

# The Human Rights Council

## TOPIC B:

[Ensuring the protection of the human rights of the Uyghur population.](#)



### Introduction:

The People's Republic of China has been accused of committing crimes against humanity and possibly genocide against the Uyghur population and other mostly - Muslim ethnic groups in the north - western region of Xinjiang. Moreover, human rights groups believe that China has detained more than one million Uyghurs against their will over the past few years in a large network of what the state currently calls "re - education camps", and sentenced hundreds of thousands to prison terms. Finally, these allegations have drawn and continue to pursue widespread international condemnation and intensified calls for independent investigations into the scale and nature of the abuses occurring in the region.

### Definitions of key terms:

(Protection of) Human rights: human rights are universal rights that are inherent to us all, regardless of one's nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language or any other status. These principles in fact outline the fundamental rights of life, such as rights to food, education, work, health and liberty. Additionally, the principle of human rights is the main pillar for international policies and human rights law, meaning that everyone is equally entitled to them. In fact, human rights are inalienable - they can't be taken away (except for specific occasions e.g. if a person is found guilty of crime) and are interdependent, signifying that one

set of rights cannot be fully enjoyed without the other. It is hence crucial for governing bodies, organizations and other similar associations to protect human rights, allowing for them to never take second place to profit or power.

Uyghur population: In Xinjiang (in People's Republic of China), officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), there are approximately 12 million Uyghurs (mostly Muslims). This community speaks its own language, and see themselves as culturally and ethnically close to Central Asian Nations. Nevertheless, although they are officially recognized by the government and already are a minority in China, recent decades have seen mass migration of Han Chinese (China's ethnic majority) into Xinjiang, allegedly orchestrated by the state to dilute the minority population there. Therefore, Uyghur activists say they fear that the group's culture is under great threat of erasure.

Genocide: the definition of the crime of genocide as contained in Article II of the Genocide Convention and was the result of a negotiating process and reflects the compromise reached among the United Nations Member States 1948.

Article II: *In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:*

1. *Killing members of the group;*
2. *Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;*
3. *Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
4. *Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*
5. *Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.*

Crackdown: according to cambridge dictionary, a crackdown is “a situation in which someone starts to deal with bad or illegal behaviour in a more severe way”.

## Background information:

About Xinjiang: Xinjiang lies in the north-west of China and is the country's largest region. Like Tibet, it is autonomous, meaning (in theory) it has some powers of self governance. However, in practice, both regions are currently subjected to major restrictions by the central government. Moreover, Xinjiang is a mostly deserted region and produces about a fifth of the world's cotton - in fact, human rights groups have voiced concerns that much of that cotton export is picked by forced labour, and in 2021, some western brands removed Xinjiang cotton from their supply chains, leading to a backlash against the brands from Chinese celebrities and citizens. In December 2020, research seen by the BBC showed that up to half a million people were being forced to pick cotton in Xinjiang - there is in fact evidence that new factories have been built within the grounds of the re - education camps.

Motive behind the crackdown: From the 1990s, Anti - Han and a particular separatist sentiment rose in Xinjiang, sometimes flaring into violence. For example , in 2009, about 200 people died in clashes in Xinjiang, which the Chinese blamed on Uyghurs who wanted their own state. Therefore, Xinjiang is now covered by a pervasive network of surveillance, including police, checkpoints and cameras that scan everything from number plates to individual faces. Moreover, according to Human Rights Watch, police are also currently using a mobile app to monitor people's behaviour, such as how much electricity they are using and how often they use their front door.

2017: President Xi Jinping issued an order saying all religions in China should be Chinese in orientation, which stimulated further crackdowns and urged more campaigners to argue that China is trying to eradicate Uyghur culture.

Allegations against China: Several countries, including the US, UK, Canada and Netherlands, have accused China of committing genocide - defined by the International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide ([Doc.1 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.pdf](#)) as the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”. The declarations follow reports that, as well as interning Uyghurs in camps, The People’s Republic of China has been forcibly mass sterilising Uyghur women to suppress the population, separating children from their families, and attempting to break the cultural traditions of the group.

2018: A UN human right committee said it had a credible report that China was holding up to a million people in “counter - extremism centres” in Xinjiang.

2020: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute found evidence in 2020 of more than 380 of these “re-education camps” in Xinjiang, which was an increase of 40% on previous estimates. Analysis of data contained in the latest police documents, called the Xinjiang police Files, showed that almost 23,000 residents - or more than 12% of the adult population of one country, were in a camp or prison in the years 2017 and 2018. If applied to Xinjiang as a whole, the figures would mean the detention of more than 1.2 million Uyghur and other Turkic minority adults. Therefore, the Xinjiang Police Files shed further light on Uyghurs being punished for all alleged crimes that took place years ago - many appear to have been targeted for their mobile phone use, for listening to “illegal lectures” or, on the contrary, not using their phones enough, which is seen as a sign the user is trying to evade digital surveillance.

2021: The UK parliament declared in April 2021 that China was committing a genocide in Xinjiang.

The People's Republic of China's response to the allegations: The state currently continues to deny all allegations of human rights abuses in Xinjiang - for example, in response to the Xinjiang Police Files, China's foreign ministry spokesman told the BBC that the documents were "*the latest example of anti - China voices trying to smear China.*" He also said that Xinjiang enjoyed stability and prosperity and residents were living happy and fulfilled lives. Moreover, the state affirms that the crackdown in Xinjiang is necessary to prevent terrorism and root out Islamist extremism and the camps are an effective tool for re-educating inmates and its fight against terrorism. Furthermore, China insists that Uyghur militants are waging a violent campaign for an independent state by plotting bombings, sabotage and civic unrest, but is accused of exaggerating the threat in order to justify repression of the Uyghurs. Finally, China has dismissed claims it is trying to reduce the Uyghur population through mass sterilisation as "baseless", and says allegations of forced labour are "completely fabricated".

### Relevant UN Treaties:

Despite extensive documentation of abuses, no formal UN treaty has been passed declaring genocide or crimes against humanity, due to China's pervasive political influence and veto power in the Security Council.

August 31, 2022: OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in Xinjiang - the report said that: "*the extent of arbitrary detentions against Uyghur and others, in context of*

*‘restrictions and deprivation more generally of fundamental rights, enjoyed individually and collectively, may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.’*

October 2022: UN Human Rights Council issued a motion to hold a debate on the OHCHR report but failed by a narrow vote.

October 1, 2025: UN experts expressed serious concern over the increasing criminalisation of Uyghur and other minority cultural expression in China - *“These cases reflect deeply troubling patterns where cultural identity, artistic creativity, and academic work are treated as threats to natural security.”* the experts proceed to state. *“The right to freely express and participate in cultural life, without discrimination or fear, is a cornerstone of human rights.”*

UN treaty bodies: committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of the core international human rights treaties. The following list includes recommendations made by UN Treaty Bodies relevant to Uyghurs.

- a. May 8, 2014: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): [Concluding Observations](#)
- b. November 7, 2014: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): [Concluding Observations](#)
- c. December 3, 2015: Committee Against Torture (CAT): [Concluding Observations](#)
- d. September 19, 2018: Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD): [Concluding Observations](#)
- e. September 9, 2022: Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD): [Concluding Observations](#)
- f. March 3, 2023: Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): [Concluding Observations](#)

g. May 31, 2023: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): [Concluding Observations](#)

Countries and Groups involved:

**Countries involved:**

People's Republic of China: currently the primary state actor, as the crisis centers on the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China, where more than eleven million Uyghurs live. Moreover, since about 2017, the Chinese government has imprisoned more than one million Uyghurs and other Muslims in a network of "reeducation" camps, subjecting them to intense digital and physical surveillance, oppressive religious restrictions, forced labor in factories and farms that are connected to global supply chains, family separation and forced sterilization and birth control. Finally, the Chinese government frames all these actions as necessary counterterrorism and "deradicalization", but human rights bodies argue that measures are vastly disproportionate and are aimed at destroying Uyghur identity rather than targeting specific crimes.

Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other Muslims: these minorities with distinct culture, language and history are subjected to a dehumanizing intensity of abuse and repression imposed by the Chinese government.

Individual countries (not exhaustive list, but key nations with prominent public positions):  
United states - declared China's actions a genocide in 2021 and passed laws targeting forced labour from Xinjiang, including bans on imports presumed linked to forced labour unless proved

otherwise - United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Australia, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Italy, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Malaysia, Taiwan, Turkey, Switzerland.

### **International Organizations and Multilateral Actors:**

United Nations (UN): UN human rights experts have repeatedly issued joint statement criticizing China's policies, highlighting arbitrary detention, disappearances, torture and cultural repression. Additionally, in 2022, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) published a major assessment of human rights concerns in Xinjiang, concluding that the extent of arbitrary detention and discrimination "*may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity*". Nonetheless, despite this, the UN has not launched a formal investigation or Security Council - mandated action: this is partly due the fact that China is a permanent Security Council member with veto power, and many states are reluctant to confront it directly.

G7 (Group of Seven): Including the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, plus the European Union as participants, the members of Group 7 issued a joint statement in October 2021 affirming concern about forced labour in global supply chains and specifically committing to act on forced labour linked to Xinjiang.

### **NGOs and other Advocacy Networks:**

Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP): this organization tracks international responses and records resolutions, sanctions and other actions. Additionally, it publishes reports, supports survivors' testimonies and functions as a bridge between Uyghur communities, researchers, media and policymaking.

Human Rights Watch: often issues detailed reports on the camp systems, surveillance and family separations.

## Possible solutions:

1. United Nations:
  - a. The UN could push the Human Rights Council to establish an independent investigative mechanism or special rapporteur focused on Xinjiang, to collect evidence, preserve documents and report regularly. Consequently, this will allow for keeping evidence “up to date” for future prosecutions and increases reputational cost for China, without Security Council action.
  - b. The UN could also organize frequent debates and resolutions to be recorded on the OHCHR report to document forced labour, cultural repression and arbitrary detention. Moreover, this would allow for it to be harder for other states to pretend nothing happened and normalize public scrutiny.
  - c. The UN could encourage and coordinate more joint statements by states at UN forums which would increase the diversity of states that condemn abuses and referencing “crimes against humanity” and overall, the Genocide Convention. This would therefore prove to China that it's not just a “Western” narrative, and in the meantime it isolates the government from the rest of the world.
2. International legal and accountability strategies:
  - a. States whose laws allow universal jurisdiction can investigate and prosecute specific Chinese officials for torture, crimes against humanity, or genocide if evidence is available.
  - b. States could highlight the case to the UN that China is allegedly breaching the Genocide Convention. However, this requires a particular nation to be brave

enough to sue a major power and withstand retaliation, but symbolically the impact on the public would be immense and catastrophic for the aggressor.

3. State and regional policy responses:

- a. Pass laws requiring corporations to detach from supply chains that are based in China and are associated with the Uyghur population, and face penalties if linked to forced labour or surveillance in Xinjiang.
- b. Grant safe pathways and asylum for Uyghurs abroad, which would mean allowing for refugee status or humanitarian visas to Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims.

4. Civil society and media action:

- a. Societies can support Uyghur survivors by funding legal aid, mental health support and advocacy training to protect activists from threats, harassment and surveillance.
- b. Education campaigns can be conducted to educate the broader public about the Uyghur genocide that is occurring, implemented in schools and other campaigns.

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