



## **Junior Committee: Economic and Social Council**

### **Issue: Addressing the treatment of Uyghurs in China's Xinjiang province**

#### **Background Information**

Chinese treatment of Uyghurs is an issue due to allegations of human rights violations made by the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and a handful of other nations.

Firstly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 is one of the most significant documents ever drafted and sets out the fundamental rights and liberties of individuals that must be protected. However, for the past decade, China's targeting of Uyghur Muslims seems to have directly infringed articles 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 18, 20, and 25 as it is alleged that China has, and continues to, carry out extreme acts of discrimination in the Xinjiang region. For example, since 2017, it has been recorded that the Chinese government has been detaining over a million Uyghurs<sup>1</sup> in re-education camps.

Moreover, the treatment of Uyghur Muslims also raises the issue of transparency and accountability. China is accused of concealing their imprisonment of Uyghurs and using inhumane justifications for their actions. China has claimed that accusations of sterilisation and forced labour against Uyghurs are "baseless" and "completely fabricated"<sup>2</sup>, and have instead justified the existence of these detention camps as a means to counter extremism<sup>3</sup> and ensure social stability. However, China's actions have been condemned by the UN Human Rights office as crimes against humanity, claimed by a UN Special Rapporteur, Tomoya Obakata, to be an example of modern

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<sup>1</sup> "China's repression of Uyghurs in China" 26 July 2023 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-humanrights#:~:text=About%20eleven%20million%20Uyghurs—a,forced%20labor%2C%20and%20forced%20sterilizations.>

<sup>2</sup> "Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?" 26 July 2023 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>

<sup>3</sup> "Assesment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China" 26 July 2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/202208-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

slavery in his report on “Contemporary forms of slavery affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities.”<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, the UN hopes, and expects that, all of its member states respect the basic rights of human beings according to global principles of humanitarian law. However, the issue of China’s treatment of Uyghurs is also a complication because it creates tension with sovereignty. Thus, it is of utmost importance that member states address China’s actions and work towards a constructive and effective solution for the minorities being affected.

## Current situation

The present situation has caused extensive tensions between China and the international community for various reasons, mainly due to allegations of China’s prolonged discrimination against Uyghurs.

From China’s perspective, there are political and economic reasons why the Uyghur’s pose a threat to state security and sovereignty. Firstly, although Uyghurs have been treated poorly by the Chinese government ever since the 1990s, they became further subjected to targeting after the September 11 attacks in the US in 2001. Rioting in Xinjiang’s capital broke out in 2009 as Uyghur demonstrators protested against the highly state incentivised Han Chinese migration in the region, as well as the economic and cultural discrimination that was occurring<sup>5</sup>. This resulted in the death of nearly two hundred persons, and this event convinced Beijing that Uyghurs could all be terrorists. Uyghurs in the XUAR region then went under heavy surveillance of Chinese authorities. Uyghurs were retrospectively blamed for multiple terrorist attacks like Tiananmen Square in Beijing on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 1989.

Secondly, China’s actions appear to be based on their belief that they are a victim of terrorism. In 2014, China introduced a “Strike Hard” campaign to combat terrorist threats—<sup>6</sup> linking it to religious “extremism” in the XUAR region in which Uyghurs reside— and developed re-education

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<sup>4</sup> Contemporary forms of slavery affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities” 10 Jan 2024 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/408/97/PDF/G2240897.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>5</sup> “China’s repression of Uyghurs in China” 26 July 2023 <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-humanrights#:~:text=About%20eleven%20million%20Uyghurs—a,forced%20labor%2C%20and%20forced%20sterilizations.>

<sup>6</sup> “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China” 27 July 2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/202208-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

camps. Documents, as well as first-hand accounts of former detainees, reveal the inhumane nature of these detention camps, resembling life in prison; detainees have been forced to pledge loyalty to the CCP, have undergone forms of torture<sup>6</sup> and sleep deprivation<sup>7</sup>, and many reported to have faced sexual abuse such as sexual humiliation and rape.<sup>7</sup> The Chinese government has asserted the success of their approach of the “Strike Hard” campaign, claiming there have been no terrorist incidents in XUAR since 2016.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the XUAR region is a crucial element of China’s economy, which is another reason for their tight control of Xinjiang. For example, Xinjiang is extremely rich in coal, natural gas reserves, and is a significant contributor to China’s energy production. To Beijing, Xinjiang’s proximity to other Central Asian countries also makes it a significant trade link and is crucial to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. However, it has been observed that the resource extraction and development in the region economically benefits Han Chinese people to a much greater extent than the marginalised Uyghurs. Furthermore, Xinjiang produces most of China’s cotton- which is reported to be mostly picked by forced labour. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, between the years 2017 and 2020, eighty thousand detained Uyghurs were sent to work in factories across China. Xinjiang’s geographical location is yet another concern for the Chinese government, considering its vulnerable borders. Xinjiang’s proximity to Central Asian and Middle Eastern countries such as Russia, India, Kyrgyzstan, and others, exposes it to geopolitical competition and global influence. Xinjiang’s border also put China at risk of potential security threats.

The UN has been incapable of acting on the Uyghur’s situation due to China’s position as an influential member state, as well as it being one of the Permanent veto powers of the Security Council which allows China to block resolutions they disagree with. Moreover, in 2022, the 47-member council in Geneva voted 19-17 against holding a debate on human rights in Xinjiang, with 11 nations abstaining.<sup>9</sup> China claimed that the push to discuss the issue was a United Nations attempt “to interfere with China’s internal affairs” which Amnesty secretary general, Agnes Callamard, addressed by saying the vote was “a dismaying result that puts the UN’s main human

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<sup>7</sup> “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China” 28 July 2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/202208-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> “Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People’s Republic of China“ 28 July 2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/202208-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> “UN Human Rights Council rejects debate on Xinjiang” 11 January 2023 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221006-un-human-rights-council-rejects-debate-on-xinjiang>

rights body in the farcical position of ignoring the findings of the UN's own human rights office."<sup>10</sup> UN resolutions, among other instruments, have consistently stressed that all measures to combat terrorism and violence must respect human rights and the rule of law, which the UN High Commissioner and the UN Special Rapporteur have noted remains a challenge in multiple legal systems.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, delegates must attempt to find solutions that won't directly threaten China's principles, and instead draw up a resolution that focuses on obligations that all member states are expected to adhere to.

Many UN member states have expressed their concern over the situation. On October 31st, 2022, fifty UN member states issued a joint statement condemning China's persecution of Uyghurs, calling on Beijing to end rights violations in Xinjiang. The statement read that China must take "prompt steps to release all individuals arbitrarily deprived of their liberty in Xinjiang, and to urgently clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing family members and facilitate safe contact and reunion."<sup>12</sup> China's response to these recommendations proves to be a topic of concern; China's UN mission attempted to boycott a UN event that would discuss the situation in Xinjiang.

## **Bloc positions**

### **China**

China is the nation primarily accused in allegations of human rights violations against Uyghur Muslims. China continues to deny any and all allegations that mistreatment of Uyghur Muslims is occurring. They have installed a high security system around the detention centres to prevent investigators from reporting any developments.

### **United States**

The United States has made their opinion on the matter quite public and has threatened to impose sanctions against China due to their mistreatment of Uyghurs and the infringement of their human rights. The United States has asked the international community to take action and the Uyghur

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<sup>10</sup> "UN Human Rights Council rejects debate on Xinjiang" 11 January 2023 <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221006-un-human-rights-council-rejects-debate-on-xinjiang>

<sup>11</sup> "Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China" 28 July 2023 <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/202208-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> "Record number of states condemn China's persecution of Uyghurs" 2 August 2023 Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/31/record-number-states-condemn-chinas-persecution-uyghurs>

Human Rights Policy Act became US law in June of 2020; this law would require tracking of the human rights violations against Uyghurs<sup>13</sup> in the XUAR. In an event at the General Assembly in March of 2023, Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador at the UN, said that “We have also determined that the Chinese government has committed genocide and crimes against humanity against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.”<sup>14</sup> To this remark, the spokesperson for China’s delegation claimed it was a “lie fabricated by the United States” and accused the US of committing genocide against Native Americans and war crimes.

## **Russia**

Russia has expressed its support for the Chinese government, along with 35 other nations who accused the West for “politicising human rights.” China and Russia are allies, as well as economic partners, and are weary of any UN action that could weaken the sovereignty of member states. Sovereignty is a principle that both nations align with as both oppose external interventions that affect domestic affairs. In June of 2021, Putin denied the existence of an Uyghur genocide in China, claiming he had met with Uyghurs and that they “assured (him) that they live in absolute peace.”<sup>15</sup> This comment is likely to have been made due to the security concerns that Russia and China share about extremism and terrorism, viewing stability in regions like Xinjiang (and Russia’s North Caucasus) as crucial to maintain.

## **United Kingdom**

Many lawmakers in the UK have extensively pushed the British government to take further action in their response to the Uyghur situation- many have wanted the implementation of sanctions against Chinese officials.<sup>16</sup> Britain, along with other European member states, are not keen about trade sanctions on China- and prefer sanctions that target specific individuals- as trade sanctions might increase China’s resistance and aggressiveness. In July of 2021, the Foreign Affairs

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<sup>13</sup> “US response to China’s crimes against the Uyghurs” 31 July 2023 <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/countries/china/case-study/response/us-responses-to-chinas-crimes-against-the-uyghurs#:~:text=On%20January%2019%2C%202021%2C%20then,of%202020%20became%20US%20law.>

<sup>14</sup> “China and US clash over Uyghurs at UN islamophobia event” 1 August 2023

<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uyghurs-china-us-clash-un-islamophobia-event>

<sup>15</sup> “Xi Jinping and Putin, Partners in Crime: A Uyghur View” 3 August 2023 <https://bitterwinter.org/xi-jinping-and-putin-a-uyghur-view/>

<sup>16</sup> “UK lawmakers declare China’s treatment of Uyghurs is genocide” 3 August 2023

<https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/22/world/uk-china-uyghur-genocide-motion-gbr-intl/index.html>

Committee published its Second Report of Session, “The UK’s responsibility to act on atrocities in Xinjiang and beyond”, with multiple recommendations of what should be done to deal with the crisis; some of the points include “Accept Parliament’s view that Uyghurs and other ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang are suffering genocide and crimes against humanity, and take action to bring these crimes to an end.” and “urgently raise a complaint against China to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.”<sup>17</sup>

## **Non-aligned states**

Nations part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) 1961, which make up 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of the UN members and represent 50% of the world’s population<sup>18</sup>, have diverse opinions on the Uyghur situation due to their different political backgrounds and overall positions on international issues. Some of these nations, however, have already expressed their attitude towards the situation. For example, members like Haiti and Honduras have expressed concern about the Uyghur situation, urging for the protection of Muslim and other ethnic minorities. On the other hand, several NAM members have also defended China’s policies. These include Algeria, Angola, Bahrain, Belarus, Cuba, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, and a handful of other nations. Considering how non-aligned nations prioritise the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in international affairs, it is unsurprising that so many non-aligned countries have shown their support for China by signing a letter advocating for her actions.

## **Focus for Debate**

During this conference, delegates must:

- Refer to the underlying issues surrounding the Uyghur situation in mind— one of them being the allegations of discrimination against Uyghur Muslims.
- Delegates should consider how to define discrimination in relation to the issue. According to Oxford Languages, discrimination is described as “the unjust and prejudicial treatment of

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<sup>17</sup> “The UK’s responsibility to act on atrocities in Xinjiang and beyond: government response to the committee’s second report” 3 August 2023 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmfaff/840/84002.htm>

<sup>18</sup> “Non-aligned movement” 10 January 2024 [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-Aligned\\_Movement#:~:text=The%20Non%2DAligned%20Movement%20\(NAM,largest%20grouping%20of%20states%20worldwide](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-Aligned_Movement#:~:text=The%20Non%2DAligned%20Movement%20(NAM,largest%20grouping%20of%20states%20worldwide)

different categories of people, especially on the grounds of ethnicity, age, sex or disability.” It is generally recognised that all human beings, despite their differences, should all be treated equally and fairly and no person should suffer more than the other.

- Reflect upon the type of pressures (e.g. diplomatic negotiation, economic sanctions), incentives and/or consequences that perpetrators of discrimination should face in order to ensure that basic human rights are secured.
- Consider how the intertwined topics of sovereignty and international law apply to the situation. Despite the fact that sovereignty is meant to allow a nation to have autonomy to make decisions within its own borders, international law places limitations to said autonomy to certify a set of standards are adhered to by all nations. Delegates will face the following questions: Does China have the right to preserve its sovereignty? Or should international law be able to dictate China’s decisions in order to prevent it from abusing its power against minorities?
- Finally, member states must observe and discuss the ways in which various nations has contributed towards modern slavery. Simply put, modern slavery is the removal of a person’s freedoms- this can be through forced labour, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, slavery-like practices, etc. Out of 49.6 million people in modern slavery, 5.8 million are, reportedly, in China<sup>19</sup>. With this in mind, delegates must consider the severity of state imposed forced labour, how it contributes to modern slavery, and what actions can be taken to end it. Article 4 of the UdoHR clearly states that “no one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and servitude shall be prohibited in all forms” so delegates must form a response against China’s alleged illicit actions and consider whether they should or should not be held accountable.

## **Proposals for Action**

Considering China’s ability to veto, delegates must come up with a resolution that China will not find too harsh. China must fully agree with broader principles that member states come up with.

### Human rights investigations

The UN could set up a series of private investigations that would assess the extent of the human rights abuses against Uyghurs in Xinjiang. This would provide credible information that would better inform international responses.

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<sup>19</sup> “Global Slavery Index” 23 August 2023 <https://www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/>

### Raise general awareness on the rights of minorities

Ensuring that all nations follow the same principles when it comes to the treatment of ethnic minorities would not isolate or target only China, which could be seen as less threatening and make China less likely to block the resolution. Furthermore, nations' governments can work with the media and social rights groups to raise awareness and create international pressure for change.

### Enforcing laws

Calling upon nations to report on the slavery situations in their nations and enforcing harsher laws against said nations could be an effective way of tackling human rights abuses in China and other countries.

### International Cooperation

Member states might decide to form coalitions to build international consensus on the Uyghur situation and collectively coerce China to change their policies. Nations might also decide to create joint statements, calling for an end to China's actions.

## **Keywords**

### **XUAR**

XUAR stands for Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, located in Northwest China. It consists of deserts and mountains, and has around 25 million inhabitants. It is known for its wide variety of ethnic groups, ranging from Uyghurs, Han Chinese, Kazakhs, and others.

### **Uyghur**

The Uyghur are a Turkish ethnic minority group which primarily reside in China's XUAR. Most Uyghurs are Sunni Muslims.

### **Re-education camps**

"Re-education camps" is a term used to describe detention facilities, or prison camps, in which detainees undergo indoctrination and, reportedly, abuse. They are also often referred to as "vocational training centres" and are seen as a prevention of extremist ideologies by the Chinese government.



## **Strike Hard campaign**

China's "Strike Hard Campaign" is a series of law enforcement initiatives that China has taken throughout many years which targeted crime and political dissent. One of the most recent and notable examples of the campaign in action would be the "Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism" in Xinjiang, aimed at combating religious unrest.

## **China's Belt and Road Initiative**

China's Belt and Road Initiative, or BRI, is an infrastructure project launched by the Chinese government in the year 2013. This strategy aimed at improving and promoting economic relations with other countries. The BRI has two main elements; the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. The Xinjiang region is valuable to the BRI considering its location connects

China's interior provinces to Central Asia and the Middle East.

## **Non-aligned States**

Non-aligned states, part of the Non-Aligned Movement of 1961, are nations that are not formally aligned to any major power bloc. It is composed of 120 countries worldwide, formed after the Korean War. The organisation's main aim was to represent the interests of developing countries during the Cold War, where most of the world was divided between either the US or Soviet bloc. With the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, nations strived for sovereignty and self-determination.

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