

# Advisory Panel on the Question of the Uyghur Muslims in China (APQUMC)

Ensuring the rights of Uyghur Muslims in  
industry in Xinjiang, specifically the cotton  
industry and manufacturing of PPE



<b>Forum</b>	Advisory Panel on the Question of the Uyghur Muslims in China (APQUMC)
<b>Issue:</b>	Ensuring the rights of Uyghur Muslims in industry in Xinjiang, specifically the cotton industry and manufacturing of PPE
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## Introduction

Uyghurs are one of the ethnic minorities recognized in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and the titular residents of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang UAR) in Northwest China. Modern Uyghurs are predominantly Muslim, with approximately 12 million inhabitants in Xinjiang. They are a Turkic ethnic group and have been culturally affiliated with areas ranging from Central Asia to East Asia. An estimated 80% of Uyghurs inhabitants reside in Tarim Basin, a basin in north west China. The rest of the population resides in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang UAR. Since 2014, Uyghur Muslims in China have been subjected to forced labor, internment and reeducation camps, and forced sterilization. It is estimated that 1 million Uyghur Muslims have been arbitrarily detained in internment camps since 2017. The alleged reason for the internment of Uyghurs is the association of Muslims as terrorists by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and sinicization.



*Image 1: Map of Xinjiang UAR and surrounding areas*

The forced labour camps mainly produce cotton for the textile and fashion industry and since the COVID-19 pandemic started, personal protective equipment (PPE). The need for PPE increased rapidly, especially as major powers implemented measures that required their use. Currently, more than 17 world industries ranging from agriculture to toys have been linked to Uyghur forced labour camps, and 1 in 5 garments are made from cotton that can be traced back to the labour camps. It is important to note that this is not only a national issue, and should not be treated as such. Major global companies have been linked through supply chains with producers that use the forced labour of Uyghurs, and their products are distributed in countries such as the United States of America and Canada. These tainted products mainly come in the form of cotton textiles and PPE such as masks, suits and visors.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Uyghur

A Turkic ethnic minority that has been politically recognized by the PRC. Most Uyghurs reside in Xinjiang, a region in northwestern China. They have been recognized as the titular people of Xinjiang, and are predominantly Muslim.

### Xinjiang UAR

Stands for "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region". An autonomous region in northwestern China where most Uyghurs are located.

### Genocide

When a large number of individuals belonging to a certain ethnic or national group is killed, with the aim of destroying that ethnicity or nation.

### **Sinicization**

When non-Chinese cultures come under the influence of Chinese culture and ethnic identity of the largest ethnic group in China, the Han people.

### **Internment Camp**

A concentration camp for civilian citizens. Uyghur civilians are placed into them and the camps are run by Xinjiang UAR and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). Information about them is limited: accounts of former prisoners allege that torture, beatings, indoctrination, forced sterilization and forced labour take place. There is also the element of indoctrination present, with former prisoners citing idolizing the CCP's leader Xi Jinping, reciting poetry written by him, reciting music in mandarin with anti-Uyghur sentiments and beatings as a form of indoctrination. Civilians are taken through arbitrary detention.

### **Forced Labour**

Any work or service that individuals are forced to do against their will, under any form of threat or punishment. Forced labour is used in Uyghur internment camps to mainly produce cotton and PPE.

### **Indoctrination**

When an individual or group of individuals are taught to believe something uncritically. Uyghur individuals are allegedly indoctrinated inside internment camps to idolize the CCP and all its components.

### **Arbitrary Detention**

When a person is deprived of liberty through arrest or detention without evidence of having committed an unlawful act or deprived of legal protection. Uyghur Muslims are not taken into camps voluntarily, instead it almost always involves arbitrary detention by a law officer or similar political entity.

### **Reeducation Camps**



A camp where civilians go to be reeducated or to change thought patterns and beliefs. This definition is the one used by the CCP to describe internment camps. The CCP claims that Uyghurs are being placed into reeducation camps due to falling victim to extremist and radical views regarding Islam.

## General Overview

It is estimated that since 2017 China has detained more than 1 million Uyghurs in internment camps. Besides the various counts of human rights violations, they are also generating profit from the internment camps through forced labour. The cotton industry in Xinjiang is the fifth biggest cotton producer of the world, and the CCP is making use of economic threats to global companies if they refuse to buy cotton from Xinjiang. Sadly, this is a very good incentive for said companies that will continue to ignore the lack of rights and forced labour of the Uyghur people.

A similar issue takes place regarding the production of PPE by Uyghurs, with the added difficulty of tracing supply chains accurately. Furthermore, the speed at which COVID-19 is being eradicated does not allow for PPE production to slow down, and it is safe to assume that most of the world population will need PPE for an extended period of time. The rights of Uyghurs in the production of PPE are very closely tied together to the pandemic, and the economy involved in such.

## Economic superpower

The PRC is a world superpower that has tremendous economic and trading relations with various other countries, due to its limited labour laws and prioritizing economic growth above all else. Even though there are labour laws in China that are in full effect, there is still room for further development that ideally prioritizes the worker's wellbeing and ensures rights. This often creates an unkind work environment that allows brands to produce in the PRC at a very low cost, putting the worker's wellbeing and rights at risk. This is further amplified by the legislation in the PRC that does not allow for independent labour unions, with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) being the only existing labour union. As the ACFTU is directly tied to the government, it prioritizes economical and political stability.

The same happens in trading relationships between the PRC and other countries, making it very difficult for a political entity to not trade or produce its goods in China. While not all goods



produced in or traded by China have ties to the Uyghur, more than 17 industries ranging from agriculture to toy manufacturing can be traced back to forced labour by the Uyghur people. As mentioned before, these products of forced labour are not only consumed or traded inside the PRC but also reach countries such as the United States of America or Canada. This is not an issue exclusive to China and should not be treated as such. Other factors to consider regarding this issue is the lack of transparency in labour and factory regulations perpetuated by the CCP, and the nature of the CCP itself as a rigid regime that does not allow NGOs and political entities to get involved.

### **Forced labour laws**

Although there are laws that deem forced labour illegal, NGOs can do very little to help those affected by it due fear of the consequences. The internment camps are sponsored, monitored, controlled by the government. Due to the very large profit margin gained through forced labour by all parties involved, the incentive to create laws that give the Uyghur people basic human rights is very low.

### **Personal protective equipment**

PPE is essential to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, and has been mass produced since the pandemic began. The main consumers of PPE are healthcare workers that work directly with infected patients. The virus began in Wuhan, China in december 2019. The PRC was the first country to be affected, and there was a large demand for cheap PPE that would be preferably domestically produced to reduce production and transportation costs. The forced labour of Uyghur people allowed PPE to be produced at a very low cost, all domestically. It is important to note that the most commonly used PPE are N95 masks, made with cotton also likely to be picked and treated by the Uyghur people in internment camps. The profits from forced labour increased when the pandemic began in other countries.

## **Major Parties Involved**

### **The People's Republic of China**

The People's Republic of China has been actively engaged in the creation, maintenance, enforcement and denial of Uyghur internment camps and the attempted erasure of Uyghur heritage. The current political scenario of the country as a quite rigid regime (CCP) does not allow for much outside involvement by other organizations or powers such as NGOs and other world powers. The main



motivator behind this lack of engagement with the issue is the PRC's status as a world superpower and economic superpower with extensive trading relations. Another reason for this is the fear of repercussions inside the PRC. All protests and discussion of the lack of rights of the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang UAR are done outside of China.

### United States of America

The United States of America (USA) together with other nations has imposed sanctions on various senior officials in Xinjiang UAR that have been accused of various human rights violations. These sanctions are based on the Global Magnitsky Act and have been in place since March 22, 2021. The sanctions include travel bans and asset freeze that the targets may have on any of the co-signing countries. The sanctions targeted four officials from the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau, Xinjiang Communist Party, Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, and the CCP. The sanctions also targeted one group, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Public Security Bureau, who is responsible for handling the detention of the Uyghurs.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act is a bill introduced on January 27, 2021. It aims to allow all products made with material or involved with forced labour in Xinjiang to be assumed to have been produced through Uyghur forced labour, thus effectively placing bans on such products in the USA. It also builds upon the previously placed sanctions and furthers them, adding a visa-blocking element to the sanctions. The bill further aims to raise international awareness through a not specified strategy. The bill has not yet become a law and as of September 14, 2021 has passed the senate.

### United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) has imposed the same sanctions that the US has placed under the Magnitsky Act.

### European Union

The European Union (EU) has imposed the same sanctions that the US has placed under the Magnitsky Act. In retaliation, the CCP has imposed sanctions that target 10 European figures, some of them belonging to the European Parliament. These sanctions include a travel ban to mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao and business restrictions to the targets and any associated companies or institutions. These sanctions were issued on grounds of distortion of facts, interference with Chinese internal affairs and undermining China and EU relations.



## Canada

Canada has imposed the same sanctions that the US has placed under the Magnitsky Act.

## World Uyghur Congress

The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) is an organization created for the purpose of ending the Uyghur internment camps, human rights violations, genocide, forced labour and overall abuse. They are active outside of China and have links to most organisations that promote human rights and support the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang conflict.

## Timeline of Key Events

From 2009 to 2014, Uyghur extremist terrorist groups carried out several attacks in Xinjiang, the most notable being the 2014 bomb and knife attack in Urumqi railway station. In late 2014, the PCR began releasing anti terrorism propaganda that promoted the negative association of muslims with terrorism. This campaign later came to be known as the "Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism". In 2017, the PRC declared an aggressive attack that would end terrorism and Uyghur extremists. Mass arrests began and laws were put in place to ban parts of Muslim faith. Abnormally long beards and wearing veils in public were outlawed.

Reeducation campaigns began in 2017, with internment camps being built and were referred to simply as "vocational training centres". The camps tripled in size from 2018 to 2019 even though the PRC claimed to have released most detainees. Journalists in Xinjiang UAR were also cracked down on, with 73% of journalists in the region being restricted or prohibited from reporting in the area. On March 22, 2021 the USA, UK, Canada and the EU imposed sanctions on China. That same day, China issued their sanction on European political figures. Both sanctions are still active today as of August 17, 2021. The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act is a bill that aims to ban the import of products of forced labour from Xinjiang into the USA. The bill passed the senate on September 14, 2021.

## UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Virtual UN Conference, May 12 2021, co sponsored by the WUC, Amnesty International, International Federation of Human Rights and Global Justice Center
- Investigation released by Human Rights Watch, "[Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots](#)", April 2021





- Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act, December 12, 2016 (112-208)
- Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labour, released a press statement on July 23, 2020, urging brands to end complicity in Uyghur forced labour. This statement was backed by 180+ organizations, including Human Rights Watch
- The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, introduced on January 27, 2021 and has passed senate (H.R. 6210)
- Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, passed on May 27, 2020. Requires various federal USA bodies to report human rights abuse committed to Uyghurs by the CCP
- USA, UK, Canada and EU impose sanctions on the PCR, March 22, 2021
- The UN does not have any information on their website about the issue (as of August 18, 2021)

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Unfortunately, there have been no previous attempts to solve the issue as a whole.

The most relevant events related to the issue of issuing rights to the Uyghur people in Xinjiang through treaties are mentioned above, and consist only of the Global Magnitsky Act which allows nations to impose sanctions on other nations due to human rights violations. The sanctions imposed by the USA, UK, Canada and EU have been placed in March 22, 2021 and are still active today.

Although it is a helpful act, it is not enough to target the problem as there is not enough incentive. Two impacted factors are not essential to the daily life of the officials targeted, thus the incentive for the PCR to terminate the internment camps and human rights violation is very low. Another factor to consider when regarding sanctions is the PRC's status as a world and economic superpower, and its effect on trading relations. The pressure put on by sanctions is increased as more countries adopt it, however for western allies such as New Zealand or Australia this is difficult to endorse due to their large dependency on trading relations with China.

Additionally, it is important to consider the chance of retaliation and deterioration of international relations. The same day the USA, UK, Canada and the EU announced the sanctions for the PRC, the PRC announced theirs. The foreign ministry spokesperson for China noted that the sanctions imposed felt quite offensive, and were based on distortion of information, accusations and



breached basic norms governing international relations. The ministry also noted that the sanctions severely undermines China-EU relations, and if no action was taken to address the accusations, China will resolutely make further reactions. As UN members, it is of utmost importance to promote world peace and preserve and hold international relations to the highest regard, while addressing the issue at hand.

Regarding the issue of the cotton industry in Xinjiang UAR, not much action has been taken. On JanUARY 27, 2021 a bill was introduced in the USA to effectively associate goods made of materials sourced from Xinjiang with forced labour, and effectively block the import of such products into the USA. The bill, called the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, has currently passed the senate but we cannot be sure of its future development and status. However, if this bill does pass and becomes a law, it will be very promising and provide the economic incentive required for the PRC to reconsider the current condition of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The bill also adds onto the current sanctions imposed and aims to add a new clause to it, visa-blocking while also strengthening the sanctions currently in place.

On July 23, 2020, the Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labour released a coalition to end complicity in Uyghur forced labour. It urged major brands to stop sourcing cotton and yarn from Xinjiang and was backed by more than 180 NGOs and organizations. Although it did raise awareness about the issue, not much was done. As it is a coalition and not an organization or government, they have no political power thus their action course is very limited. The coalition is still active as of August 2021, and they have expressed their support for the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act and further asked for full disclosure regarding what brands lobby against the bill.

## Possible Solutions

This is a multifaceted, international, complicated and delicate issue and should be handled as such. There is no easy solution to this problem, and global cooperation is needed.

The most important part of this issue is that the PRC does not allow access to other powers and organizations to directly operate in Xinjiang UAR, which also does not allow other NGOs to alleviate the physical harm done to the Uyghurs. A way to get access into Xinjiang UAR for the purpose of alleviating the problem would be to implement economic sanctions, as financially is the biggest way that China profits from their actions. The current sanctions in place are not enough incentive to encourage the PRC to truly make a change, and extending those measures is suggested. The sanctions combined with the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act being in full effect is a promising solution that



could indeed improve the condition of the imprisoned Uyghurs. As mentioned before, the only disadvantage of this solution is its potential to further erode international relations between China and Eu, China and USA and China and other western supporters. If precautions are not taken to remain civil and not use offensive or otherwise accusing language, this could cause the conflict in Xinjiang to escalate into a global conflict. It should also be taken into account the possibility of retaliation in the form of sanctions by China, as it has happened in the past. We must ensure rights for the Uyghur people while preserving national relations and preventing further escalation.

Regarding the cotton industry, a worldwide movement would need to take place, again making use of the economic sanctions on powers or major brands that use cotton picked and treated by Uyghurs in internment camps. It is essential that supply chain transparency is achieved and brands are held accountable for their involvement in Uyghur forced labour. Again, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act is a good solution to this as it effectively blocks the import of any goods that may have ties to Uyghur forced labour but it is applicable only to the USA. For the ban to be effective and provide enough economical loss that it encourages the PRC to ensure rights to the forced workers, it must be done on a global scale. It is suggested that delegates work together to create legislation that will tackle this issue, while taking into account that the main benefit gained by China through Uyghur forced labour is indeed economical. Additionally, it is recommended that nations work together with NGOs with similar aims in order to gain the necessary knowledge to fully tackle the issue. NGOs will also benefit from this as it allows them to fully assist those impacted by the issue to their organization's fullest extent.

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