

Grief Observed: **UIGHUR** **TESTIMONIES**

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Cover photo: Uighur refugee in Turkey, she has been campaigning for the return of her children who she believes are currently held in camps, and the release of relatives from prison.



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*“What reason could you have
for not fighting in the way of Allah –
for those men, women and the children who are oppressed
and say, ‘Our Lord, take us out of this city
whose inhabitants are wrongdoers!
Give us a protector from You! Give us a helper from You!’”*

[Qur'an 4:75]

The command of the old despotisms was
Thou Shalt Not. The command of the
totalitarians was *Thou Shalt*. Our command is
Thou Art. No one whom we bring to this place
ever stands out against us. Everyone is
washed clean.

[1984, George Orwell]

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Foreword

The world has been alarmed to learn about camps used to incarcerate hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Uighurs in China. The headlines speak of internment camps, re-education, and discrimination against minority communities.

What the headlines overlook is the history of persecution faced by China's Uighur Muslims. This is a history in which the Chinese government has sought to erase their ethnic and religious identities through acts of persecution, surveillance and where that has failed, by killing those who refused to bow to their dictates.

The camps are the latest in a long history of persecution: Uighur women forced to marry Chinese men to change the demography of Xinjiang, imprisonment and torture of Uighur activists, the repression of all expressions of religious and cultural identity, and the murder of those who were deemed dangerous by the state.

China has chosen to treat its Uighur population as a threat, whose ethnic and religious identity is out of sync with the majority Han Chinese identity. As each repressive policy fails to disabuse the Uighurs of their cultural and religious heritage, China responds with newer and more repressive measures. The “re-education” camps in Xinjiang are a sign of desperation: having failed to scare Uighurs into adopting a Han identity through arrests, torture, surveillance and murder, China is now resorting to forcefully brainwashing the Uighur community in order to teach it how to be more Chinese and less Uighur.

The Chinese authorities should know that repressing an entire population will not work – from Palestine to Kashmir, Chechnya or the Rohingya of Myanmar, the modern world is replete with examples of states failing to break the will of oppressed minorities, irrespective of how monstrous and barbaric their assaults on those peoples.

If China hopes to resolve its Uighur question, it needs to start viewing them as equal citizens of China. It needs to protect their ethnic and cultural identity and allow them to worship freely. A free, prosperous Uighur population will be an asset to China. Failure to turn away from its current course will only cause instability in Xinjiang as the Uighurs seek to free themselves from the repressive policies of Beijing.

**Massoud Shadjareh
Chair**

Introduction

IHRC sent a research team to Turkey in February 2019 to meet and speak to Uighur groups and individuals. The purpose of the visit was to interview people who had fled China, so as to better understand what was happening in Xinjiang province. This short report is a summary of what was reported by individuals as well as the conclusions of our research team and recommendations based on their fieldwork. This is followed by summaries of witness testimonies provided by individuals who fled China for fear of persecution.

The title of this report came from what our team observed during these testimonies: grief and trauma. While all witnesses maintained a dignified composure throughout their statements, the grief and trauma were palpable. The trauma of dealing with detention and torture, the grief of not being accepted in their homelands by a regime that saw them as a threat, the grief of abandoning their families, the grief of being separated from loved ones, of not hearing from them, of not knowing where they were, how they were or if family members were suffering because they had escaped. The tension between the need to escape China and the guilt felt because of the consequences for family members left behind was always left unsaid, and yet was an invisible thread that weaved its way through almost every testimony.

This is not the first time our organization has compiled a report on the treatment of Uighur Muslims¹. Our previous report on China focused on incidents that took place in July 2009 when so-called riots in Xinjiang led to the arrests and detentions of many Uighurs as well as the deaths of many involved in what began as peaceful protests. It was portrayed by the media in China and to some extent the West, as the violent rioting of extremist separatists, rampaging and killing ethnic Han. Our report at the time found that there was systematic discrimination and abuse against Muslim populations. This ranged from criminalizing those who went to perform the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, to forcing Muslim Uighur women to marry non-Muslims or even emigrate to other parts of China as a way of changing the demographic balance in Xinjiang. There were even reports that Muslims were forced to drink alcohol and paraded through the streets as a way of humiliating and torturing them.

¹ R.A. *Reflections on Chinese Policy in Xinjiang – Uighur Autonomous Region: An Eyewitness Account of 5 July 2009 and the Aftermath* (Wembley: Islamic Human Rights Commission, Revised edition 2018).

Findings

Those interviewed included individuals who had been repeatedly arrested and tortured, who have been held in so-called ‘re-education camps’ as well as those who had fled following the persecution of family members. All witnesses had said they had fled China in fear of their lives.

All witness accounts showed a level of consistency in what was reported, leaving our team in no doubt that these were not politically motivated accusations with a view to undermining the Chinese government.

The most consistent grievances included:

- The creation of a police state wherein Muslims are monitored everywhere they go in Xinjiang. Muslims are repeatedly being required to provide biometric information at regular police checkpoints and face blanket CCTV surveillance everywhere they go. One witness reported how children were being surreptitiously interviewed by teachers so as to determine the religiosity of parents. He recounted how innocent children would proudly admit to teachers about their parents teaching them the Quran, not realizing the dangers involved, and later find their parents being arrested for illegal religious activity.
- The systematic targeting and persecution of anyone who displayed an Islamic identity. Witnesses recounted being arrested for collecting and distributing *sadaqa* (charitable donations) after officers accused them of illegal religious activity. Others spoke of being targeted because members of their family had already been arrested for illegal religious practice. They described how after the arrest of one person, the police would systematically arrest all their closest friends and relatives for the exact same reason. The idea behind this practice is to create fear in a community so that its members will stop practicing the religion, encourage others around them to avoid religious practice and where that fails, report religious activity in order to avoid arrest themselves.
- The use of torture to extract confessions as well as persuade individuals to provide names of others practicing Islam is routine. One witness spoke of being made to sit and listen to others being tortured and being warned that if she did not confess or provide names of others who were practicing their religion illegally, a similar fate awaited her. The beatings and torture that were described to IHRC showed organised and systematic abuse of Uighurs by the state. Victims were beaten, electrocuted and made to sit in their own excreta. Others reported how the beatings would lead to them becoming unconscious. They would then be revived for the beatings to continue. They would

only be allowed enough recovery time and medical attention for the torture and beatings to be able to continue.

■ The female witnesses recounted how rape was used as a weapon to humiliate and blackmail women. Violent gang rapes by police officers is systematic and allows the officers to not only dehumanize women but use the rape itself as a tool to blackmail women into spying on their own community in order to avoid the humiliation of this information being made public. One witness recounted how some girls would be regularly called in to the station to be raped, almost as a reminder that the police controlled their lives.

■ Many of the witnesses spoke of family members who had disappeared in the 're-education' camps. Family members would disappear suddenly, and when released would maintain little to no contact with their family members outside China. Many told us that they feared that their fleeing to Turkey was the cause of their family members being targeted and held in the camps.

■ One witness who had first-hand knowledge of the camps described a disturbing world where prisoners were kept in inhumane conditions with every aspect of their lives watched and controlled. They were forced to undergo many hours of state propaganda, repeating mantras that extolled the virtues of the Chinese state and Han identity, while denying their own Islamic / Uighur identity. It seemed that there was no set criteria for being imprisoned in the camp other than being Muslim / Uighur, but the end result being sought in every case was the same, the complete erasure of the Uighur identity for a state endorsed Chinese identity.

■ The camps also house large numbers of children. Two different witnesses spoke about how their children, who they had left behind in the care of relatives when they fled to Turkey, were imprisoned in camps. The goal of incarcerating children seems to be for the state to raise a new generation of Uighurs, completely immersed in Han Chinese culture, and totally alienated from their Uighur / Muslim roots. This is a disturbing trend, in which the hearts and minds of the Uighur youth is a weapon to be deployed against the community. If successful, such a strategy would allow the wholesale destruction of the Uighur identity, and its links with Islam.

■ The western media has spoken of anything between one million and three million Uighurs being held in camps². This is based on research that questioned people in Xinjiang about the numbers of people in their village/locality who were taken to camps³. Uighur groups our team met with reported that their methodology, was based on satellite images that show construction of new buildings on previously undeveloped land. They estimate the number of people that such buildings can hold at between 1-3 million. China has stated that it has established “vocational education” centers to stave off terrorism in the country⁴. The Chinese government places the number in the hundreds of thousands. While the exact number cannot be determined, as we cannot trust the account of the Chinese government or the accuracy of the estimates by human rights organisations, it is likely to be somewhere in between the two. In any case, the hundreds of thousands being imprisoned, as quoted by the Chinese authorities, is itself too large and an extremely distressing figure.

² Quartz, *More than 1 million Muslims are detained in China—but how did we get that number?* (4 July 2019) <https://qz.com/1599393/how-researchers-estimate-1-million-uyghurs-are-detained-in-xinjiang/> [Accessed on 04 June 2020].

³ Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) and Equal Rights Initiative (ERI), *China: Massive Numbers of Uyghurs & Other Ethnic Minorities Forced into Re-education Programs* (03 August 2018) <https://www.nchrd.org/2018/08/china-massive-numbers-of-uyghurs-other-ethnic-minorities-forced-into-re-education-programs/> [Accessed on 04 June 2020].

⁴ Reuters, *China rejects allegations of detaining million Uighurs in camps in Xinjiang* (13 August 2018) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-rights-un-uyghurs/china-rejects-allegations-of-detaining-1-million-uyghurs-in-camps-in-xinjiang-idUSKBN1KY0Z7> [Accessed on 04 June 2020]; Xinhuanet, *Full transcript: Interview with Xinjiang government chief on counterterrorism, vocational education and training in Xinjiang*, (16 October 2018) http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-10/16/c_137535821.htm [Accessed on 04 June 2020].

Breach of International Laws

Our team identified the violation of a number of fundamental rights as enshrined in international law, including:

Prohibitions against Torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), unequivocally prohibits torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment⁵. This is further emphasised by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁶ (which China has signed but has not yet ratified) as well as the United Nations Convention against Torture⁷ (which China ratified in October 1988).

The use of rape, torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment against individuals in state custody is widespread in China. The routine use of torture by law enforcement officers and camp officials is not a failure to control rogue employees, but a deliberate policy by the state. The policy is designed to control a suspect population by any means possible.

The right to liberty / freedom from arbitrary detention

The UDHR protects everyone's right to life, liberty and security of person⁸ as well as protecting people from arbitrary arrest or detention⁹. These rights are also protected under ICCPR¹⁰.

The arrest and detention described by those interviewed showed that they were done without any regard for any due legal process rights. Those arrested were not told what their exact crime was, were not given opportunities to speak to a lawyer or to challenge their arrest via the courts. Likewise, the “education” camps also deny people their right to liberty and amount to arbitrary detention given China has offered no valid legal reason for holding people in “re-education” camps or a legal mechanism for those held to challenge their detention.

⁵ UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), [217 (III) A] (Paris:1948) art.5.

⁶ UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171 (New York: 1966) art.7.

⁷ UN General Assembly, *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 1465, p. 85 (New York: 1984).

⁸ UDHR, art.3 .

⁹ UDHR, art.9.

¹⁰ ICCPR, art.9 .

Freedom of Thought, Expression, and Religion

The UDHR and the ICCPR protect people's right to freedom of thought, belief, and religion¹¹. International law recognises that restrictions may need to be imposed on people's freedom to practice a religion or belief in certain instances, when it is necessary to protect public safety, public order, health or morals, or the rights and freedoms of others.

The restrictions China imposes on the practices of Uighur Muslims goes beyond the exceptions recognised by international law. From arresting people for teaching the Quran, to accusing people of sedition for distributing charitable donations to the poor, the repression of Islam is systematic. China is actively and methodically repressing all expressions of normative Islam amongst the Uighurs.

Arbitrary and Unlawful Interference in Family Life

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, (which China ratified in 1992) recognises the “right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.”¹² It further states that “No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence...”¹³ Finally, the convention states that governments “shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will” unless that separation is in the child's “best interests.”¹⁴

All of the above rules relating to children has been repeatedly and systematically breached by the Chinese government. From forcefully removing children from their parents / families, to forcefully indoctrinating them with an identity that is at odds with their Uighur Muslim heritage, the Chinese government has shown scant regard for its obligations under international law. Further, it is difficult to see how separation from parents/family would be in the child's best interest given that no transparent legal procedure is followed to identify the child's best interests in the first place.

¹¹ UDHR, art.19; ICCPR, art.19.

¹² UN Commission on Human Rights, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), E/CN.4/RES/1990/74 (Geneva: 1990), art.8.

¹³ CRC, art 16.

¹⁴ CRC, art 9.

Conclusion and Recommendations

What is happening in the Xinjiang region of China is state sponsored persecution of the Uighur Muslim community. The state has taken upon itself the task of controlling every aspect of the Uighur communities' lives, using harsh and repressive measures, and in recent years has moved towards creating camps in order to "educate" Uighurs to be better citizens - Chinese citizens, shorn of their Uighur and Islamic heritage.

We recommend the following:

- 1.** China should immediately shutdown all re-education camps in Xinjiang, and release all individuals detained;
- 2.** China should end all programs and policies aimed at surveilling and controlling the Uighur Muslims;
- 3.** China should allow free and unfettered access to suspected camps in Xinjiang to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other relevant international bodies/NGOs. Staged tours of the camps controlled by the Chinese state do not give the world a credible picture of what is happening in Xinjiang;
- 4.** Nations states who have granted asylum /residency to Uighur refugees should ensure that they are protected from forced return to China, and that those living on short-term residency permits have the right over time to apply for long-term / permanent residency. Failure to protect those seeking asylum/humanitarian protection from forced return to China will contravene the principle of non-refoulement as enshrined under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and customary international law;
- 5.** The international community needs to engage with the Chinese government on this issue more urgently. States need to point out that history shows that repressing minorities never ends well. If China wishes to create a strong and harmonious nation, it needs to find positive ways to incorporate the Uighur Muslims and other minority communities into the Chinese national identity;
- 6.** Muslim states need to emphasize that minorities, and in particular Muslims, are not a threat to the Chinese state. Rape, torture, murder and forced indoctrination will only make the Uighur population angry and make the Muslim world resentful of China;

7. Muslim states need to encourage China to allow the expression of dual and even multiple identities for its citizens. For example:

- a.** Introduce the office of an independent Mufti of Xinjiang, which would have symbolic resonance with the community, but also facilitate the teaching of traditional Islamic values practiced by the Uighur community for many centuries;
- b.** Introduce an Islamic curriculum that will teach traditional Islamic norms, which will be taught alongside the mainstream curriculum as part of allowing dual space for citizens, whether Uyghur, Muslim or other, to realise their rights to religious and cultural expression, strengthening societies as political spaces.

The above examples are illustrative and not prescriptive. China should draw on the experiences of other multicultural countries from the non-aligned world, which though imperfect, manage the relationship between state power and the religious needs of minoritized groups without coercive and assimilatory tactics, policies and ideologies. Various countries have policies and constitutional practices that allow religious, cultural and even some political autonomy for minoritized groups, which in turn fosters social and political cohesion.

8. Dialogue needs to be started with Uighur groups, so that they understand the need for constructive solutions that benefit the entire Uighur community. Many groups are being influenced by foreign governments to push for uprisings and independence. Such a policy will lead to tragic consequences, as seen in other parts of the Muslim world. Autonomy and even sovereignty are not necessarily served within a purely nation state format. There are other ways for communities to have autonomy, and the Uighur polity needs to think creatively about this. Changing China's repressive practice towards the Uighurs will be slow, but ultimately needs to be peaceful. Calls for independence will be met with harsher and more repressive policies from China.

Testimonies

Some names, places and dates have been changed or omitted to protect the identity of the witnesses and their families.

Dr. Omer Kul, head of department of Department of Turkish History at Istanbul University, Research Institute of Turkology. He is also the Secretary General of the East Turk Foundation.

Dr. Kul spoke in Turkish, which was translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

Osman Bator was one of the earliest freedom fighters to lead Uighurs. He led a rebellion against China 1945. In 1951 he was caught and executed in front of 90,000 people in Urumqi.

Today there is something happening in East Turkestan – China controls it and has an interest in maintaining this control. There are provocateurs in every place: if a people are tortured – they will want others to come and intervene/help. China wants to forcefully assimilate Muslims and the USA is trying to manipulate the issue.

There are human rights violations in East Turkestan and it gets worse every day. China applies racist policies against the people of East Turkestan and violates various international treaties – so the world reacts to this. China in turn tries to hide all of this from the world. The outside world has not been receiving much information about what is happening.

There are concentration camps that can be seen from outer space but the Chinese deny they exist. When the UN send people to China, the Chinese spread misinformation: these are not concentration camps but re-education camps, the inmates love the Communist Party and enjoy their stay at the camps. The Chinese claim the re-education / training is for people to get jobs; yet there are lawyers / doctors / businessmen / academics / dentists etc being held at these camps – what kind of training do these people need to get jobs given their qualifications / vocations?

When they take a Uighur person from their home, they leave behind a Chinese male in the family. The Chinese newcomer is described as a “friend”; he or she lives with them, eats with them etc; but the family have to obey him – he can report members of the family who will then be sent to the camp.

Uighur children are sent to camps referred to as “kindergartens” – there they are raised with Chinese culture and identity – their own ethnic/religious culture is removed. The camps assimilate them into Chinese culture.

In terms of the numbers that are held, the estimate of 1 million is a low estimate, the true figure is likely to be between 3-5 million. This number is based on satellite images of the camps showing their size and scale, and then calculating how many prisoners are likely to be held in such a complex.

The overall population of Uighur Muslims has been kept secret by the Chinese government – most people estimate the population to be 30 million plus. This is based on historical data; in 1945 77.5% of East Turkestan's population was Muslim. In 1946 the governor of the region estimated 95% of the population to be Muslim. The historical figures themselves are likely to be underestimates, people were afraid to provide details – so during the 1945 census people hid information or avoided being counted so they didn't have to pay taxes (the policy at the time was that if you had more than four children they paid more tax, so people hid children from the census to avoid higher tax bills).

China is a closed dictatorship where communication is strictly controlled. They have always had a policy of assimilating minorities. Regarding the Uighurs, the government claims they are fighting extremism, but their policy statements about minorities assimilating shows that this may not be the case.

Chinese Muslims are treated differently to the Uighurs. Chinese Muslims rebelled in the 19th century (Ching period). This was brutally put down. Since then Chinese Muslims have always been on the side of government, they are Chinese first, Muslim second. They have started to face some harassment in recent years – the destruction of mosques etc.

The Ching dynasty conquered East Turkestan. Following the Communist revolution Mongolia was given independence. At the same time, East Turkestan was promised a plebiscite on its independence which has never materialised.

The main urgency now is the human circumstances – the conditions in which people are being kept in these camps and ending this.

[References to East Turkestan were made by interviewee.]

Fatima *

Spoke in Uighur, which was translated into Turkish and then translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

Has been living in Turkey since 2015 – she fled the oppression in East Turkestan, came to Turkey for a free life. [Reference to East Turkestan made by interviewee.]

She was coordinating social aid for those who have no food etc, to the people (collecting and distributing charitable donations to the poorest in her community). This activity was mostly done privately.

She was arrested and accused of supporting underground organisations (un-official/illegal religious activity) i.e. teachers, Imams and others teaching Islam illegally.

Arrested in June 2015; she was told to come to the police station to discuss the fact that she had sold her house. When she arrived she was taken to an unknown location.

She was forced to confess to the crimes she was accused of. There were three officers in the room, one writing things down and two leading the interview. She was told that if she did not confess she would be sent somewhere worse.

They asked her to confess to raising and giving money to underground religious activity/groups, if she did, they would show mercy.

This was her first arrest, it lasted 10 days. She estimates she was tortured for the first 3 days, after which they humiliated and slapped and beat her the rest of the time [the distinction between torture and beatings made by interviewee – the difference seems to be one of severity of force used].

She explained had not done the things she was accused of. Eventually the interview ended and she was taken to basement of the same building.

Officers demanded she remove her clothes. She refused and asked for female officers to be present. They stripped her naked by force, cuffed her and made her sit on the table and started questioning her. The cuffs got tighter the more she moved or fidgeted.

She said she felt humiliated and ashamed by being stripped naked and questioned in this way.

They questioned her like before and also asked about Islamic audio cassettes – did she make / distribute them? She said no.

They left her alone for 30 minutes and then two different officers arrived. These officers asked the same questions just in different ways/wording.

They were trying to get information about the people who were escaping to Thailand – their names, family details etc. – they were not interested if the information was correct or not – just names they could follow up.

When they didn't get what they needed from her they started kicking her in the stomach. She fell to the ground so they kicked her in the stomach. They grabbed her hair and smashed her face against the wall. They also used a thick stick to hit her all over her body. They then sat her up as she was unable to sit/stand or walk by herself.

To this day she is unable to properly use her left hand, she can't hold on to or lift heavy objects, and has pain in her left foot due to the injuries sustained during that beating. She also stated that she has not been able to conceive following kicks to the stomach.

After the beating they started questioning her again, even though she was dazed from having her head smashed against the wall. She was questioned for another 11 hours, but she did not confess as she had not done what they accused her of.

Two new officers came in, they were nicer and explained that if she confessed they would let her go. She replied that she had nothing to confess.

Another officer entered and stood her up; she started vomiting. They then took her upstairs and left her alone on the roof, exposed/naked.

After 5 minutes a dog arrived (she is unsure from where) and started barking at her – no one was holding the dog. The dog never bit her. She lost consciousness as a result of the fear she felt at being attacked by this dog. When she woke up she saw the dog nearby, but they dragged her away.

She was then taken to another room where they photographed her naked, then again to another room where she was photographed clothed, holding a plaque with her name and date of birth. They took her fingerprints, foot print and blood samples (she estimates 6 units).

She was now taken to a different, larger facility. She estimates it was an hour's ride away from the first. The building had two levels as seen from outside – but had four levels underground, and possibly more.

Her captors continued hitting her, mainly in the stomach and back. Electric shocks were administered to her arm.

She saw others being tortured in a room. The room had a glass window. On one side of the glass window the victim was being tortured. On the other side, the detained were made to sit and watch the torture.

They used something she referred to as the tiger chair: they chained the victim to a chair – any movement and the restraints would get tighter.

She saw a young man in the chair. He was being asked to confess to having the Quran on his phone. They used electricity to torture him. She was unable to watch the torture. She saw him being taken out to another level below that one, unable to walk due to the torture.

At around 2am she was taken into one of these rooms. A Uighur officer came in and asked her “Did you see the boy? Confess and this will end, you won’t be able to stand this [torture]”.

She thought to herself that she would be charged if she confessed to anything, so she said nothing. They started hitting her, but at that point they did not administer electricity. They were also swearing at her and humiliating her.

They took her out to another room – as she was being moved she could hear screaming from the other rooms/levels.

She was not allowed to sleep for the next 16 hours – the psychological effect has been devastating.

On the third day she was moved to another level – she was not fed, and they swore at her and humiliated her for not confessing, but did not hit her on this occasion.

A Uighur lady who prepared food for the officers gave her something to eat.

On the fourth day she saw a young man from Kashgar in Xinjiang. He was accused of not having an ID card. He walked in normally. When she next saw him he was being carried out.

After 10 days they released her. As part of her release she was forced to sign a declaration stating that she had not seen any torture or any wrongdoing – everything was done lawfully, and that she didn’t have any complaints. She was told she wouldn’t be released if she didn’t sign.

Before releasing her the officers told her she had to spy for them on anyone teaching religion, being part of unauthorised underground organisation etc. She was to pass all the information to the officers, and that if she didn’t tell them they would bring her back.

All the prisoners she saw were Uighur, mainly teenage girls. She didn’t see it personally but many girls were raped. This was based on a conversation she had with another prisoner during her second arrest.

Her second arrest was in August 2015. She was arrested for wearing the hijab. At that time, the Chinese government was arresting Muslim women who wore the hijab in public in Xinjiang. She was arrested with 5 others. They were all forced to take the hijab off, fined and made to sign a declaration that they would

never wear the hijab again. While they were at the police station she met Aisha, who was 19 at the time. Aisha asked Fatima to pass a message to her family, notifying them of where she was. Aisha confirmed that she had been raped by the officers while she was being held. She met Aisha a week later, who told her that she was having severe bleeding from her genitals as a result of the rape she was subjected to. Aisha later moved to Urumqi.

In October 2015 Fatima got her passport and travelled to Turkey. At around that time the Chinese government was giving passports to everyone who applied, prior to that it was very difficult to obtain a passport.

Turkey has provided a residence permit for her to remain there. The Chinese consulate does not give any support to Uighurs and won't provide paperwork for birth, marriage etc.

Zaynab *

Spoke in Uighur, which was translated into Turkish and then translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

Her husband, Hassan, was an English teacher. Following the 2009 riots, the police arrested him from their home at midnight. He was accused of being involved in the riots as a number of his students had been arrested for the same. His father was a public attorney and his brothers were police officers, so he was taken to mainland China – Shanxi province – instead of being interviewed in Xinjiang [the distinction between Xinjiang and “mainland China” was made by interviewee].

The family were later told that he died in a traffic accident during transfer. They showed the family pictures of his face – the body was covered. To this day the family don't know where the body was taken or buried.

At the time Zaynab was also working as a lecturer in Chinese. She was suspended and her salary stopped. Prior to her husband's arrest and disappearance, he had advised her to leave if she got a chance – he used to be arrested, along with friends, on an almost weekly basis to be questioned about his views. Nothing happened during those arrests besides questioning until he disappeared in 2009.

She was arrested on a number of occasions and says she was beaten and tortured during those arrests. She eventually managed to get a passport, after paying bribes, and made her way to Turkey in 2013. She returned to Urumqi to arrange all her affairs before permanently relocating to Turkey (property, finance etc).

She was met at the airport by two officers who took her to a hotel, saying they just wanted to chat about her stay in Turkey. They had tea together, and she fell unconscious. When she awoke, she was in a dark room on her own. Two civilians entered the room and started questioning her, one was Chinese and the other Uighur.

They wanted to know why she went to Turkey, who she spoke to while there, who she worked for etc. They were unhappy with her answers and started hitting her. They took her to another room, stripped her naked and chained her to a chair. Her hair was tied to something on the ceiling and she had a powerful light shone on her face. They proceeded to apply electric shocks to her genital area. They also pulled out her nails partially as it was more painful to leave them in.

She repeatedly asked her torturers that they kill her due to the pain and shame she felt. They gave her medicine and water so that she could recover. She was dazed and disorientated and didn't know the time of day.

She was then taken to another room, where she was raped multiple times. She lost consciousness at various points during this ordeal but estimates at least 10 people, if not more, were involved. She had never been raped before.

She eventually lost consciousness and when she woke, she was tied up again with her hair tied to the ceiling. They started beating her. She stated that it was a cycle of beatings and rape for around 7 days (she estimates). They also used needles to pierce her body, sometimes the needles were heated. During this time she was only given water and medicine but no food. When she did request food on one occasion they urinated into a glass and made her drink it. After the 7 days she was eventually given some food to eat.

While in custody she tried to kill herself several times – hit her head against the wall and tried to stop breathing.

Throughout this ordeal they kept asking the same questions – why did you go Turkey / what did you do/ who did you talk to / who do you work for?

She was given a white drug twice every day with water

Her captors moved her from room to room which kept her disorientated. On around day 14 of her ordeal she saw someone familiar, Dawud, an old acquaintance. He agreed to help her get released. Dawud took her deposit card and emptied her account as the price for his assistance – she doesn't remember how much she had, but it constituted her life savings.

Before being released they administered an injection behind her ear and on her arm, she was also made to take four tablets. They returned her clothes, passport and ID card, before being taken directly to airport, where she left for Turkey where she has lived ever since.

Amina *

Spoke in Uighur, which was translated into Turkish and then translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

While she was in China she had 5 children. When she was pregnant with her sixth, she tried to hide the pregnancy by wearing large dresses. When it became too obvious, she and her husband, Abdullah, decided to go to Turkey for her to have the child there.

She travelled to Turkey in April 2016 with her husband and a friend of his, Ismail. The plan was to see what Turkey was like, and they would bring the other children later.

Her husband and his friend returned to China after 10 days. After he returned she had no contact with him and received no information about him until June. She asked a relative to find out what had happened to him.

They told her that on his return he had prepared everything for the children to travel to Turkey and he was planning on travelling with the children to Turkey. When they boarded the plane to Turkey at Urumqi airport, he was arrested along with his friend Ismail. They were taken to Kashgar 3 days later. Ismail died after 6 days due to the torture – they never released his body. Her children were placed in the care of close relatives in Kashgar.

Relatives went to prison to see her husband but were not allowed to see him. They found out that he had been sentenced to 10 years in prison. He was accused of going to Turkey and sending money to Turkey (Turkey was on a list of countries that was of concern to China in relation to the Uighur Muslims). This information was relayed to her by relatives from officials in China.

As relatives were not allowed to visit him, they bribed officials for information. They were told he was taken to hospital multiple times; on one occasion he was taken as his arms and legs were broken.

In 2017 her relatives requested that she not call again as it was causing problems for them and told that she should come to China and ask for the requested information herself if she wanted to know.

She later learnt that two people from her family had been taken to camps for their communication with her (a husband, who was tortured, and his wife who was eventually allowed to go home).

She came across pictures and videos of one of her daughters in a camp being shared on social media in December 2018. The videos were in Uighur and Chinese and were propaganda videos.

She learnt that her daughter, Sumayyah, was in a camp in another city. She doesn't know where her other children are. Her husband is in jail so he wouldn't know what is happening.

In total she has seven children, her youngest child is with her. Besides Sumayyah, she has no information about the whereabouts of her five other children and fears they may also be in camps or put up for adoption.

Relatives have stopped answering her calls since December 2018 (around the time she saw the video of her daughter) and she fears her older sister may have been taken to a camp as a punishment to stop the family from communicating with her.

Hussain *

Spoke in Uighur, which was translated into Turkish and then translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

He used to be a businessman in China buying and selling properties.

His older children were going to school where teachers bribed them to learn about their families. This was a way for teachers to determine who was violating laws etc. The children were eager to please their teachers and so did not realise the danger their relatives faced.

For example they would put Arabic script on a board and ask the children if they could read it. If they could, this indicated child was being taught Arabic/Quran at home. The children would willingly volunteer this information, at which point teachers would want to know who was teaching them so they could be identified to the authorities. The son of a local imam said he could read Arabic and so his father was arrested for teaching the Quran.

They would also ask questions such as did they get up at dawn in Ramadan, who knows how to pray etc. Children would volunteer information, which would lead to follow up questions for them to determine who exactly was breaking the laws.

After the arrest of the imam he was worried his children would innocently mention the practice of Islam at home, leading to him getting arrested. So he decided to send his kids to Turkey but he would travel to China on business. His business has been seized by the Chinese government since he came to Turkey.

He came to Turkey in January 2016. He had 8 children in China, 3 travelled with him to Turkey, 5 remain in China. 2 of the children left behind in China had passports (Hafsa and Ali), the other children didn't due to restrictions on the number of births allowed.

He purchased tickets to bring Hafsa and Ali to Turkey, along with 3 other relatives. This was in Ramadan 2016 [June/July]. Whilst at the airport his 3 relatives and 2 children were all arrested.

One of his relatives had \$3500, which was his money, they took the money with an official report claiming they had confiscated this.

His sister's son, Zubair, and brother's son, Umar, were arrested at home for helping them try and flee China. Uthman, an acquaintance, had assisted his children and relatives to try and escape. He found out through friends that Uthman was arrested, tortured and his arms and legs broken – his whereabouts were unknown and it is possible he is imprisoned.

After that all his relatives changed their phone numbers as they were afraid of being arrested if he contacted them. To date he does not know where exactly Hafsa and Ali are.

On 05 February 2019 he came across pictures of children in camps on the “We Chat” website. One of the children was his daughter, Hafsa, wearing Buddhist clothes and symbols.

He has 150 or more relatives who can take care of his children in China, but doesn’t know where they are. He can’t contact anyone as they are either in a camp or have changed their number so he doesn’t contact them, to avoid them being punished. He did manage to establish contact with an old friend via “We Chat” using a fake profile, but whenever he asked about his relatives, the chat would end abruptly. One relative told him to never make contact again as he was very ill. Nobody wants to talk to him as phone calls are monitored and if they are caught communicating with him, they fear being arrested or being put in a camp.

The last contact he had with his wife was in August 2016, he thinks she has been taken to a camp.

He has nine children. Three travelled to Turkey with him. Two of his daughters were with their mother until 2016 – after he lost contact with his wife, he doesn’t know what happened to them. Hafsa and Ali were taken at the airport. He has seen pictures of Hafsa in a camp but has no information about Ali and assumes his fate is the same. His youngest child is with her paternal aunt, but as he has lost contact with his sister, he doesn’t know about her situation either. Whilst in Turkey he has started a new relationship and has a son from that relationship.

What little information he has now comes from friends who have escaped to Turkey.

Turkish state police arrested one of his sons after he arrived and kept him for 1 month at the request of the Chinese government. He can’t travel out of Turkey as he cannot return to China and can’t go elsewhere. The Chinese government complains about him regularly. The Turkish state keeps an eye on him and makes him report to the police every month.

Khadija *

Khadija is an ethnic Uighur who is a Kazakh citizen. Spoke in Uighur, which was translated into Turkish and then translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

She has been doing business with China for 20 years, trading in clothing.

On 22 May 2017 she was arrested while at her hotel in Urumchi. She was arrested by 3 officers in civilian clothing. They approached her and asked her to go with them, she was not allowed to take clothes or bags with her. They took her to a building that looked like a police station. She was kept there for 24 hours without food or water. The following day she was sent to a camp.

During her stay at the police station she was placed on a metal chair all night. They kept asking her about whether she had travelled to Turkey, who she knew there, what she knew about Islam, the Quran, prayer etc.

They asked about a young lady named Zahra, who had also been arrested. They had found her number on Zahra's phone. Zahra also had 17000 Yuan on her, which the officers claimed was given to Zahra by her. She denied giving Zahra this money and said that she only knew her as Zahra who worked for a freight company. This was a Uighur owned business that she used to send her goods abroad. The officers asserted links between the freight company and Turkey, and said that she also had those links to Turkey based on her connection to Zahra. She denied this, but they did not believe her. Khadija explained that freight company in question continues to operate and continues to do business with Turkish companies.

After her arrest the officials sent official paperwork to her family which stated that she was a terrorist. Her family made representations to the Chinese authorities that this was wrong, but nobody listened.

She was taken to a camp in Urumqi, with her head covered and hands and feet tied during the journey. She estimates she was kept there for 1 year, 3 months and 10 days. They were not allowed to keep her in the camp as she is a Kazakh citizen, so they gave her a Chinese name as well as a Chinese passport and ID card.

After entering the camp she was given yellow clothing to wear. She saw lots of girls wearing yellow clothing with shackles on their feet. The colour of clothes was based on the crime the person was accused of having committed.

She was placed in cell 500 but she doesn't know how many other cells there were. Everything was in one room – bedding, toilet and bathroom. The number of people was always changing with people being brought in or taken away, but was always overcrowded. The room was for 10 people but there were always more. During the day they were made to sit side by side while not taking part

in mandatory activities. At night they would sleep in shifts of 2 hours – some would sleep and others would stand, and every two hours they would change.

She saw a naked woman on one occasion, she believes the woman had possibly given birth as she was expressing milk.

Once a week they were made to line up in a corridor naked. Ten women in civilian clothes and three men (soldiers with rifles) would make them squat and would search them. Their rooms would also be searched. They administered electric shocks with a rod to anyone they felt was acting out of line.

They were denied water to do ritual ablution to perform religious worship. They were allowed to use the toilet once an hour for 2 minutes - if they violated the time limit they were placed in solitary confinement.

When they wanted to question inmates they would take them to another room where they would be shackled and hooded. She reports that she never had electric shocks used on her but others did. They also used a water hose during the questioning as a form of torture.

She has scars from where she was beaten with sticks at various points during her incarceration. She lost weight drastically while in the camp, she estimates around 20kg; they were given a small glass of water and an extremely small portion of a macaroni type dish 3 times a day.

They would be set daily tasks. There would be no officer present to give instructions. The orders were conveyed via speakers and compliance monitored by CCTV cameras. They were made to sing patriotic Chinese songs, watch programmes about Xi Jinping or write good things about him. They were also made to write down that they would not worship or pray as a Muslim again. If there were no tasks to do they were made to sit silently.

Her experience in the camp made her realise that China is trying to destroy all ethnic identities except Han.

Yahya *

Spoke in Turkish which was translated into English. This is a summary of what was said.

He lived with his father, Imran, mother, Mayam and his sisters, Safiya and Asma.

After the Ghulja massacre in 1997 his father, Imran, was arrested and sentenced to 15 years for helping the rebellion financially. He was never involved in the rebellion. He was a businessman. The authorities arrested many people (writers/ulema/businessmen etc) for helping the rebellion. Some were killed while others imprisoned. From his neighbourhood 7 people were executed after being accused of participating in the rebellion.

The rebellion was for Uighur religious rights. Those accused of taking part in the rebellion were executed, while those accused of helping were jailed.

After his father was jailed, his family was placed under surveillance. Their neighbourhood consisted of both Chinese and Uighurs. Every time someone would visit his family home, someone in the neighbourhood would tell the police that they had a visitor. Police would then come to their home and question them about the guests – he doesn't know if the guests were questioned about the visits.

One of the visitors was a businessman. Following his visit to their home the authorities seized his money and shut down his business. His business and money were now owned by the state, simply for associating with a family who had a member in jail for supporting the Ghulja rebellion.

The family continued to live in the house despite the surveillance they were under.

In 2002 his maternal uncle, Jafar, was sentenced to two years in jail for doing 'tabligh' – teaching religion. Another maternal uncle, Abbas, was also jailed for tabligh in 2003 for three years.

During the 1990s the authorities started implementing a policy in the city to deliver drugs and alcohol for free to young people, as a way of breaking religious and cultural norms amongst Uighur youth. The rebellion in 1997 was partly a reaction to such policies. His uncles were telling young people that drugs were harmful and contrary to Islamic norms. This was the preaching they were jailed for.

In 2008, prior to the Olympic Games, 200 people were arrested in his town, including members of his family. His 65-year-old grandfather, Muhammad, was sentenced to 5 years in jail while an uncle got 7 years. They were arrested for religious activities, including teaching the Quran. His maternal family are very

religious, and so are known by the authorities. The arrests and charges were on the pretext of targeting Uighur terrorism. His relatives had no guns, knives or other weapons. This was just an excuse to arrest people.

His father was kept in jail for 12 years and released in January 2009 because of health problems; the authorities were worried he was about to die. His father recovered after receiving medical treatment outside prison.

Around 2008/2009 checkpoints popped up around the province even though it has a limited population. Whenever his family tried to leave the province for a trip they would be questioned for a long time about where they were going, sometimes they were allowed on their trips, at other times they were made to go back home.

He would hear of friends going to jail, but never heard of trials or what they were charged with or the evidence against them. He also witnessed people being arrested who were under 18. He feared that if he stayed in East Turkestan, the authorities would arrest him [reference to East Turkestan made by interviewee]. His family had a bad reputation in the eyes of the authorities; many relatives had been arrested and were in jail for their religious activities. The authorities also knew who consumed alcohol, drugs, tobacco etc as well who prayed and was religious. So, he felt in danger due to his own family history and religious leanings.

He applied for a passport in 2013 as a regular Chinese citizen, this was refused. He then paid a bribe of \$5000 to get a passport, he felt this was relatively low compared to others. This was because some of his relatives had contact with officials who agreed to help. Others have paid \$30-40,000, and even this didn't guarantee a passport.

He got his passport in January 2014. In March 2014 he travelled to Egypt with his wife and child. He left behind his family and a shop he had in town. Had he put his business on sale before he left people would have thought he was planning to escape and reported him to the authorities.

After he left China, his family had problems with the authorities. They were pressuring the family to make him return and wanting to know what contact they had with him. Sometimes police would question his relatives in their homes and at other times they were taken to the police station. He doesn't know if they were tortured while at the police station.

He didn't feel safe in Egypt so decided to go to Turkey. He was worried that he would be deported from Egypt; in 2017 Egypt deported Uighur students to China (after Morsi was removed). Around 3000 students were removed from Egypt.

His wife gave birth to their second child in Egypt. They travelled to Turkey in September 2014, and have lived there since. They have had a son in Turkey.

In March 2016 his mother came to see him in Turkey and stayed with him for 2 months. She was visiting to see her grandchildren. She returned at the end

of May. After she returned the authorities confiscated her passport and questioned her at the airport. When she returned home, she was arrested. She was questioned for a few days before being released. She never told him over the phone what she was questioned about as they were worried the authorities were listening to calls.

In December 2016 his older sister was arrested at an airport. She was carrying her passport, visa and tickets to go to Turkey to visit him. The authorities took her to Ghulja and showed her a file on his 'crimes'. They questioned her about why she was going to Turkey. She explained she just wanted to see her brother. They told her that the file showed clearly that her brother was a separatist/terrorist.

His sister called him from the police station and asked him about his activities in Turkey. He said he did not participate in anti-Chinese activity in Turkey. She said if he did, she would end all contact with him. Afterwards his family were made to sign a document acknowledging that he was a terrorist and that he took part in separatist activity.

After they released his sister on, she was re-arrested in March 2017 in Urumqi. His mother was arrested from her home at the beginning of April. He learnt of both arrests in 2018. In 2017 a lot of Uighurs in Turkey lost contact with family in China. He was contacted by a cousin in April 2018. His cousin endangered his life by sending the message via WeChat to inform him that his mother had been sentenced to 5 years in jail and his sister 3 years. His cousin was arrested a few days after sending the message. He doesn't know the reason for their arrest and sentencing.

He was later informed that his mother was in a camp for around one month and was released after his sister died in custody. His mother was rearrested 4-5 days later and sentenced to 5 years in jail. He doesn't know if she is being held in a jail or a camp. He doesn't know the source of this information, sometimes police let people know so he assumes that is the source of this information.

His father and other sister were left alone initially. At some point in 2018 they were also arrested – he doesn't know when or why. Someone (identity withheld from him) told him they were arrested at the end of 2018.

In 2017 his grandfather and maternal uncles were sent to a camp along with a number of other relatives. His maternal aunt and her family were also in a camp. All male relatives were placed in a camp – he estimates more than 35 close male relatives were sent to a camp but doesn't know what happened to their wives and children. His father in law had been on the Hajj, while his sister in law and mother in law had both visited Turkey. All were sent to a camp. China is suspicious of any Uighur who visits Turkey, and has placed Turkey on a terror list [a country of concern for China].

His sister in law was caught messaging her sister in Turkey. The fate of many other relatives remains unknown. He believes all were arrested for being Muslim.

His maternal uncle, Salman, was jailed from 2008 to 2011. Whilst in jail he lost his memory, suffered many broken bones and a broken back. When they asked what happened to him in jail he explained that because he prayed they tortured him using electric rods, hanging him from the ceiling by his hands, tying him to a chair and electrocuting him, putting him in sewage water up to his stomach. On one occasion they left him in dark room with a large number of mice, the mice would bite him if he stood still so he had to keep moving. His memory started troubling him after that trauma.

His family has been suffering since 1997. The authorities say they are educating people, but what can they teach his 75-year-old grandfather? His father is a businessman, he doesn't need training. His father is 65 and mother 55. What can they teach them?

They are lying, they are torturing and brainwashing people. Thousands of people have been murdered.

He does not have contact with anyone in China at the moment and whenever he tries to contact someone he gets blocked as people are afraid to contact him.

None of his family have separatist or extremist views. They are being targeted for their religious practice which the authorities view as a crime.

*We desired to show kindness to those
who were oppressed in the land
and to make them leaders
and make them inheritors*

[Qur'an 28:5]

