



## **More Must Be Done to Pressure the Government of China to Immediately End Its Abuses of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims**

Following High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet’s recent official visit to China, Human Rights Now (HRN), a Tokyo-based international human rights NGO, protests abuses by the Chinese government against Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims, including mass detentions, torture, forced labor, sexual violence, and other crimes against humanity, and we call on the High Commissioner’s office and the international community to redouble their efforts to oppose and pressure the government to end them. The recent leak of tens of thousands of official photographs and documents—displaying, documenting, and instructing authorities to commit abuses—leave no doubt about the deep and widespread culpability of the Chinese government in these crimes.

In May 2020, HRN released a report summarizing the facts and evidence of serious crimes against humanity being committed against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims by the Chinese government as part of its “Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism”.<sup>1</sup> Since 2017, between 1 to 2 million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, from the ages of 13 to 84, have been detained in re-education camps in China’s northwestern Xinjiang region, about 15% of the region’s population.<sup>2</sup> Documented criteria for detentions are arbitrary and pretextual, and include religious conduct, such as growing a beard or abstaining from alcohol; being related to someone already detained; travelling or communicating with people abroad; and having too many children (the most common reason). Detainees are then subjected to a highly abusive re-education program as part of a comprehensive effort to erase Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims’ identity, culture and religion, motivated by extreme discrimination, political paranoia, and exaggerated threat perceptions by the government against Turkic Muslims.<sup>3</sup> The children of detained parents are placed into government-run boarding schools across the region, and reports of alleged rape, torture, forced abortion, and sterilization in the camps are widespread.<sup>4</sup>

The recently leak of tens of thousands of internal government files, taken from Public Security Bureau (PSB) computers for Konasheher and Tekes counties covering the period 2000-2018, clearly demonstrates the abusive conditions of the re-education camps and Chinese officials’ direct involvement in their abuses.<sup>5</sup> The cache includes official speech transcripts, such as former Xinjiang Party Secretary Chen Quanguo’s instructions for “absolute security” of detention camps, including instructions for police to “shoot dead” anyone who even attempts to escape by running a few steps, and to “shoot all terrorists dead” and to “first kill and then report” in response to security incidents, inconsistent with China’s own policing standards.<sup>6</sup> Detention camp directives and guidelines in the files give explicit instructions for prison-like measures, such as Ili Prefecture PSB’s guideline that shackling and hooding of detainees must not be lax,<sup>7</sup> and another guideline that watchtowers be armed with sniper rifles and military-grade machine guns to provide “suppressive fire” against potential intruders.<sup>8</sup>

Internal spreadsheets from Konasheher show the personal information of nearly the entire county population in 2018 (286,000 people), including detention levels and the arbitrary reasons for detentions as listed above, indicating that about 12.5% of the county’s ethnic adults were detained in re-education, detention, or prison facilities, over 64 times higher than China’s national imprisonment rate.<sup>9</sup> Photos in the cache show a prisoner with hood and shackles, guards with wooden clubs or in military fatigues with machine guns, guards training to use forcible tactics to subdue detainees, and a tiger chair interrogation.<sup>10</sup> There are also photos of over 2,800 detainees, many confirmed by family members or corroborating evidence, supporting the veracity of the leak.<sup>11</sup> Other violations beyond the camps include widespread forced labor, homestay surveillance, forced marriages, the destruction of cultural property, and restrictions on cultural and religious expression.<sup>12</sup>

As for High Commissioner Bachelet’s recent visit to Xinjiang, while it is important for the United Nations to endeavor to have constructive engagement with the government of China on this critical issue, we must express that a weak response from UN officials will only be used by the Chinese government to diminish the

severity of its crimes and harden its impunity.<sup>13</sup> In this respect, Ms. Bachelet's comments were much too weak for the occasion. She only invited the government "to potentially rethink [its] policies" negatively impacting human rights, and the concerns she publicly raised about Uyghurs' rights (referring to the lack of judicial oversight for detentions and a means for victims to seek redress) did not indicate of the full scale or severity of the violations involved, the combination of which only appears to minimize the violations.<sup>14</sup>

As expected, the Chinese government has already misrepresented the engagement, misquoting Bachelet as saying that she "admires" China's efforts "protecting human rights", requiring Bachelet to release a rebuttal with her actual words that made no mention of admiring China's human rights record.<sup>15</sup> This incident shows how essential it is that UN officials give unambiguous and strongly worded statements exposing the full scope of the government's violations and bringing real pressure on it to be accountable for its crimes, so that they are not vulnerable to manipulations which strengthen the government's impunity. To this end, we request Ms. Bachelet and OHCHR to make such unambiguous, accurate, and strongly worded statements, and to release the delayed official report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang region, which provides a full and accurate description of the scale and severity of the government's violations.<sup>16</sup> A more forceful response by the international community is also needed.

HRN calls on the Chinese government to immediately end all abuses associated with its Strike Hard Campaign against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims, including mass detentions, torture, sexual violence, forced labor, homestay and mass surveillance, destruction of cultural areas, restrictions on cultural and religious expression, and other abuses; to implement effective judicial review and grievance mechanisms for victims; and to ensure accountability for past violations. HRN further requests that OHCHR conduct a meaningful investigation and quickly release an accurate report on the human rights situation in Xinjiang, and that the international community implement sanctions and other forms of appropriate pressure to urge the Chinese government to end its abuses against Uyghur and other Turkic Muslims, and to facilitate accountability for these rights violations.

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<sup>1</sup> HRN, "The Government of China Must Immediately End Its Campaign of Mass Detentions, Abuse, Forced Labor, and Destruction of Muslim Culture in Xinjiang", 1 May 2020, <https://hrn.or.jp/eng/news/2020/05/01/xinjiang-statement/>.

<sup>2</sup> Scilla Alecci, "The faces of China's detention camps in Xinjiang," International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 24 May 2022, <https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-cables/xinjiang-police-files-uyghur-mugshots-detention/>; id.

<sup>3</sup> John Sudworth, "The faces from China's Uyghur detention camps," BBC, May 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/85qihv6e/the-faces-from-chinas-uyghur-detention-camps>.

<sup>4</sup> HRN, *supra*, note 1; Vincent Ni, "Thousands of detained Uyghurs pictured in leaked Xinjiang police files," The Guardian, 25 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/24/thousands-of-detained-uyghurs-pictured-in-leaked-xinjiang-police-files>.

<sup>5</sup> Xinjiang Police Files (a project by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation), <https://www.xinjiangpolicefiles.org/>; id.

<sup>6</sup> Adrian Zenz, "The Xinjiang Police Files: Re-Education", 3 Journal of the European Association for Chinese Studies, 2022, at 12, 14, <https://journals.univie.ac.at/index.php/jeacs/article/view/7336>.

<sup>7</sup> Id. at 13.

<sup>8</sup> Id. at 26.

<sup>9</sup> Id. at 3.

<sup>10</sup> Xinjiang Police Files, *supra*, note 5, at "Key Documents"; id., at 23-24.

<sup>11</sup> Zenz, id., at 34 ff.

<sup>12</sup> HRN, *supra*, note 1.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, "UN rights chief concludes China trip with promise of improved relations," UN News, 28 May 2022,

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/05/1119302>.

<sup>14</sup> Statement by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet after official visit to China, UN OHCHR, 28 May 2022,

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/05/statement-un-high-commissioner-human-rights-michelle-bachelet-after-official>; Associated Press, "U.N. human rights chief asks China to rethink Uyghur policies," NPR, 29 May 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/29/1101969720/un-human-rights-chief-asks-china-to-rethink-uyghur-policies>.

<sup>15</sup> Al Jazeera, "UN's Bachelet says China trip not for a probe, faces criticism", 28 May 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/28/hr-organisations-slam-un-right-chief-over-china-visit>; Wang & Ramzy, "As U.N. Rights Chief Visits China, Some Fear She'll Become Part of the Spin", New York Times, 27 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/27/world/asia/un-china-xinjiang.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Mercedes Page, "The mysterious missing UN report on human rights abuses in Xinjiang," The Lowy Institute, 6 April 2022, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpretor/mysterious-missing-un-report-human-rights-abuses-xinjiang>.