of their arrival.

An officer in the county’s Choda township said residents must report guests to the police within 10 minutes, and that if they failed to report them within 30 minutes, they would be held responsible, though he didn’t elaborate.

“If the guests stay for more than half an hour they need to be reported,” he said. “It’s the same for any number of guests. Starting from the beginning of this year, this policy has been strict.”

Adult and teenage visitors as young as 14 must be reported, he added.

He said he didn’t believe that any Uyghurs who failed to report visitors had been taken in for “re-education.”

Translated by RFA Uyghur. Edited by Roseanne Gerin and Matt Reed.



THE STORY OF ZUHRE SULTAN, UYGHUR EXILE: “THE CCP TOOK AWAY MY ENTIRE FAMILY”



Zuhre Sultan, at a meeting of the Concentration Camp Survivors' Group in Istanbul, demanding to know where her relatives might be. Photo by Ruth Ingram.

29 of her relatives are detained, disappeared, dead, or still serving lengthy prison sentences. She tells her—and their—story to “Bitter Winter.”

Buwajir Allavedi was everyone's friend. Mother of four children, she never strayed far from the village of her birth during the course of her 44 years, spending her days laboring in the fields, planting crops, tending sheep, and being a good neighbour. Her five times daily prayers were devout, and her ankle-length clothes and headscarf reflected her piety.

But her familiar routine and that of her family were shattered one day in 2017 when she disappeared. Her husband Hudavedi Ömer, then 49, also vanished at the same time, and the younger children were billeted with grandparents. The couple were initially detained for interrogation and later it emerged that an extra-judicial court had sentenced them both to 10 years in jail.

Hudavedi died in prison two years ago aged 54. The family was denied access to his body, and there was no Muslim funeral.

Zuhre Sultan, Buwajir's younger sister, was heartbroken by this news when it eventually trickled down through the Uyghur exile rumor mill, and she blames the Chinese state for what she describes as his "murder." She has been watching the events unfold in her homeland with horror since 2017. She has witnessed from her exile in Türkiye, where she came with her husband in 2014, the disappearance of family members one by one and their illegal sentencing for "crimes" unspecified. "We never hear directly that they have been arrested and rarely know why," she told "Bitter Winter"

from her home in Istanbul. "Sometimes we don't hear for years and rely on friends of friends or TikTok videos for messages to reach us."

She says the ache of not knowing and the pain of hearing snippets of bad news second or third hand is unbearable. "We are completely powerless to do anything, and the injustice eats away at us constantly," she said. "We never know what tragedy will hit us next."

Zuhre, who shares a large extended family with her husband, has lost count of the numbers but estimates that around 29 of their family members disappeared in 2017 and at least 15 that she knows of were later sentenced to lengthy jail terms. These are the ones she has heard about; but they could be the tip of the iceberg, she said. The family heard in 2021 and 2022 that 14 had been released from so-called "re-education" camps or shorter prison sentences, but 13 of the other 15 are still detained. Two of the 15 have already died in detention, including her husband's older cousin Abdugupur Sultanni, who passed away in custody at 65, two years ago, halfway through a lengthy jail term.

Since all contact was severed by the Chinese State in 2017, expatriate Uyghurs have been unable to speak to their relatives and friends directly. "Even if we could contact them, we are reluctant to risk their safety," she said, noting that Uyghurs in her homeland have been imprisoned simply because they once visited Türkiye or have relatives there.



A blurred photo of Zuhre Sultan's older sister Buwajir Allavedi, now 53 years old, currently serving a 10-year prison sentence, seen here holding one of her grandchildren. This out of focus image is the only photo Zuhre has to remind her of her sister. Courtesy of Zuhre Sultan.

Zuhre Sultan's sister's daughter Bumeryem Hudavedi, currently serving a 25-year sentence in a Xinjiang jail. Courtesy of Zuhre Sultan.



Hudavedi's younger brother Mohammed Eli Ömer, now 37, an Arabic translator, was hunted down to Lanzhou in inner China and returned to Xinjiang to face "trial" where he was given 10 years. His wife meanwhile had escaped to Türkiye where she now lives, daily wondering what has become of her husband.

The catalogue of those unaccounted

for includes Zuhre's older brother's two sons, whose fate was not known until 2020. The youngest, Abduvahid, quiet and even tempered, had opened a small bazar stall in the capital Urumqi selling the famous hand made knives from their hometown Yangizhar, not far from Kashgar at the furthest western edge of the vast Taklamakan Desert. He was recalled by

the local police to his hometown in 2010 and arrested in 2017. His membership of a local gym was portrayed in court as training for insurrection and he was sentenced to 10 years.

Zuhre's cousin Abdushukur Ömer, now 50, and his wife Buhilich Sawut were convicted for the "crime" of having seven children and punished with 10 years in jail. Two of their six boys were also sentenced to 10 years, with the other children taken in by an aunt. "They were just living their normal lives," said Zuhre. "Do you see this kind of thing happening anywhere else in the world?"

Abdushukur's boys, Abdusupur Abdughupur, now 34, and Abdurahman Memtimen were both sentenced to 10

years. Abdusupur owned a shop in Urumqi but was recalled to his village in 2017 to face arrest and 10 years imprisonment. Abdurahman, now 34, who grew up in the large extended family in the same village where they all played as children and partied together celebrating the Uyghur traditional milestones of life is now seven years into a 10-year sentence. His wife, now living with her mother-in-law, is working their land, and also forced to labour for free for the government in the mountainous areas, flattening and breaking up the stony ground. "With most of the young and healthy men in prison, only women and the elderly are left to do the back breaking work of tilling the fields," said Zuhre.



Zuhre Sultan's sister's husband's younger brother Mohammed Eli Ömer, now 37, serving a 10-year prison sentence. His father Hudavedi died in prison. Courtesy of Zuhre Sultan.



Zuhre Sultan's elder brother's son, Abduvahid, now 32, sentenced to 10 years. Courtesy of Zuhre Sultan.

At one point, to escape draconian family planning laws most enforced in the Uyghur heartland of southern Xinjiang, the entire extended family moved north to the capital Urumqi where with the benefit of an out of town registration they could fly under the radar for a number of years until new legislation required all unregistered Uyghurs to return to their place of birth.

She wants all the disappeared to be named. “These are real people with hopes and dreams of their own,” she said. “These have been stolen from them by the Chinese state that has robbed them of a future.”

Abdu Kayam Abdushukur, now 25, the son of one of Zuhre’s cousins was arrested in 2018/19 for reasons that are unclear. “He just disappeared one day and now we hear he is serving a 10-year sentence,” she said. Her cousins Abdukerim Mamut and Aygul Heyit are also serving 10 years.

Four members of one family, her cousins Abdushukur Ömer, Muhammed Eli Ömer, Abdurishit Abdushukur, Abdukeyyum Abdushukur, together with their mother Buhelchem Savut were all arrested and now serving 10-year prison sentences.

She described her family members as hard working, straightforward people who kept themselves to themselves and never set out to cause trouble. She said that she cannot imagine how they are surviving prison.

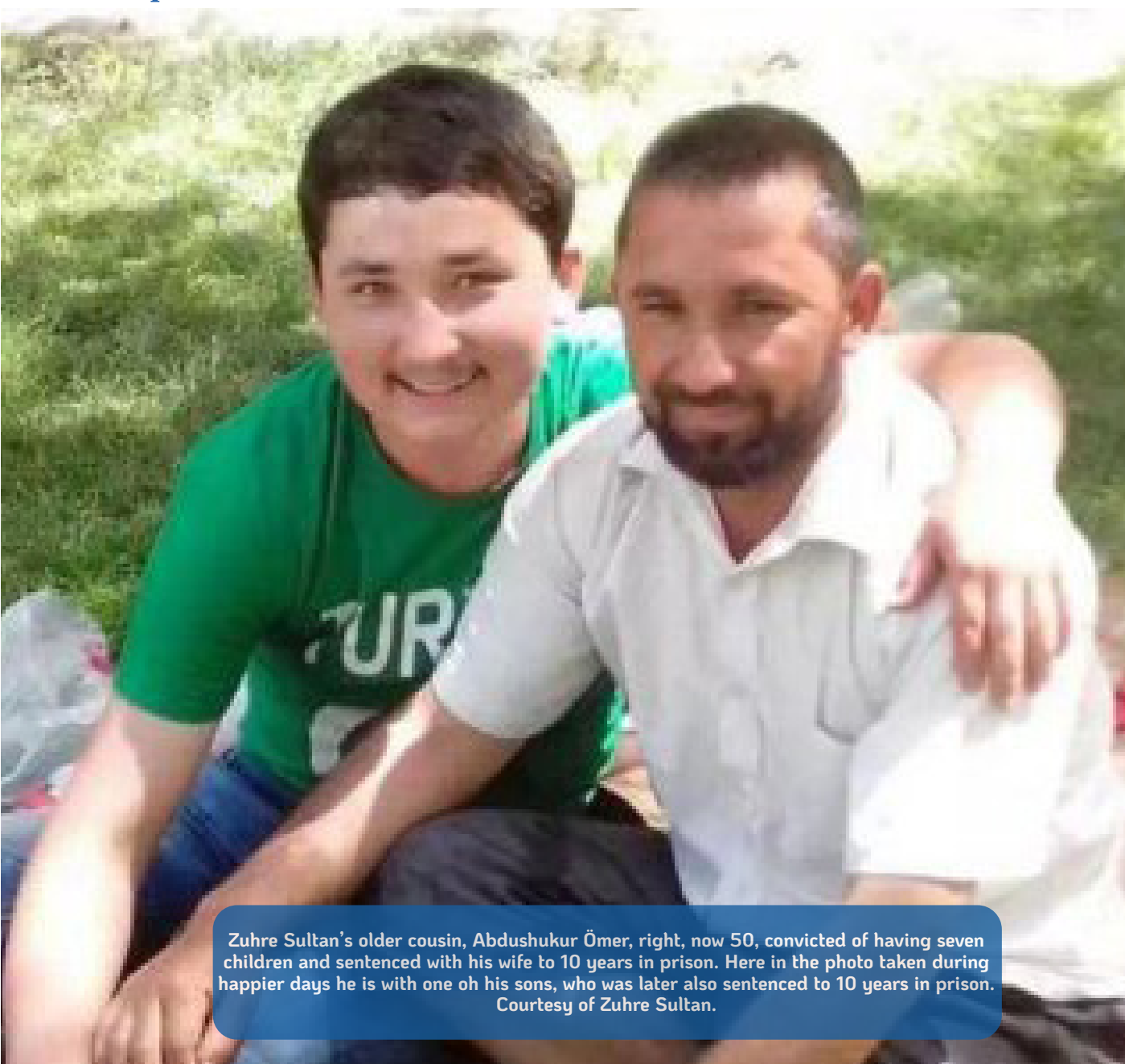
“I cannot stop wondering how my sister passes her days locked in a cell. Deprived

of her freedom, hungry, randomly punished, and subject to a brutal regime; it’s just unimaginable. What are the cells like? What is she wearing? How is she feeling? Does she have any friends? My questions and thoughts are endless,” said Zuhre.

Zuhre uses the freedom she has in Türkiye to campaign for the release of her family members. She is active in the Istanbul-based grassroots Concentration Camp Survivors Group that relentlessly pursues justice for relatives in the homeland. The movement, lead by Medine Nazimi, has tirelessly campaigned for the release of members’ missing relatives through United Nations channels, with the help of pro bono support from Turkish lawyers.

But the progress is frustratingly slow and disappointing, she said, explaining that the large-scale demonstrations on the streets of Istanbul and Ankara they once organized, have largely stopped. Beijing’s relentless pursuit of relatives in the homeland and threats of imprisonment against those who so far have escaped the roundups and imprisonments, has brought a dark shadow over their activities and many do not dare to protest as before. “We are all terrified that our actions could make things worse for those at home,” said Zuhre. “Some have been released from the camps or prison, but many are being rounded up again and re-sentenced. We don’t want to be responsible for more trauma for our loved ones.”

Grassroots support around the world has



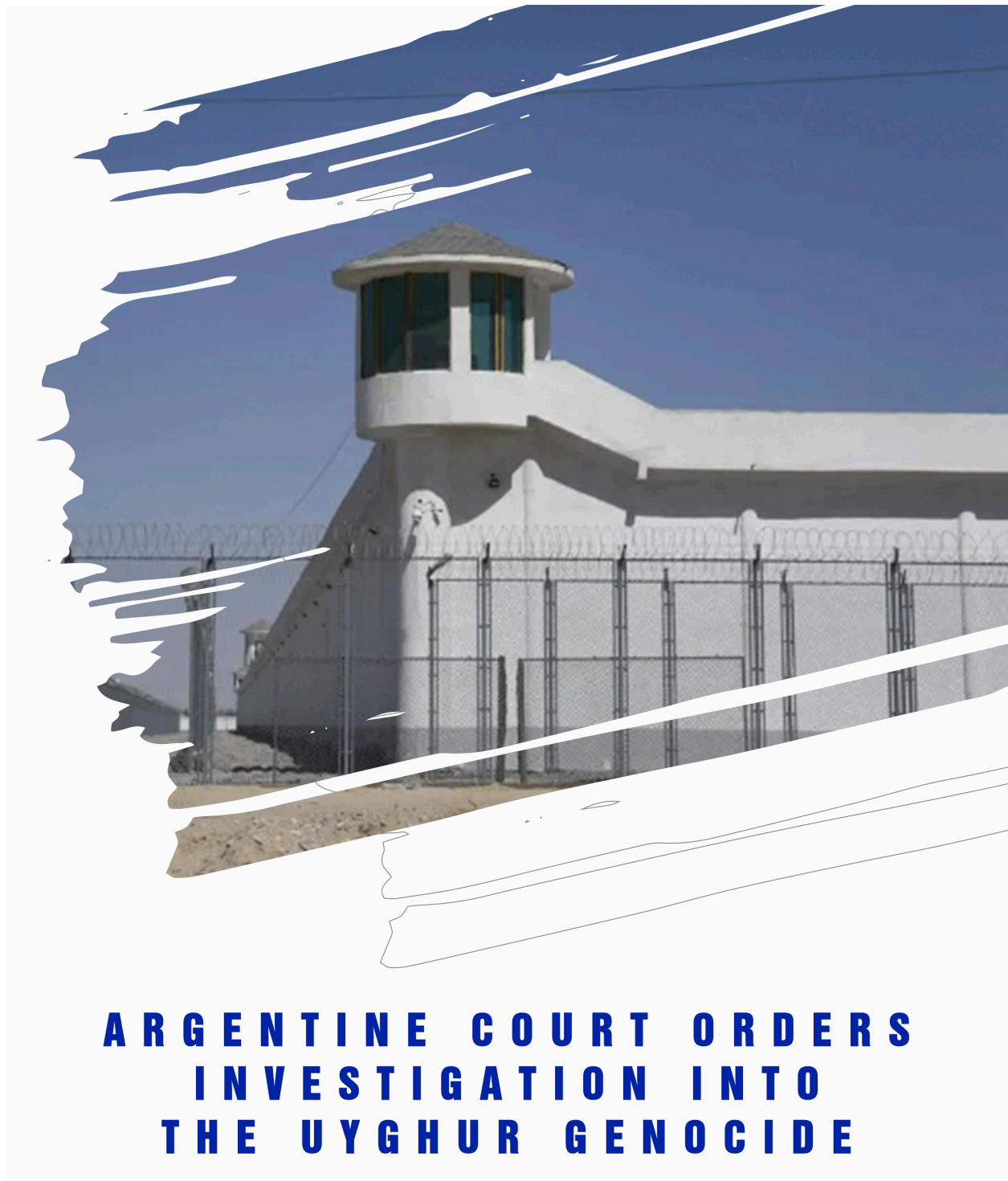
Zuhre Sultan's older cousin, Abdushukur Ömer, right, now 50, convicted of having seven children and sentenced with his wife to 10 years in prison. Here in the photo taken during happier days he is with one of his sons, who was later also sentenced to 10 years in prison. Courtesy of Zuhre Sultan.

encouraged exiled Uyghurs. With the help of media and activist campaigns small steps have been made to challenge the might of China and to demand answers from Beijing about the fate of their families. But Zuhre often feels defeated and hopeless. “Whatever we say nothing seems to change. The Chinese state is

merciless and inhuman.”

“Where are our relatives? What have they done wrong?” are the lingering questions that Zuhre lives with every day.

“We live with the hope that one day they will release them,” she said. “And we hope in God. What other hope do we have left?”



ARGENTINE COURT ORDERS INVESTIGATION INTO THE UYGHUR GENOCIDE

On July 11, 2024, the Argentine Federal Court of Criminal Cassation handed down its decision in a case concerning the issue of Uyghur genocide ordering the Prosecutor to open an investigation.

The decision follows a criminal complaint, originally filed in August 2022, by three non-governmental organizations including the World Uyghur Congress, the Uyghur Human Rights Project and Lawyers for Uyghur Rights, setting out the international crimes committed against the Uyghur and other Turkic people in Xinjiang, and the identity of those most responsible for these crimes. The information submitted with the complaint contained evidence of forced labor, forced abortion and sterilization, torture, mass internment in camps, and killings. The complaint was initiated under the universal jurisdiction provision set out in Article 118 of the Argentine Constitution. It allows for complaints concerning international crimes (such as genocide, crimes against humanity, and torture) to be tried by any domestic court in Argentina, and independently from where the crimes are committed. This provision has previously been used to investigate international crimes committed against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela.

After the criminal complaint was filed, the Prosecutor decided to archive the complaint because of reports that a criminal complaint in Turkey was pending. In November 2023, victims from the Uyghur community submitted an appeal to the decision. A hearing took place in December 2023 where the court heard that there was no evidence that the issue of the Uyghur genocide was being considered by courts in Turkey. At the time, the judges sided with the

Prosecutor's decision.

In its decision of July 2024, the Court of Cassation held that the Court of Appeal of Buenos Aires had been wrong to agree with the Prosecutor's decision to archive the complaint and ordered the Prosecutor to open an investigation. Once the case is opened by the Court of First Instance, it will enter the investigatory stage, whereby victims will be called to give evidence. This will provide an opportunity for the Uyghur people to testify before a criminal court in relation to the atrocities committed against the community. After hearing such evidence, the court can indict defendants, issue arrest warrants, and send the case to trial.

The July 2024 decision Argentine Federal Court of Criminal Cassation is an important step to ensure justice and accountability for the community, especially as other legal options are severely limited. Despite efforts by lawyers and civil society organizations, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was not able to take further the case of the Uyghurs. In its report from 2020, the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) stated that there was no basis to proceed at the time. Further evidence was submitted to the OTP, however, without any progress. Similarly, despite the strong report of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, which found that Uyghurs may have been subjected to international crimes, and in particular, crimes against humanity, no further steps have been taken by the United Nations. The report concluded

that “the information currently available to [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights] on implementation of the Government’s stated drive against terrorism and ‘extremism’ in [Xinjiang] in the period 2017- 2019 and potentially thereafter, also raises concerns from the perspective of international criminal law. The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention of members of Uyghur and other predominantly Muslim groups, pursuant to law and policy, in the context of restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights

enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.” An attempt to allocate some U.N. time to discuss the findings was blocked.

It is crucial that victims and survivors of international crimes have access to legal avenues for recourse. They deserve their day in court and an independent arbiter considering their testimonies and other evidence available. This will help to establish the truth in relation to gross human rights violations and help them to see a glimpse of justice.



CHINA IS USING ARCHAEOLOGY AS A WEAPON



Photograph of the Qigexing Buddhist Temple Ruins, southwest of the town of Yanqi, Yanqi Hui Autonomous County, Xinjiang, China. (Rolfmueller/Wikimedia Commons)

The state is unearthing ancient justifications for its rule over Xinjiang

desert outside Kashgar, an oasis city in the far-western region of Xinjiang, an ancient Buddhist stupa rises out of the sand. Because of its conical shape, it is known as Mo'er, the word for "chimney" in the language of the native Uyghurs. The stupa and the temple next to it were probably built some 1,700 years ago and abandoned a few centuries later. Chinese archaeologists started excavating the site in 2019. They have dug up stone tools, copper coins and fragments of a Buddha statue.

They also claim to have found clear proof that Xinjiang has been part of China since ancient times. According to official statements, artefacts discovered at Mo'er temple are similar to those dug up thousands of miles to the east in areas dominated by the Han, China's majority ethnic group. Parts of the temple were built in a "Han Buddhist" style. And its architectural features suggest that it was visited by a famous 7th-century monk from central China called Xuanzang. He is known for spreading Buddhism in the country.

These claims may sound academic, but China's government is using them to justify its brutal rule over Xinjiang. At the peak of a security campaign in 2018-19, perhaps a million Uyghurs and other Muslim residents of Xinjiang passed through camps where they were forcibly assimilated into Han Chinese culture. Critics accuse China of cultural genocide. Officials say they are trying to stamp out religious extremism. Moreover, if the inhabitants of Xinjiang have always

been Chinese, then accusations of forced assimilation make no sense.

Last month China organised a conference in Kashgar that focused on the discoveries made at Mo'er temple and other sites. They prove that there is no separation between the culture of Xinjiang and Chinese culture, said Pan Yue, head of the state's Ethnic Affairs Commission. Those who criticise China's policies in the region reveal their "ignorance of history" and are peddling "baseless narratives", he added.

In fact, it is China's narrative that looks dodgy, say experts. The country's ancient dynasties had an on-and-off military foothold in what is now Xinjiang, says James Millward of Georgetown University. But from the 8th century to the early 18th century, they had little influence. Then in 1759 China's final dynasty, the Qing, conquered the region and turned it into a colony. That is what the Communist Party inherited when it came to power in 1949.

Sites like Mo'er temple are fascinating, but do little to strengthen China's claims. They demonstrate the globalising effect of the Silk Road, a network of trade routes that linked China with Central Asia and Europe. Just as money and commodities flowed along the road, so did religions such as Buddhism, picking up aspects of local cultures along the way. Many of the Uyghurs' ancestors were indeed Buddhist. But that hardly means Xinjiang was culturally or politically part of China. After all, Buddhism originally came from India.

In any case, since the 16th century most

Uyghurs have practised Islam. But China has no interest in this later period. Instead, officials are trying to erase it. In recent years they have destroyed hundreds of mosques and Muslim shrines across Xinjiang. The museum in Kashgar barely mentions Islam, save for signs claiming that it was forced on Xinjiang and that the Uyghurs “are not Muslim by nature”.

When your correspondent visited Mo'er

temple this month, it was being turned into a tourist site. The ruins are surrounded by buildings with sloping roof tiles and red doors, mimicking those of Beijing's Forbidden City. The style is appropriate, said a Han construction worker. Buddhist culture is part of Han culture, he claimed, and Xinjiang has been part of China for thousands of years.

WHEN A PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL TRIES THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA



From left to right: Bhavani Fonseka from Sri Lanka, Zac Yacoob from South Africa, and Stephen Rapp from the USA, composed the chamber of the People's Court sitting in The Hague, from July 8 to 12, to consider the charges against Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China for crimes allegedly committed in Taiwan, Tibet, and against the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. Photo: © The Court of the Citizens of the World

A people's court sitting in The Hague has "indicted" Chinese President Xi Jinping for genocide and crimes against humanity, notably for crimes against the Uyghur. This unofficial court set up by a non-governmental organisation hopes "he will take note", said its presiding judge after announcing the indictment. Justice Info went to take a look at one of these "people's courts", heirs to the renowned Russell Tribunal, and find out how it works.

Last week in The Hague, a people's tribunal confirmed crimes against humanity and genocide charges against the People's Republic of China President Xi Jinping. The hotel conference room turned into a court for the week and, on Friday July 12, many of the victims and witnesses followed the judgement with phone in hand to film the moment.

While the judges decided there was not enough evidence to confirm the count of aggression against Taiwan, Taiwanese statehood was recognised. They also found there was clear evidence of crimes against humanity against the local population in Tibet and the Uyghur community in Xinjiang, where they also confirmed charges of genocide.

In China, "there was evidence of a clear aim at annihilating a whole community", said presiding judge Zac Yacoob, who served for 15 years in the constitutional court of South Africa, appointed by late President Nelson Mandela. Besides Yacoob, on the panel of judges were Bhavani Fonseka, prominent Sri Lankan constitutional and human rights lawyer, and Stephen Rapp, former US Ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues. "We hope the Chinese government will take note of this judgment," said Yacoob, adding that he hopes the international community will also "take note" and reflect on holding the Chinese government accountable.

The hearings of the victims, witnesses, and expert witnesses took place from July

8 to 12, with the closing arguments and judgment on the final day. At three rows of tables facing each other, the legal team -- six men and two women all wearing traditional black robes -- sat with thick folders in front of them. The audience had to stand up as the judges entered. On the sidelines were four cameramen, moving around and signalling to each other to get the best shots. They are making a documentary on the event.

CREATING A LEGAL BLUEPRINT?

This was the second visit to The Hague for the Court of the Citizens of the World, organized by the Cinema for Peace Foundation. In February 2023, they organised a tribunal in relation to the crime of aggression in Ukraine, which confirmed the ICC indictment of Russian President Vladimir Putin. People's tribunals face criticism regarding their purpose and lack of authority, but are also considered as a way to create a legal blueprint for possible cases.

A people's court has no legislative power. Here, it applied the Rome Statute of the ICC and was not organizing a trial but a confirmation of charges hearing in absentia. This is much like the pre-trial chamber of the International Criminal Court will do next October in the Joseph Kony case, said Rapp. He says the people's tribunal "provides the victims and survivors with an opportunity to have some sort of judicial proceedings. It was a simulated process, and it was understood as such but it is still the next best thing".

DELAYS AND DISORGANIZATION

Not unlike sometimes in real international courts, the process leading up to this people's tribunal was also marked by delays and disorganization. The trial was initially scheduled for April 27 to May 4. However, on April 19, Justice Info received the update that the whole process had been postponed to July. Then, a few days before the real start of the event came allegations of interference from China, disclosed to the participants only, which allegedly caused the organisation to move to a new location.

The day we could attend in person was the last day of testimonies before the judgment, Thursday July 11. The audience was around 10 people, half of them victims and witnesses. Among them were a Tibetan monk wearing a red robe and a Uyghur man with a traditional hat. Some of the victims had signs with photos of their loved ones who were killed or disappeared. A first victim testified, a Uyghur man now in the diaspora who had been detained in Xinjiang for 15 months in 2013-14. He held a photo of his niece and recounted how she asked him and other members of their family not to speak out, so as to protect everyone's safety. He said she was later tortured and killed in China in 2018.

EXPERT WITNESS, VICTIMS, DEFENCE, PROSECUTOR

The Uyghur are a Turkic-speaking and largely Muslim people mostly living in Xinjiang. Adrian Zenz, an international

expert on internal Chinese government documents and the Xinjiang internment campaign, testifying remotely, explained how there is evidence in the policies of President Xi Jinping of an intent to “weaken and control the Uyghurs”. This was done with the construction of re-education camps where people could be sent even preventively. The Chinese government accused the Uyghurs of being terrorists and used national security as a justification for the repression.

The first Uyghur victim, who asked not to be named, then spoke of his arrest on false accusation, of multiple interrogations on a “tiger chair” [used to immobilize suspects], of “food and water

deprivation”, of sexual abuse and torture. He had to confess a minor crime and go through two trials before he could be freed, only to find a city full of cameras for face recognition, where as a Uyghur with a criminal record he was banned almost anywhere. Cross-examined by defence lawyer Gregor Guy-Smith, a former president of the Association of Defence for the International Court for the former Yugoslavia, he was asked about one of the trials he faced in China, which the victim described as trumped up. “Was it a piece of theatre like this?” asked the defence lawyer and he gestured to the room.

The second victim testifying was a woman, speaking with the help of an interpreter.



She was sent to a re-education camp in Xinjiang under bogus charges, she said. She explained how “the Uyghur language was prohibited” and “praying was prohibited”. They had to study Mandarin, sing the Party songs, and praise Xi Jinping. Once she was interrogated for six days and asked questions like “Are you part of a terrorist organisation? Do you want to divide the country?”. She was then made to record a video that the police scripted for her.

The prosecutor, Jonathan Rees, a British KC who worked on defence before the Kosovo Specialist Chambers, said in his closing argument that “President Xi bears criminal responsibility for inciting, inducing, committing and contributing to those offences”. In the judgment, Yacoob confirmed all counts of genocide and crimes against humanity, including imprisonment, torture, sexual violence and enforced sterilization. The crimes were “wide and systematic, were planned and involved state apparatus from beginning to end,” he concluded.

CHINESE “INTERFERENCE” AND INTERNAL CONFLICTS

Before and during the event, the court communication team and one of the victims raised allegations of Chinese interference. The victim was a Uyghur activist now living in the Netherlands. He said he was contacted via Telegram by the Chinese police and received messages from one of his relatives living in China, who asked him not to attend the hearings. In a statement sent to us on July 17, the

court communication explained how the initial venue, a conference centre in The Hague city centre, received threats and fake legal letters, so they cancelled the reservation a few days before the start. Contacted by Justice Info, the director of the centre confirmed that they received emails, anonymous phone calls and threats. However, he said that they had to cancel the event because of its political subject.

The same July 17 statement said that earlier this month one or two alleged spies infiltrated the organisation as legal volunteers and claimed in a group message that “the Court is not paying its staff and is acting unjustly”.

A former volunteer, who asked not to be identified, explained to Justice Info that the two volunteers sent the message to the WhatsApp group to discuss with the leadership their complaints about delays in payment and the working conditions. Following the message, they were accused of being secret agents. This led a group of around five volunteers to resign at once. The resignation letter includes reasons such as a toxic work environment, lack of management and adequate conflict resolution, and delays in payment.

“There’s a large degree of internal disorganization,” said Brian Hioe, Taiwanese journalist and founder of the online magazine New Bloom. Hioe was supposed to join the tribunal in May as a witness, but he decided to leave the process. He points to meetings being delayed or postponed, to the documentary

being announced a few weeks before the event while many have privacy concerns, and then the whole event being delayed around a week before it was scheduled, in late April. Most of the participants had already booked time off work.

Asked for a reply, the People's Court said that the postponement from May to July

was requested by the legal professionals involved to gather more evidence on all charges and continue the witness screening process. According to them, the documentary was always part of the planned process and was communicated to the participants.



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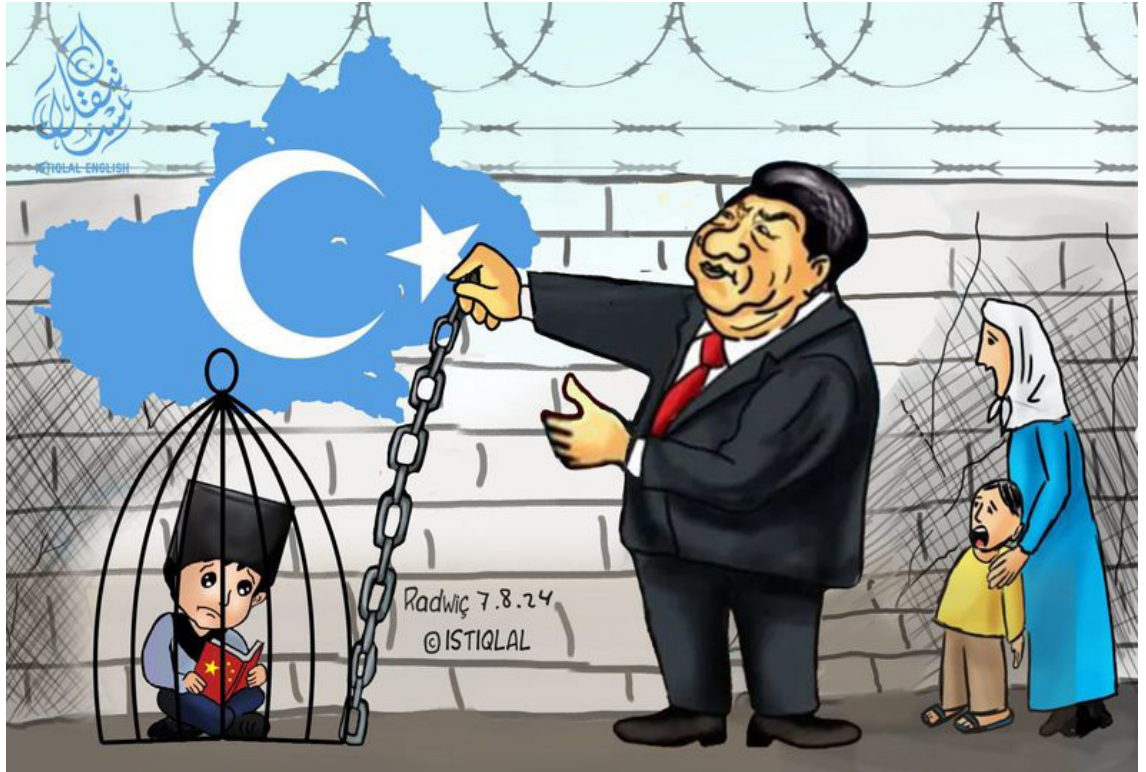
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A new report exposes the crime of separating Uyghur kids from their families.

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

Publication Type **Monthly Journal**

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