

FAIRGAZE MUN'22

UNHRC

**Investigating the Existence of Chinese
Concentration Camps for Uyghur
Muslims**

Letter from Chairperson

Greetings,

A very warm welcome to the UNHRC!

The Executive Board wants all of you to understand that in the capacity of the Executive Board, we neither wish to intimidate or dominate. This is as much of a learning experience to us as it is to you. Thus, we advise you to not bring any preconceived notions of omniscience about us in the committee room. We will make mistakes as will you. We aim to learn, teach and create a safe space where each one of us can learn without fear of judgement. This is the true spirit of Model UN- learning without judgement.

The EB does not expect you to know everything. We expect you to come well-prepared. We do not expect you to pretend we live in a utopian world; we expect realism. The spirit of compromise and mutual agreement is welcome and accepted, but in the real world, it is always secondary to national interests and your actions should be such that they tend towards compromise but always remain within the horizon of your political and diplomatic leanings. All in all, we expect real world diplomacy condensed and mirrored in the committee room. Focus on the solutions you can conceive within the constraints of your diplomatic policy. Make sure that the same is reflected in your speeches. For this, research is essential. Most importantly, remember that real world problems require real world solutions.

Please take into account that this background guide serves only as an introduction to the diverse and wide-spanning agenda that awaits your research; it is meant to serve solely and only as a directing document and is not sufficient in itself to supplement committee discussions. The idea is to direct, not dictate.

We are looking forward to hearing your ideas and see how the discussion turns out.

In case of any procedural or substantive queries, feel free to reach out to

Regards,

Introduction to the UNHRC

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a body within the United Nations responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights around the world. Further, the UNHRC seeks to address and prevent human rights violations. Its purpose is simply to discuss any and all issues pertaining to human rights that require attention and then subsequently make recommendations on them.

The UNHRC was established in 2006 as a replacement for the UN Commission on Human Rights. It meets at the UN offices in Geneva, where its 47 member states are elected for terms of three years by the General Assembly. During this process, the UNGA takes into consideration the promotion and protection in those countries as well as the pledges they made.

Members of the UNHRC are elected as part of regional groups, with each group having a dedicated number of seats:

- Africa (13 seats)
- Asia-Pacific (13 seats)
- Latin America and Caribbean (8 seats)
- Eastern Europe (7 seats)
- Western Europe, North America, and others (6 seats)

The work of the UNHRC is largely advisory in nature. It uses mechanisms such as the Advisory Committee (the council's "think tank"), the Universal Periodic Review, and the Complaint Procedure (a procedure that allows individuals and organisations to bring human rights violations to the council's attention). Thus, it makes frequent use of independent experts, special rapporteurs, and other working groups to monitor and understand situations, in order to then make accurate recommendations based on their data.

Overall, the UNHRC's founding resolution states that it "shall be responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind in a fair and equal manner" and it "should address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon". Delegates should keep this in mind when bringing forth their resolutions.

History

The Uyghurs are an indigenous group of Muslims who have inhabited East Turkestan, also known as Xinjiang, in Central Asia for thousands of years. They are not Chinese, but descendants of the Turks. As one of the few settled ethnic groups in Central Asia, the Uyghurs lived along the Silk Road, developing a culture with Western influences. In 934, Kashgar, the then-capital of the Uyghur empire, became a major learning centre of Islam where arts, the sciences, music, literature, and Islamic institutions prospered. During this period of success, thousands of books were written and hundreds of Uyghur scholars became world-renowned.

Religion carries a significant influence in Uyghur culture. Their form of Islam combines Sunni Islam, folk religious beliefs, Buddhism, Manicheism, Shamanism, and Tengrism, which has created a truly unique religion.

In 1876, the Manchu Empire (Qing Dynasty of China) invaded the Islamic Uyghur Kingdom of East Turkestan. After eight years of war, the Manchu Empire formally annexed East Turkestan and renamed the region Xinjiang, or “New Territory,” on November 18, 1884. In 1911, when Chinese Nationalists overthrew the Manchu Empire, Xinjiang fell under Nationalist rule. During this period of Chinese takeover, Uyghur culture declined significantly. The Uyghurs tried twice to gain independence from the Chinese Nationalists, succeeding both times (1933 and 1944). By 1949, China re-annexed Xinjiang, this time under the reign of the Chinese Communist Party. In 1955, Xinjiang became an autonomous region, and the Uyghurs received recognition as an ethnic minority under Chinese sovereignty.

Ürümqi Riots

The Chinese government implemented laws encouraging more Han Chinese immigration to Xinjiang, as a result of which, the Han population in Xinjiang grew dramatically which increased tensions and worsened treatment of the Uyghur Muslims. Many blame the declining treatment of the Uyghur community to the Ürümqi Riots of 2009. After reports that Han girls had been raped, on June 25th, 2009, two Uyghur factory villagers were beaten to death. Following these events many students protested in front of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) office demanding an investigation.

These once peaceful protests quickly became violent riots in which the Uyghurs began chanting “Kill the Hans”, and then the Han population retaliated by assaulting the Uyghur Muslims. These riots lasted two days and resulted in the death of 194 people. To prevent violence like this from happening again, the CCP restricted internet access in the region for ten months, flexing its control over the region but doing little to ease tensions.

Note: There are many ways to spell Uyghur, including Uighur, Uygur, and Weiwu’er.

Present-Day Conflict

Since early 2014, as part of the Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism, the Chinese government has been developing, what they claim to be “Re-education Camps” in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. Human rights groups report that these “detention” facilities hold up to a million Uighurs and other predominant Muslim ethnic groups.

Discrimination towards these minority groups broadened and intensified after the “Regulations on De-extremification” were adopted in March 2017 followed by further local legislation giving the Xinjiang government the legal authority to take action against any behaviour that it regards as “extremist.” China maintains that these measures are necessary to counter terrorism and ensure social stability.

However, instead of bringing stability and lasting peace, the regulations have bought China worldwide condemnation. Leaked documents and first-hand accounts show that the “Re-education Camps” resemble life in prison. The camps are equipped with wire fences, watch towers, and armed police. Interviews with former detainees also reveal the lack of humanity in the camps. They report that inmates are electrocuted, forcefully administered unknown medication, and required to study communist ideology.

Despite widespread concern about human rights abuses and torture, the international response has been mixed. Led by the United States, the US and its allies have issued condemnations and called for the United Nations (UN) to intervene, while Chinese-allied countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia have defended the camps, claiming that China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism work for the sake of national security. China initially denied the existence of the detention facilities, but in the face of mounting international pressure, China instead began to describe the camps as “Educational Training Centres”. Chinese authorities have stressed that their purpose is not only to stamp out extremism but also to provide people new vocational skills.

Although the issue continues to make world news headlines, little has been done regarding the camps.

Past Actions

Joint Statement calling for Xinjiang Resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council, February 2019. This was a statement issued by multiple human rights organizations calling for a resolution regarding the Xinjiang reeducation camps from the United Nations Human Rights Council. The statement argues that the Chinese government, despite stating that its “Strike Hard Campaign counters extremism and terrorism” is actually aiming to “eradicate Muslim’s distinct identity and to ensure their loyalty to the government and Chinese Communist Party”. It also states that the Human Rights Council should aim to conduct a “fact finding mission, so that it can consider the allegations of widespread violations in Xinjiang and take appropriate next steps”.

Statement by the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, March 2019. On March 2019, the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, has requested access to Xinjiang to “verify” the “worrying reports [they] are receiving” of re-education camps holding millions of Uighurs”. She has also stated that she “wishes to engage China in a serious dialogue on this pressing matter” and that she “will continue to push for permission to visit Xinjiang soon”. China has since called on Bachelet to “respect China’s sovereignty”.

Resolution on China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities 2019/2690(RSP). The European Union has taken a strong stance on the current conditions of the Uighurs in Xinjiang with a resolution adopted in April 2019 on China and the situation of religious and ethnic minorities. The resolution recognizes the abuse of human rights in Xinjiang, stating that the Chinese government “stepped up its hostility” towards “the freedoms of expression and religion”. The resolution “calls on the Chinese Government to immediately end the practice of arbitrary detentions”. It further encourages actions such as halting all exports of technology that help with China’s cyber surveillance and calls for the release of information on the missing people in Xinjiang. The EU also posted a press release in April 2019, in which the parliament called on “the Chinese Government to put an end to arbitrary detentions, without any charge, trial or conviction for a criminal offence, of members of the Uyghur and Kazakh minority and Tibetans”.

A closed-door meeting of the Security Council on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia on July 2019 was described by some participants as a heated exchange. It was followed by a formal rebuke of China's mass detention of Muslims in a letter to the UN signed by 22 (mostly) Western countries. The response to this letter came from China's allies in another letter to the UN.

Possible Solutions

Please note, the solutions below do not comprise an exhaustive list. Delegates are encouraged to develop their own solutions remembering that the HRC works with not only governments but also regional organizations, national human rights institutions, and civil society. Negotiated cooperation is one of the most important UN mechanisms to bring human rights violations to an end. Bear in mind that the HRC has no executive powers. It is not the Security Council and cannot therefore impose sanctions or provide a mandate to intervene. Nevertheless, precisely because the HRC is not the SC, it can pass resolutions despite the opposition of the country concerned. This also means that resolutions cannot be vetoed by a country trying to avoid international attention.

The work of the HRC involves promoting human rights by making recommendations (calling on States to take specific actions or uphold certain principles), organizing fact-finding missions and international inquiries, and monitoring questions of concern - thus bearing witness to human rights abuses. The Council also manages the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a process through which each UN Member State's overall human rights record is reviewed. With the UPR and the passage of HRC resolutions each session, the UN shows that the international community holds out the prospect of accountability for human rights abuses.

Sanctions

By imposing sanctions (country by country, or in political blocs with a common interest), the Chinese government may be compelled to limit their violations of the human rights of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region. Additionally, for countries that currently run Belt and Road Initiative projects, the future of projects can be considered as leverage to help pressure China into taking action that would satisfy the wider international community.

Many countries are reluctant to impose sanctions on China because of the economic repercussions that will result from it. Therefore, as some countries prioritize their economic and strategic relationship with China, governments choose to ignore human rights abuses. This includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, and other Muslim-majority countries. Sanctions can also lead to economic repercussions for the global market and result in economic loss.

Denial of Exports

By denying exports of technologies (etc) that could be used to continue the abuse of targeted groups in the Xinjiang region, nations could be directly reducing the amount of control the Chinese government has over the Uighurs in the Xinjiang region, and in so doing, protecting their privacy online as well as their freedom of movement.

This can, again, result in economic repercussions because countries would be reducing the amount of trade of particular products between themselves and China. Therefore, countries may be reluctant to deny exports of technology and other items that facilitate abuse. However, they can mitigate this consequence by engaging in greater trade and cooperation among country groups that do not include China.

UN Investigations

A UN fact-finding team will have more credibility than a small group of reporters travelling to and reporting on the conditions of Xinjiang.

To create a UN team dedicated to fact-finding missions may take a long time to develop and to negotiate the terms of a visit, if China permits this at all.

Education and Cultural Exchanges

By focusing on sharing the cultural elements of the Uighur community (that China has not identified as extremist) between regional groups within and beyond Xinjiang, with the rest of China, and with the world, the UN can work to preserve Uighur culture.

The Chinese government could object to these exchanges, but even if they do, it would be widely publicized and would essentially bring international pressure and tension back on China for rejecting a peaceful cultural exchange.

Development Projects within Xinjiang

By supporting development projects within Xinjiang, the standard of living will increase and this will likely resolve some unrest within the region, which would help China meet goals for social stability and national security.

Unless funds are dedicated to a specific development project and overseen by a third party, there may be little incentive for nations to provide money that the Chinese government could use to serve its own interests.

Diplomatic Attempts

Encouraging high-level diplomats from Muslim-majority countries and international Islamic organizations to start and continue to visit Xinjiang and report back to their local Muslim organizations and the HRC on the situation would exert pressure on China to be accountable to its Muslim-majority country allies. A visit is more powerful than a statement or a news report in a state-run newspaper. The presence of high-level Muslim-nation diplomats may also bolster good will with local Xinjiang groups and a sense that they are supported beyond the Chinese border by the wider Muslim community.

The issue should not become a "Muslim problem" but rather remain of interest to all nations. Politicians and diplomats have to serve their own country's complex interests and therefore may respond to the situation in Xinjiang either positively or negatively but not simply because of concern for minority groups in China. The international community must work together towards a solution that respects and protects the cultural rights of Uighurs and all religious and ethnic minorities in China while also respecting China's sovereignty.

Questions To Consider

1. Which NGOs, IGOs, private entities, or individuals from outside China could potentially exert pressure on China to change its policies? How might these groups or individuals be encouraged to use their influence to promote human rights protections? What about groups or individuals within China?
2. What are the Chinese government's goals in Western China, exactly? What are some other ways that the central Chinese administration and local authorities could achieve these goals without resorting to human rights abuses? How can UN groups encourage China's pro-human rights actions?
3. What are ways to fight violent extremism that a large majority of countries can agree upon? What are some examples from your own country's experience that you could highlight to help solve the issue?
4. How can countries who have openly sided with China on the issue of its re-education camps be incentivized to help improve the human rights situation in Xinjiang regardless?