

# **A “Life or Death Struggle” in East Turkestan: Uyghurs face unprecedented persecution in post- Olympic period**



A Report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project  
Washington, D.C.

## **A “Life or Death Struggle” in East Turkestan: Uyghurs face unprecedented persecution in post-Olympic period**

September 4, 2008

Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)  
1701 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20006, USA

Tel: (202) 349 1496 Fax: (202) 349 1491 Email: [info@uhrp.org](mailto:info@uhrp.org) Visit: [www.uhrp.org](http://www.uhrp.org)

The Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) is extremely concerned that, following the Olympics and recent turmoil in East Turkestan (also known as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, or XUAR), Uyghurs living in the region will be subjected to an unprecedented level of persecution. Uyghurs throughout East Turkestan experienced widespread detentions and restrictions on freedom of movement prior to and during the Olympics, and official rhetoric by high-level regional authorities indicate that these measures will only intensify in the post-Olympic period. Reports of widespread arrests and detentions of individuals throughout East Turkestan have indicated that a massive clampdown on Uyghurs has already begun.

This report will examine recent accounts of harsh security measures in East Turkestan following a series of violent attacks in August; the security tactics that resulted in the broader persecution of Uyghurs during the Olympics and in the months leading up to the Olympics, in the name of anti-terrorism; and background on the persecution of Uyghurs in the name of the war on terror. It will then provide a set of recommendations to the Chinese government and the international community on how to preserve human rights in East Turkestan.

A series of three attacks targeted Chinese security forces and government agencies in Kucha and in Kashgar and nearby Yamanya in the first half of August. Reports indicate that a more recent incident occurred in Peyzawat [in Chinese, Jiashi] County near Kashgar on August 27, in which two unarmed Uyghur policemen were killed and at least two other Uyghur policemen were critically wounded in a knife attack.<sup>1</sup> This incident was followed by reports that six of the suspected assailants in the August 27 attack and a previous attack were shot to death, and local residents’ accounts indicate the six suspects were shot after surrendering.<sup>2</sup>

A “life or death struggle” was announced by Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan on August 14, following the first three attacks. In a speech, Wang stated that security forces must “stick to a strategy of seizing the initiative to strike preemptively, closely guard against and attack separatist sabotage by the three forces and never allow our enemies to gain strength.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, recent media reports have cited evidence of Chinese

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<sup>1</sup> Police Killed in New Xinjiang Clash, *Radio Free Asia*, August 28, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Police in China shoot dead 6 suspects in Xinjiang, *Associated Press*, August 30, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> China faces life or death struggle say Communists, *Times Online* (UK), August 14, 2008.

government plans to crack down with military pressure in East Turkestan in the coming months, including a report stating that “the enhanced military action would begin immediately after the Olympics end on the 24th, when the world’s attention will no longer be focused on China’s human rights record”.<sup>4</sup> A new report from the Hong Kong-based Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy states that around 200,000 public security officers and armed police have been mobilized in East Turkestan to “prevent terrorist attacks” on China’s National Day, observed on October 1.<sup>5</sup> The group also cites official orders allowing for the family members and even neighbors of suspected terrorists to be punished, in areas such as Kashgar and Hotan.<sup>6</sup> If this report is accurate, it represents the largest mobilization of security forces in East Turkestan since forces were mobilized in early April 1990 to quell the Baren uprising.<sup>7</sup>

Wang, a Han Chinese member of the Politburo, has served as Party Secretary of the XUAR since 1994. His tenure as provincial Party chief has already far exceeded the 10-year term limit stipulated by the Party. Wang has presided over a period of political repression and extremely rigid social controls for Uyghurs in East Turkestan, and has spearheaded a drive to blur the distinction between peaceful dissent and terrorism in the region.

Political Consultative Committee head Zhu Hailun stated at a televised news conference on August 18 that government forces must “Strike Hard” at the three evil forces [terrorism, separatism, and extremism], and mobilize the masses to guard against these forces at all levels of society.<sup>8</sup> “Strike Hard” campaigns are used by Chinese officials in East Turkestan to stifle political dissent, and they have been utilized as an effective tool in the latest wave of repression against Uyghurs, including “Strike Hard” campaigns launched in recent months in the cities of Ghulja and Artush.

Traditionally, “Strike Hard” campaigns in East Turkestan are known to exacerbate Chinese government authorities’ tendency to over-state the seriousness of a perceived crime. “Strike Hard” campaigns are generally typified by arbitrary punishments, accelerated judicial procedures and an increased use of the death penalty.

Information obtained by UHRP indicates that ongoing security measures have targeted and will continue to target large numbers of Uyghur civilians, including many not suspected of involvement in any crime, in contravention of Chinese law and international law. In addition, UHRP is concerned that such measures may be accompanied by torture and other forms of state-sponsored violence. Uyghurs in government custody frequently suffer from physical abuse and other forms of severe maltreatment. Torture and forced confessions are an extremely prominent feature of most Uyghurs’ experiences at the hands of the police and judiciary in East Turkestan. As UN Special Rapporteur Manfred

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<sup>4</sup> Harsh Chinese Crackdown Coming in Xinjiang, *Asia Sentinel*, August 15, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Security stepped up in Xinjiang for National Day, *South China Morning Post*, August 28, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> For more information on the Baren Uprising see Violent Separatism in Xinjiang, *James Millward*, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> "Use an Iron Fist to Strike Hard Against Destructive Activities" [Yong tiede shouwan yanli daji pohuai huodong], *Xinjiang Daily*, August 19, 2008.

Nowak stated following a visit to East Turkestan in 2005, documented torture allegations from China have included “a consistent and systematic pattern of torture related to ethnic minorities, particularly Tibetans and Uyghurs, political dissidents, human rights defenders, practitioners of Falun Gong, and members of house-church groups.”<sup>9</sup>

UHRP is also gravely concerned about the reported detention of children, which has already been reported to have occurred following the recent attacks. UHRP is also concerned that many of those detained in security sweeps have been denied or will be denied access to proper legal counsel.

“Some of my worst fears about the Chinese government’s intent to use security as an excuse to detain innocent Uyghurs, including children, are now being realized,” said Uyghur freedom movement leader Rebiya Kadeer. “While I knew the Chinese government was capable of such a massive crackdown, I hoped I would never see repression on such a broad scale.”

A report issued recently by the organization International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) documents the existence of a similar crackdown in Tibet, following March 2008 demonstrations that were largely peaceful. Tibetan areas remain closed off to foreign reporters and most overseas tourists.<sup>10</sup> Disappearances, detentions and severe religious restrictions have been widespread throughout Tibet since March.<sup>11</sup> As the report observed, “Hu Jintao’s leadership... has imposed a brutal crackdown that owes more to the political extremism and paranoia of the Maoist era than to a 21st century would-be superpower.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Children targeted**

According to information obtained by UHRP, following the attacks in Kucha and Kashgar, 160 Uyghur youths who were living and studying religion in a Hui Muslim area in Yunnan Province were arrested by police dispatched by the Public Security Bureau in East Turkestan. The youths, ranging in age from 8 to 14 years old, were brought to Urumchi and held in Bajiahu Prison. When the parents of these children asked authorities for their release, 10 of the children were released after their parents paid 20,000 Yuan each, and the children of those parents who could not afford such a sum are still being detained. The parents of the 150 children remaining under detention have been told by police that the children will be brought to court and sentenced for the crime of participating in “illegal religious activities”.

According to Radio Free Asia (RFA), the new village police chief of Misha village stated that the eight-year-old son of a woman suspected in the Yamanya attack was being held

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<sup>9</sup> Special Rapporteur on Torture highlights challenges at end of visit to China, United Nations Press Release, December 2, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> *Tibet at a Turning Point: The Spring Uprising and China’s New Crackdown*, Washington: International Campaign for Tibet, 2008. <http://www.savetibet.org/news/newsitem.php?id=1344>

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

in police custody, together with the suspect's 50-year-old mother, as the suspect herself remained at large.<sup>13</sup> "We have her eight-year-old son in custody," RFA quoted new Misha village police chief, Mamet Ali as saying. "We also have Amangul [her mother] in custody... Anargul is a key person for us to arrest the others. That is why we have her son."<sup>14</sup> The RFA report also quoted Misha village's propaganda chief as stating "In Misha village alone, about 2,000 people including 500 troops, 300 armed police, and 400 government employees and paramilitary" had been mobilized to search for suspects in the Peyzawat attack (also suspected in the Yamanya attack).

### **Family members and associates of alleged attackers detained, including 10-month old baby**

UHRP has learned that the family members of Ehmetjan Tohti, who was killed during the attack in Kucha, have reported that his 10-month-old baby has been taken away by police to an undisclosed location. Mr. Tohti's wife, Bumeryem, the mother of the baby, was also killed in the attack. Local authorities have refused to give any information about the baby's whereabouts to Mr. Tohti's relatives. In addition, despite maintaining their innocence of any crime related to the attacks, Mr. Tohti's 60-year-old father Tohti Tay, his mother, his younger brother Musajan Tohti, his older brother Memet Tohti and his sister have also been arrested. Memet Tohti's sister was recently released, but the present situation of the other family members remains unclear.

UHRP has also learned that police have also reportedly detained Bumeryem's older sister, a businesswoman who was running a supermarket business called "Ihlas Soda Baziri" in Kucha. All of her 30 employees were also arrested. Despite the fact that the sister and her employees have maintained they had no connection with the attacks in Kucha, they are still being held in local detention centers.

### **Security sweeps throughout Kucha and Kashgar**

According to other reports received by UHRP, the deputy minister of the Ministry for Public Security has set up a special working group in Kucha County to carry out post-attack security sweeps in Kucha and in Kashgar. More than 1,000 individuals have reportedly been arrested in these sweeps, and numerous other individuals have been temporarily held in local government buildings in several villages in the region.

Very dense checkpoints have reportedly been set up by security and military forces in each village in the Kucha area. UHRP has documented reports of residents describing the presence of armed vehicles and the People's Armed Police patrolling the streets of Kucha and Kashgar. The Associated Press stated that "authorities declared virtual martial law" in Kucha after the attacks.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Radio Free Asia, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Official: 2 attackers in western China were women, *Associated Press*, August 11, 2008.

Local residents are reportedly forbidden from traveling freely, even within their own towns. According to local residents, there are 5-6 checkpoints on the way from one town to the county center of Kucha. In addition, local government authorities have ordered law enforcement officials in the area to check each individual who goes to a mosque for prayer. Also, those who pray secretly in their homes have reportedly also been targeted for “political examination”.

UHRP has also learned that residents of Kucha state that following the August 10 attack in the city, all employees of ten different restaurants in Kucha’s Old City were arrested. UHRP estimates the total number of employees arrested to be in the range of 200 to 300.

One of the people arrested in the sweeps in Kucha County is Adil Qarim, who is the imam of a local mosque. Qarim maintains that he had no connection to the recent attacks, but one of the attackers attended the mosque he leads. The local court of Kucha County has reportedly sentenced Adil Qarim to life in prison.

Additional information indicates that throughout Kucha, all young people who have traveled abroad before have been rounded up and detained. This was reported to have begun during the Olympics, but intensified after the start of the Olympics.

Internet access has reportedly also been heavily restricted in Kashgar following the attacks in the city.

### **Detentions in Korla**

According to UHRP’s information, all non-resident Uyghurs in the city of Korla have been detained, and have been told that they will be released after the Beijing Olympics are over. UHRP has no information to indicate that these Uyghurs have been released from detention. The detention of non-resident Uyghurs in Korla began following the attacks in Kucha on August 10.

### **Heavy security in Urumchi**

Local residents have reported the presence of armored vehicles in the regional capital of Urumchi, including in front of the Rebiya Kadeer department store. Employee IDs are required to be shown by those employed in the vicinity of the department store. In addition, numerous detentions have also been reported to have occurred as part of security sweeps in Urumchi.

### **Uyghurs pushed out of Beijing**

The crackdown on Uyghurs also spread beyond East Turkestan to areas of the PRC outside the region. The Bloomberg News Service stated that Uyghur residents of Beijing complained of “being pressured to leave” the city<sup>16</sup>, and numerous media reports have

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<sup>16</sup> Olympic Terror Clampdown Targets Beijing Uighurs After Attacks, *Bloomberg News Service*, August 18, 2008.

stated that Uyghurs and Tibetans were not allowed to stay at hotels or guesthouses in Beijing prior to and during the Olympics.<sup>17</sup>

### **Stepped up executions in 2008**

UHRP has received information that, since the beginning of 2008, the sentences of many Uyghurs who have been given death sentences with a two-year reprieve have been changed to regular death sentences, and they have been executed. Traditionally throughout the People's Republic of China (PRC), individuals given a death sentence with a two-year reprieve who have exhibited "good behavior" have had their sentences commuted to life in prison (according to Chinese law, such sentences should be commuted to life unless the prisoner commits a crime during the two-year period and is subsequently tried and convicted of that crime.) Up to several hundred Uyghurs who had been given two-year reprieve sentences may have been executed since January 2008, according to UHRP's information. These individuals had been held at prisons throughout East Turkestan, and may have been comprised of both political criminals and common criminals.

### **Urumchi raid; executions in Kashgar**

On July 9 in Urumchi, five young Uyghurs were shot and killed without warning in an unjustifiable show of force on an alleged "religious extremist" group, and two Uyghurs were executed in Kashgar after their sentences were read in front of an audience of 10,000 Uyghurs forced to attend a mass rally.<sup>18</sup> No evidence, however, has been put forth to support officials' allegations that these Uyghurs were involved in terrorist activities.

### **Passport confiscation**

UHRP has learned that in the run-up to the Olympic Games, Uyghurs' passports were almost universally confiscated throughout the PRC, and it is unclear when these passports will be returned. Residents of East Turkestan have indicated that Uyghurs' passports were confiscated in the spring of 2008. Officials in East Turkestan confirmed they had confiscated the passports of Uyghurs in June 2007, apparently in a bid to prevent them from making a pilgrimage to Mecca.<sup>19</sup> This official action was taken immediately following an announcement by Wang Lequan that authorities were launching a crackdown on "illegal pilgrimages".<sup>20</sup>

### **Torch relay**

A heavy security presence accompanied the passage of the Olympic torch in East Turkestan in June 2008, including police checks of vehicles, numerous snipers and

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<sup>17</sup> China intensifies crackdowns before Olympics, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, June 12, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Five Uyghurs killed in raid in Urumchi; Uyghurs executed in Kashgar after mass sentencing rally, *Uyghur Human Rights Project*, July 10, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> China Confiscates Muslims Passports, *Radio Free Asia*, June 27, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

warnings to residents to stay inside their buildings with their windows shuttered.<sup>21</sup> UHRP has learned that a seal was reportedly placed over the windows of Uyghurs' homes along the torch route, and these Uyghurs were told that if the seal were found to be broken, they could be charged with a crime. Uyghurs were also told to keep watch on their neighbors in these areas, and to report any suspicious activity.

The same sources informed UHRP that Uyghurs in the cities hosting the torch were told to avoid contact with foreigners, especially foreign journalists. Government authorities in East Turkestan vetted the small number of Uyghur participants and spectators involved in the torch relay, warning that the government would reprimand any Uyghurs who discussed topics perceived as sensitive with members of the press. These Uyghurs were told that, if they disobeyed the warnings, they could be charged with the crime of "revealing state secrets".

### **March protests in Hotan**

Government authorities clearly hoped to project an image of harmony and unity along with the torch relay, and prevent any public displays of dissent among local Uyghurs. But peaceful protests against systematic violations of human rights, such as a demonstration of hundreds of Uyghur women in the city of Hotan in late March,<sup>22</sup> exposed discontent among Uyghurs, contrary to government propaganda.

Speaking at a news briefing following the attack in Peyzawat, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told reporters "People of various ethnic groups coexist in harmony and equality, and the situation in Xinjiang is generally good."<sup>23</sup> Qin went on to say "This has nothing to do with any alleged persecution or oppression of the Uighur people."<sup>24</sup>

Uyghur residents of East Turkestan indicated that the death of a prominent local businessman and philanthropist while in custody had been one of the motivations behind the Hotan demonstration.<sup>25</sup> Other demands cited include dissatisfaction over a proposed ban on headscarves in the city, together with calls for an end to the government-sponsored torture of Uyghur dissidents.<sup>26</sup>

### **Religious repression**

The closure of at least one mosque has been reported in recent months<sup>27</sup>, and the destruction of another mosque was apparently due to parishioners' refusal to post Olympics slogans on its walls.<sup>28</sup> Uyghur imams were ordered to undergo "political education" regarding the Olympics. In addition, the World Uyghur Congress has stated

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<sup>21</sup> Heavy security for Xinjiang relay, *BBC News*, June 15, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> China Confirms Protests by Uighur Muslims, *New York Times*, April 3, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> 2 Chinese policemen killed, 7 wounded in Xinjiang, *Associated Press*, August 28, 2008.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Uyghurs Protest in China's Remote Xinjiang Region, *Radio Free Asia*, April 1, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Chinese Muslims cower under secret police crackdown, *Telegraph*, August 5, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Uyghur Mosque Demolished, *Radio Free Asia*, June 23, 2008.



that East Turkestan authorities plan to hold a 40-day 'Strike Hard' campaign in September, coinciding with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ghulja Massacre of 1997**

The Chinese government has a history of using security threats in East Turkestan as a pretext for much broader crackdowns on human rights in the region. On February 5, 1997, thousands of Uyghurs, mostly young men, took to the streets of Ghulja and marched to the Ghulja Municipal Government offices. They were demanding equal treatment, religious freedom, and an end to racial discrimination. Armed paramilitary police confronted the unarmed demonstrators with batons, tear gas and high-pressure water sprayed from fire trucks. Eyewitnesses report that Chinese police fired indiscriminately into the crowd, killing as many as 30 Uyghur demonstrators and wounding more than 100 on the spot.

In the period immediately following February 5, 1997, thousands of Uyghurs were detained on suspicion of participating in the demonstration. In some cases, family members of those who had participated were also detained. Dozens and possibly hundreds of Uyghurs were executed, some in public, following summary trials. Many others were sentenced to lengthy prison terms including life on charges of 'hooliganism'. Other people simply disappeared, and are assumed to be either in prison or dead, their remains disposed of without their families being informed. Reports indicate that hundreds of Uyghurs suspected of involvement in the Ghulja demonstrations were executed between 1997-1999.

### **Political persecution of Uyghurs in the era of the “war on terror”: persecution from 2001-2008**

Over the past seven years, using “terrorism” as a justification, Beijing has undertaken a renewed, systematic, and sustained crackdown on all forms of Uyghur dissent. As is common in the PRC justice system, those arrested in these campaigns frequently suffer from physical abuse and other maltreatment while in government custody. In addition, they are often subject to nontransparent trials and denied access to independent counsel. Convictions are regularly obtained on the basis of forced confessions extracted through torture. Security forces target Uyghurs who express any type of dissent as they “strike hard” against the “three evil forces” of “separatism, terrorism, and extremism.” Reminiscent of the Chinese proverb “killing the chicken to scare the monkey,” these activities are calculated to send a strong and intimidating message to the Uyghur population.

Since 9/11, Amnesty International has documented that, under these types of campaigns, “tens of thousands of people are reported to have been detained for investigation in the region, and hundreds, possibly thousands, have been charged or sentenced under the Criminal Law; many Uyghurs are believed to have been sentenced to death and executed

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<sup>29</sup> Exiles claim China planning crackdown on Xinjiang during Ramadan, *Monsters and Critics*, August 19, 2008.

for alleged “separatist” or “terrorist” offences.”<sup>30</sup> According to a scholarly paper from a 2001 Ministry of Justice compendium, one out of eleven convicted Uyghurs are in prison for “state security crimes.”<sup>31</sup>

It was reported in April 2007 that the Xinjiang and Tibet Working Groups had been established specifically to handle Uyghur and Tibetan separatism. Luo Gan, Secretary General of the Central Political and Legislative Committee, leads the Xinjiang Working Group, with Vice Premier Hui Liangyu and Central Political Bureau member and XUAR Party Secretary Wang Lequan acting as deputy group leaders.<sup>32</sup> All three are widely seen as holding hard-line views.

In addition to the two working groups, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission announced in March 2007 the creation of a new mechanism to monitor the activities of certain ethnic groups, especially Uyghurs and Tibetans, in order to “deal with emergencies resulting from ethnic issues.”<sup>33</sup> According to Dainzhub Ongboin, vice director of the Commission, the monitoring group represents “a major step in the central government’s efforts to develop the country’s ethnic minorities.” However, one stated goal of this “development method” is to “clamp down on ethnic separatism so as to safeguard ethnic unity, social stability, and national security.”<sup>34</sup>

Uyghurs who are arrested during “security” sweeps often suffer in government custody.<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International has documented a number of extremely cruel forms of torture used by PRC authorities, including “severe beating and kicking; the use of electric batons; the use of handcuffs, shackles or ropes to tie prisoners in positions which cause intense pain; and exposure to extreme cold or heat.”<sup>36</sup> Other torture methods used in East Turkestan are “unidentified injections which cause the victim to become mentally unbalanced or to lose the ability to speak coherently; the insertion of pepper or chili powder in the mouth, nose or genital organs; and the insertion of horse hair or wires into the penis.”

### **Recommendations for the Chinese government**

- \*\*Cease terror-related security clampdowns aimed at the broader Uyghur population.
- \*\*Immediately release all Uyghur individuals who were detained without evidence of criminal culpability.
- \*\*Provide a detailed accounting of all individuals’ detention, as well, as the charges against them.

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<sup>30</sup> People’s Republic of China Uyghurs fleeing persecution as China wages its “war on terror”, *Amnesty International*, July 2004; <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170212004>.

<sup>31</sup> Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, *Human Rights Watch*, April 2005. p. 72.

<sup>32</sup> Uyghur Canadian Sentenced to Life on “Terrorism” Charge, *UHRP*, Apr. 19, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> China to Monitor Ethnic Relations, *Xinhua*, March 30, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> 2006 World Report, *Human Rights Watch*, January 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Torture Campaign Leaflets, *Amnesty International*, August 1, 2000. See also Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Uyghur Autonomous Region, *Amnesty International*, London: Amnesty International, 1999.

- \*\*Allow access to East Turkestan for independent human rights experts, such as United Nations officials, to investigate reports of human rights abuses and terror allegations.
- \*\*Release evidence of all recent terror allegations.
- \*\*Return passports to Uyghurs that were confiscated in violation of Chinese law.
- \*\*Revisit and acknowledge failed minority policies, particularly in East Turkestan and Tibet.
- \*\*Recognize that harsh treatment will not help to achieve security of China proper.
- \*\*Provide channels for legitimate grievances to be heard in East Turkestan.

### **Recommendations for the international community**

- \*\*Call upon the Chinese government to end repressive security measures aimed at the Uyghur population in East Turkestan.
- \*\* Urge PRC authorities to initiate negotiations with Ms. Rebiya Kadeer, Uyghur democracy leader, to peacefully resolve the East Turkestan issue.
- \*\*Call upon the Chinese government to conduct transparent judicial processes in regard to cases involving Uyghurs.
- \*\*Call upon the Chinese government to produce evidence of terror allegations against Uyghurs and the presence of contacts between Uyghurs and global terror networks.
- \*\*Establish a group of experts to independently assess any evidence produced by the Chinese government to prove terror allegations against Uyghurs and the presence of contacts between Uyghurs and global terror networks.
- \*\*Send representatives to East Turkestan to investigate human rights abuses and Chinese government allegations
- \*\*Enforce compliance by the Chinese government to international human rights obligations through the treaties bodies system at the United Nations.

## **Who are the Uyghurs?**

Uyghurs (alternatively spelled Uighurs, Uygurs) are an ethnically and culturally Turkic people living in East Turkestan, called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Chinese, a vast area constituting one-sixth of the total land area under the control of the People's Republic of China. Uyghurs have a rich cultural history going back almost 4,000 years. Before embracing Islam in the tenth century, Uyghurs believed in Buddhism, Manichaeism, and Nestorian Christianity. Today, Uyghurs practice a moderate form of Sufi Islam and lead predominantly secular lives.

East Turkestan has a long and distinctive history, enhanced by its position along the Silk Road, bridging mainland China and the ancient Arabic, Persian and European cultures to the west. Today, the population of approximately 19 million includes several Turkic-speaking Muslim ethnic groups, of which the Uyghurs, numbering more than eight million, are the largest.

Uyghurs in East Turkestan have struggled for cultural survival in the face of a government-supported influx of Chinese migrants, as well as harsh repression of political dissent and any expression, of their distinct identity, however lawful or peaceful. As a result of Chinese government policies, the percentage of ethnic Chinese in East Turkestan has grown from four percent in 1949 to more than 40 percent at present, constituting some 7.5 million people.

Reports from East Turkestan document a pattern of abuse including political imprisonment, torture, and disappearances. With only a few extremely rare exceptions, Uyghurs continue to be the only population in China consistently subjected to executions for political and religious offenses. Mosques are summarily closed and the Uyghur language is banned from use in schools. Uyghurs are subjected to compulsory unpaid labor on infrastructures, such as oil or gas lines to transfer East Turkestan's resources to mainland China.



The Uyghur American Association (UAA) works to promote the preservation and flourishing of a rich, humanistic and diverse Uyghur culture, and to support the right of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, democratic means to determine their own political future in East Turkestan.



The UAA launched the UHRP in 2004 to promote improved human rights conditions for Uyghurs and other indigenous groups in East Turkestan, on the premise that the assurance of basic human rights will facilitate the realization of the community's democratic aspirations.

UHRP also works to raise the profile of the Uyghur people and the plight of all “minority” peoples in East Turkestan by:

Researching, writing and publishing news stories and longer reports covering a broad range human rights issues involving civil and political rights, through to social cultural and economic rights;

Preparing briefings – either written or in person – for journalists, academics, diplomats and politicians on the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people and others in East Turkestan.