

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	671
Land:	Kina
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China - Xinjiang
Udgivet:	2. juni 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	12. oktober 2022

2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China — Xinjiang

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Executive Summary

The constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which cites the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), states that citizens "enjoy freedom of religious belief" but limits protections for religious practice to "normal religious activities," without defining "normal." The U.S. government estimated that since April 2017, the government has detained more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and members of other Muslim groups, as well as some Christians, in specially built internment camps or converted detention facilities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) under the national counterterrorism law and the regional counterextremism policy. Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academics estimated the number of individuals detained in internment camps or other facilities was higher. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's (ASPI) analysis of satellite imagery data, the government built or expanded 385 detention centers between 2017 and 2021, including at least 61 between July 2019 and July 2020 and five built during the year. Human rights NGOs and former detainees said authorities subjected individuals to forced disappearance, torture, other physical and psychological abuse, including forced sterilization and sexual abuse, forced labor, political indoctrination, and prolonged detention without trial because of their religion and ethnicity. There were reports that authorities moved tens of thousands of individuals from their home areas to work elsewhere in the region and the country. During the year, multiple organizations found the government's widespread and systematic physical abuses targeting Uyghurs amounted to crimes against humanity and its actions suppressing the group's regenerative capacity amounted to genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention. A legal opinion by a group of British barristers stated there was a "plausible inference" that President Xi Jinping, Zhu Hailun, Deputy Secretary of the Xinjiang People's Congress, and Chen Quanguo, XUAR Party Secretary since 2016, each possessed "the necessary intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group, so as to support a case against them of genocide." The government continued to cite what it called the "three evils" of "ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism" as justification for enacting and enforcing restrictions on religious practices of Muslims and members of non-Muslim religious minority groups. In May and September, the CCP adopted Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy and Administrative Measures for Religious Schools, respectively. These measures placed greater scrutiny and rules on clergy and religious schools to uphold CCP ideological principles. The whereabouts of hundreds of prominent Uyghur intellectuals, religious scholars, cultural figures, doctors, journalists, artists, academics, and other professionals, in addition to many other citizens the government arrested or detained, remained unknown. There were reports of individuals dying of injuries sustained during interrogations, medical neglect, and torture. According to PRC government documents, eyewitness accounts, and victims' statements, the government continued to use family separation, forced sterilization, involuntary birth control, and abortion to reduce the birthrate among Muslims. Authorities continued to implement a variety of different methods, including home inspections, to ensure families were not observing religious practices such as praying, and it banned certain groups from observing Ramadan. According to government sources and eyewitness accounts, the government encouraged – and in some cases required – neighbors to spy on each other. Other surveillance included behavioral profiling and forcing Uyghurs to accept government officials and CCP members living in their homes. Government documents revealed extensive use of surveillance cameras and security checkpoints in public spaces, including religious venues, as well as telephone, online, and financial surveillance. In December, the "Uyghur Tribunal," an international group of attorneys, academics, and NGO representatives, stated surveillance was so pervasive, "*parts of Xinjiang have become, to some of those ethnic minorities, an open-air prison.*" Based on satellite imagery and other sources, researchers estimated authorities had destroyed, damaged, or desecrated approximately 16,000 mosques in the region (65 percent of the total), and demolished a further 30 percent of important Islamic sacred sites. Research conducted in 2020 estimated nearly 900,000 children, including some preschool-aged children, were separated

from their families and living in boarding schools or orphanages, where they studied ethnic Han culture, Mandarin, and CCP ideology. In November, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) issued a report stating the goal of these schools was to erase Uyghur cultural and religious practice from the younger generation. International media reported that in September, state media announced the launch of the “Pomegranate Flower” program, which assigned Han children from across the country as “relatives” to maintain contact with Uyghur toddlers and young children, in what activists and analysts said was a further effort to assimilate Uyghur children and eliminate their language and culture. Textbooks in the Xinjiang Islamic Institute, which trains imams, emphasized the need to “be grateful to the Party” and build a socialist Xinjiang. The government continued to seek to forcibly repatriate Uyghur and other Muslim citizens from overseas and detained some of those who returned. The government harassed and threatened Uyghurs living abroad.

Unequal treatment in society of Uyghur Muslims and Han Chinese continued in parallel with authorities’ suppression of Uyghur language, culture, and religious practices while promoting the Han majority in political, economic, and cultural life. Muslims reported severe societal discrimination in employment and business opportunities, and in travel. A journalist who traveled to the region reported manifestations of Uyghur culture, such as song, dance, and clothing, were packaged as tourist items for visiting Han Chinese in what one Western scholar referred to as the “museumification” of Uyghur culture.

U.S. embassy officials met with national and regional government officials to advocate for the human rights of Uyghur Muslims and members of other Muslim and non-Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang. On January 19, the then Secretary of State publicly announced a determination that since at least March 2017, the government has committed crimes against humanity and genocide against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. On February 16 during a CNN townhall, the President said the United States would continue to speak out against human rights abuses China perpetrated against, among others, Uyghurs. During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic and economic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Xinjiang, including sanctions, visa restrictions, controls on exports and imports, and an updated business advisory raising awareness among U.S.-based companies about the risks of doing business in the region. On June 22, the United States joined a group of 44 countries in issuing a Canada-led joint statement condemning human rights abuses in Xinjiang, as well as the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. On October 21, the United States joined a group of 43 countries in issuing a France-led joint statement condemning human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The embassy and consulates general delivered direct messages about religious freedom in Xinjiang through social media posts and promoted online engagement on the issue of religious freedom for Xinjiang’s ethnic minority Muslim populations.

Section I. Religious Demography

A June report on the XUAR issued by the Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics estimates the total population is 26 million. The report states Uyghurs, along with Kazakh, Hui, Kyrgyz, and members of other predominantly Muslim ethnic minority groups constitute approximately 15 million residents in Xinjiang, or approximately 58 percent of the total population. According to the report, of these, 12 million are Uyghurs. The largest segment of the remaining population is Han Chinese (11 million, approximately 42 percent), with additional groups including Mongols, Tibetans, and others constituting less than 1 percent. Uyghurs are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims. The *Globe and Mail* reported in September 2019 that according to sources in the region, Uyghur and Han Chinese Christians likely number in the thousands.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution, which cites the leadership of the CCP and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong and Xi Jinping Thought, states that citizens “enjoy freedom of religious belief” but limits protections for religious practice to “normal religious activities,” without defining “normal.” The constitution also stipulates the right of citizens to believe in or not believe in any religion. The government recognizes five official religions – Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism. Only religious groups belonging to one of five state-sanctioned “patriotic religious associations” (the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association) representing these religions are permitted to register with the government and legally hold worship services or other religious ceremonies and activities.

The Regulations on Religious Affairs require that religious activity “must not harm national security.” While the regulations stipulate religious groups must abide by the law, safeguard national unity, and respond to “religious extremism,” the term “extremism” is undefined. Measures to safeguard unity and respond to “religious extremism” include monitoring groups, individuals, and institutions, and recommending penalties such as suspending groups and canceling clergy credentials.

In addition to the national counterterrorism law, Xinjiang has its own counterterrorism and “de-extremification” laws that went into effect in 2016 and 2017, respectively, containing similar provisions to the national law regarding “religious extremism.” These laws ban wearing long beards, full-face coverings, and religious dress; expanding halal practice beyond food and daily prayer; and “interfering” with family planning, weddings, funerals, or inheritance, among other provisions. The law limits the information that may be released to the public following an incident the government defines as a terror attack.

Regional regulations passed in 2018 to implement the national counterterrorism law permit the establishment of “vocational skills education training centers” (which the government also calls “education centers” and “education and transformation establishments”) to “carry out antiextremist ideological education.” The regulations stipulate that “institutions such as vocational skill education training centers should carry out training sessions on the common national language, laws and regulations, and vocational skills, and carry out antiextremist ideological education, and psychological and behavioral correction to promote thought transformation of trainees and help them return to the society and family.”

CCP members and retired government officials, including Uyghurs, are required to be atheists and are forbidden from engaging in religious practices. CCP members who are found to belong to religious organizations are subject to various types of punishment, including termination of their employment and expulsion from the CCP.

Regulations in Xinjiang’s capital, Urumqi, prohibit veils that cover the face, homeschooling children, and “abnormal beards.” A separate regulation bans the practice of religion in government buildings and the wearing of clothes associated with “religious extremism.” Neither “abnormal” nor “religious extremism” are defined in law. Similar regulations are in effect in other parts of Xinjiang.

Authorities in the XUAR have defined 26 religious activities, including some practices of Islam, Christianity, and Tibetan Buddhism, as illegal without prior government authorization. Regional regulations stipulate no classes, scripture study groups, or religious studies courses may be offered by any group or institution without prior government approval. No religious group may carry out any religious activities, including preaching, missionary work, proselytizing, and ordaining clergy, without government approval. Regional regulations also ban editing, translation, publication, printing, reproduction, production, distribution, sale, and dissemination of religious publications and audiovisual products without authorization.

Xinjiang officials require minors to complete nine years of compulsory public education before they may receive religious education outside of school. Xinjiang regulations also forbid minors from participating in religious activities and impose penalties on organizations and individuals who “organize, entice, or force” minors to participate in religious activities. A regulation in effect since 2016 further bans any form of religious activity in Xinjiang schools and stipulates parents or guardians who “organize, lure, or force minors into religious activities” may be stopped by anyone and reported to police. Xinjiang’s regional version of the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law states children affected by ethnic separatism, extremism, and terrorism, and/or committing offenses that seriously endanger society but do not warrant a criminal punishment may be sent to “specialized schools for correction” at the request of their parents, guardians, or the school.

The State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) issued new regulations, effective May 1, entitled “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” that require all clergy to pledge allegiance to the PRC and socialism and that create a database of “religious personnel” to track their performance. Article 3 of the regulations states clergy “should love the motherland, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, support the socialist system, abide by the constitution, laws, regulations, and rules, practice the core values of socialism, adhere to the principle of independent and self-administered religion in China, adhere to the direction of the Sinicization of religion in China, and operate to maintain national unity, religious harmony, and social stability.” Article 6 states, in part, clergy should “resist illegal religious activities and religious extremist ideology, and resist infiltration by foreign forces using religion.” Article 41 states “entrance to religious places of worship should be regulated through strict gatekeeping, verification of identity, and registration.” The regulations also stipulate that authorities will hold religious organizations and institutions responsible for the behavior of individual religious clergy. Article 7 stipulates religious staff should “focus on improving their own quality, improving their cultural and moral literacy, studying the contents of doctrines and regulations that are conducive to social harmony, progress of the times, and health and civilization, and integrate [these values and practices] into preaching, and play a role in promoting the Sinicization of religion in our country.”

In addition to these nationwide rules, XUAR regulations on the administration of religious affairs, revised in 2014, require clerics to “uphold the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, safeguard the reunification of the motherland and ethnic unity, be patriotic and loyal, and have high prestige and religious knowledge.”

The SARA also issued new regulations on September 1 requiring all religious schools to teach Xi Jinping Thought and adhere to the “Sinicization of religion.”

The Islamic Association of China, managed by the SARA under the leadership of the United Front Work Department, passed regulations in 2019 regarding the qualifications for Muslim clerics throughout the country. The national-level regulations require Muslim clerics to meet the following requirements: “uphold the leadership of the CCP; love Islam and serve Muslims; possess a degree or receive formal training in Islamic scriptural education; have graduated from junior high school or above, in addition to attaining competency in Arabic; and be at least 22 years old.”

To apply to become a cleric, applicants first need to submit an “Application Form for the Qualification of Islamic Clerics.” In addition, they must provide a certificate of education from an Islamic school, an education certificate from junior high school or above, and a physical examination certificate issued by a designated hospital (including items such as “mental history”). Applicants are also required to submit a household registration certificate and national identification card. The applicant must receive a letter of recommendation written by the Administration of Islamic Activity Sites where the applicant’s household registration is located and submit it to the Islamic Association of the province, autonomous region, or municipality after review and approval by the local Islamic Association.

On September 28, the Standing Committee of the 13th People’s Congress of XUAR adopted “Regulations of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region on the Construction of Public Safety,” effective on January 1, 2022. The regulations instruct authorities to “crack down” on “ethnic separatist forces, evil terrorist forces, religious extremist forces, and other illegal and criminal activities that endanger national security[.]” The regulations also call for “control[ing] illegal religious activities, illegal religious propaganda materials, and illegal religious network dissemination in accordance with the law, and continu[ing] to promote de-radicalization.” The regulations further state authorities will “carry out anti-cult or xie jiao [literally ‘heterodox teachings’] propaganda and education,” prevent and crack down on various “cult” organizations, and effectively educate and reform the individuals involved in “cults.” The regulations also call for full implementation across the entire XUAR of a grid system of social surveillance that had previously been used only in certain parts of the region.

Government Practices

According to media and NGO reports, the central government and XUAR authorities continued to cite what they called the “three evils” of “ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and violent terrorism” as justification to enact and enforce restrictions on religious practices of Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and members of other Muslim and non-Muslim religious groups. Police raids and the government’s restrictions on Islamic practices continued throughout the year.

On January 26, barristers Alison Macdonald, Jackie McArthur, Naomi Hart, and Lorraine Aboagye of the Essex Court Chambers published an opinion entitled *International Criminal Responsibility for Crimes against Humanity and Genocide against the Uyghur Population in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* (the Essex Court Chambers Opinion). The opinion stated, “There is evidence of crimes against humanity being committed against the Uyghur population, within the meaning of Art. 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. First, there is sufficient evidence to conclude the existence of a widespread and systematic attack on the Uyghur population of the XUAR, within the meaning of Art. 7. Second, there is sufficient evidence to amount to an arguable case that, as part of that attack, the *actus reus* [physical elements of the crime] requirements for the following specific crimes against humanity have been fulfilled: (a) Enslavement... by the use of forced labour by former and current inmates of detention facilities. (b) Imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty... constituted by widescale deprivations of liberty of members of the Uyghur population held in detention facilities without charge or trial. (c) Torture... in detention facilities, including the use of ‘tiger chairs’ [immobilizing chairs] and sexual violence. (d) Rape... in detention facilities. (e) Enforced sterilization... of Uyghur women, as part of efforts to reduce the Uyghur population. (f) Persecution... ranging from the deprivation of liberty to sexual violence and enslavement, directed against persons on the basis that they are members of the Uyghur population and/or Muslim. (g) Enforced disappearance... of members of the Uyghur population.”

The Essex Court Chambers Opinion stated, “We consider that there is evidence that the crime of genocide is currently being committed in XUAR. First, the Uyghur population of XUAR constitutes an ethnical group within the meaning of Art. 6 of the Rome Statute. Second, it is at least arguable on the available evidence that there is an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, the Uyghur population of

XUAR as such. The evidence also demonstrates that the *acta rei* [physical elements of the crime] listed below are taking place in the context of a ‘manifest pattern of similar conduct’ directed against the Uyghur population. Third, in our view, there is sufficient evidence to amount to an arguable case that the *actus reus* requirements for the following specific crimes of genocide have been fulfilled, with respect to members of the Uyghur population: (a) Causing serious bodily or mental harm... to Uyghurs in detention, including acts of torture and forced sterilisations. (b) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group. (c) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.” The opinion further stated there was a “plausible inference” that Xi Jinping; Zhu Hailun, Deputy Secretary of the Xinjiang People’s Congress; and Chen Quanguo, Party Secretary of XUAR since 2016, each “possesse[d] the necessary intent to destroy the Uyghurs as a group, so as to support a case against them of genocide.” The opinion also stated, “China is a tightly controlled single-party State. It is therefore highly unlikely that an attack on the scale of that which the evidence reveals, and especially systematic detention on such a scale, would be carried out by State authorities other than on the orders of senior State officials.”

In March, think tank Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy released a report entitled *The Uyghur Genocide: An Examination of China’s Breaches of the 1948 Genocide Convention*. The report examined whether China was committing genocide against Uyghurs as defined by Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The report included contributions of more than 30 scholars and researchers and found that the PRC bears responsibility for committing genocide against Uyghurs. The report stated, “High-level officials gave orders to ‘round up everyone who should be rounded up,’ ‘wipe them out completely,’ ‘break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections and break their origins.’” The report stated the PRC also pursued a “dual systematic campaign of forcibly sterilizing Uyghur women of childbearing age and interning Uyghur men of child-bearing years, preventing the regenerative capacity of the group.”

On April 19, international NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) released a 53-page report entitled *“Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots”: China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims*, authored with assistance from Stanford Law School’s Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Clinic. Based on research conducted by the authors, reports by human rights organizations, media, activist groups, and others, and internal CCP documents, the report found that “[s]ince at least 2014, the Chinese government has subjected Turkic Muslims to various crimes against humanity, including mass arbitrary detention, torture and deaths in detention, and enforced disappearances.”

In June, UK-based NGO Amnesty International released a 160-page report entitled *“Like We Were Enemies in a War”: China’s Mass Internment, Torture and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang*, documenting the accounts of more than 50 former detainees who experienced torture, violence, and other mistreatment in detention camps. The report detailed the government’s systematic use of detention and “re-education” centers to target Uyghurs and members of other ethnic minority groups living in Xinjiang. The report concluded “members of the predominately Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang have been subjected to an attack meeting all the contextual elements of crimes against humanity,” and that the evidence demonstrated the PRC government had at least committed the crimes against humanity of “imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law; torture; and persecution.” The report also stated security officials’ use of rape and sexual violence constituted a crime against humanity as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Article 7(1)(g) “Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilizations, and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity.”

In November, the USHMM Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide released a 60-page report entitled *“To Make Us Slowly Disappear”: The Chinese Government’s Assault on the Uyghurs*. The report stated the USHMM was “gravely concerned that the Chinese government may be committing genocide against the Uyghurs.” It further built on the USHMM’s March 2020 announcement that “there was a reasonable basis to believe that the CCP had perpetrated the crimes against humanity of persecution and of imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty against Uyghurs.” USHMM stated, “This report analyzes additional information available in English in the public domain concerning the treatment of China’s Uyghur community in Xinjiang, and finds there is now a reasonable basis to believe that the crimes against humanity of forced sterilization, sexual violence, enslavement, torture, and forcible transfer are also being committed.”

On December 9, the “Uyghur Tribunal,” an international group of attorneys, academics, and NGO representatives, released its “Summary Judgment.” Based on the tribunal’s research and investigation, including the use of eyewitness testimonies, it concluded “in Xinjiang and at the hands of some part or parts of the PRC government and the CCP: (a) Hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs – with some estimates well in excess of a million – have been detained by PRC authorities without any, or any remotely sufficient reason, and subjected to acts of unconscionable cruelty, depravity and inhumanity. Sometimes up to 50 have been detained in a cell of 22 square metres [240 square feet] so that it was not possible for all to lie on concrete (or similar) floors, with buckets for toilets to be used in view of all in the cell, observed at every moment by CCTV. (b) Many of those detained have been tortured for no reason, by such methods as: pulling off fingernails; beating with sticks;

detaining in 'tiger chairs' where feet and hands were locked in position for hours or days without break; confined in containers up to the neck in cold water; and detained in cages so small that standing or lying was impossible. (c) Many of those detained have been shackled by heavy metal weights at their feet and sometimes with feet and hands connected, immobilised for months on end. (d) Detained women – and men – have been raped and subjected to extreme sexual violence. One young woman of twenty or twenty-one was gang raped by policemen in front of an audience of a hundred people all forced to watch. (e) Women detainees have had their vaginas and rectums penetrated by electric shock rods and iron bars. Women were raped by men paying to be allowed into the detention centre for the purpose. (f) Detainees were fed with food barely sufficient to sustain life and frequently insufficient to sustain health, food that could be withheld at whim to punish or humiliate. (g) Detainees were subjected to solitary confinement in cells permanently dark or permanently lit, deprived of sleep for days at a time and ritually humiliated."

According to multiple human rights NGOs and academic sources, authorities held more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Hui, and members of other Muslim groups as well as some Christians, in a vast network of camps since 2017, many of them co-located with factories, where sources said detainees were subjected to forced labor and "reeducation." Several human rights groups estimated the number of individuals interned to be up to 3.5 million. The government continued to use detentions to implement a XUAR-specific counterextremism policy that identifies "extremist" behavior (including growing beards, wearing headscarves, and abstaining from alcohol) in concert with the National Counterterrorism Law, which contains provisions on "religious extremism."

In September, the Jamestown Foundation released academic research providing evidence that the PRC's top government officials were closely involved in the creation of the internment camp system in Xinjiang. The research, based on an examination of government documents and state-run media commentary, found that the "XUAR De-Extremification Regulation" was spearheaded by three government bodies: the Central Committee Xinjiang Work Coordination Small Group, the Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in Beijing, and the SARA. Two of the three institutions were under the direct supervision of Li Zhanshu and Wang Yang, members of the CCP's seven-person Politburo Standing Committee, the CCP's highest-ranking body.

Researchers at ASPI's International Cyber Policy Centre continued to maintain the Xinjiang Data Project, an online database that uses satellite imagery, PRC government documents, official statistics, and other sources to document human rights abuses in the region. The project locates, maps, and analyzes suspected detention facilities. According to the data, the government built or expanded 385 detention centers between 2017 and 2021, including at least 61 facilities built or expanded between July 2019 and July 2020 and five built during the year. Based on satellite imagery analysis of security features including high perimeter walls, watchtowers, internal fencing, and other features and usage patterns, analysts concluded 109 were low security facilities, 94 were medium security facilities, 72 were high security facilities, and 110 were maximum security facilities.

In July, *BuzzFeed News* published an analysis of the scale of the detention centers in Xinjiang and concluded that "China has built space to lock up at least 1.01 million people in Xinjiang at the same time," i.e., one in every 25 residents in the region. The news outlet stated this was likely an underestimate, based on accounts of former detainees who described overcrowded conditions in the detention centers.

In July, authorities permitted an Associated Press (AP) reporter to enter a detention camp in Dabancheng, north of Urumqi. In its subsequent article, AP estimated the site could hold approximately 10,000 people. The article stated detainees all wore uniforms and sat with "their legs crossed in [the] lotus position and their backs ramrod straight, numbered and tagged, gazing at a television playing grainy black-and-white images of Chinese Communist Party history." AP reported 25-foot-tall concrete walls surrounded the camp, with watchtowers and topped with electric wire as well as face-scanning turnstiles and guards holding rifles placed at the entrance. The AP also described rooms in which inmates could speak through computers to lawyers, relatives, and police as well as medical rooms with instructions on the wall instructing staff on procedures to deal with sick inmates and to force-feed inmates on hunger strikes. The AP stated that although the government claimed in 2019 it had closed "training centers," satellite imagery and interviews with experts and former detainees suggested it converted some, like Dabancheng, into prisons or pretrial detention facilities.

In September, former detainee Baqitali Nur told the *Guardian* that surveillance cameras were ubiquitous in detention camps. "Inside the cell, here was a camera, there was a camera, on all sides and angles there were cameras," he said. "The only camera-free place was where the toilet was." The *Guardian* reported at least four other survivors who testified recalled cells and facilities that were surveilled from floor to ceiling. In April, the *New Yorker* reported that former detainee Anar Sabit, an ethnic Kazakh, said there were cameras even in the toilet and shower areas.

The *Financial Times* reported in October that one researcher who studied Xinjiang's internment system indicated the detention facilities were the largest internment of a religious minority since the Second World War. According to the researcher, some detainees were able to escape punishment with displays of loyalty, but "those who lacked these masks were dehumanised under the lights and cameras of the camps."

There were numerous reports of individuals being incarcerated, sometimes for lengthy periods of time, held under harsh conditions, physically and sexually abused, and subjected to involuntary sterilization. Many individuals disappeared in prior years, but relatives only learned what happened to them during the year. Some ethnic Uyghur and Kazakh individuals who had been held in detention facilities managed to emigrate abroad during the year, where they were able to speak with human rights NGOs and journalists about their experiences. Local observers said many incidents related to abuses or pressure on Uyghurs and other Muslims went unreported to international media or NGOs due to government restrictions on the free flow of information.

In October, CNN interviewed a former Chinese police officer who served multiple tours in Xinjiang and was directly involved in the severe physical mistreatment and violence undertaken against Uyghurs and other ethnic minority communities. The former police officer stated 150,000 police officers had been recruited to participate in the province-wide "strike hard" campaign and that there were arrest quotas they had to meet. The officer stated, "We took (them) all forcibly overnight. If there were hundreds of people in one county in this area, then you had to arrest these hundreds of people." During interrogations, police officers would "kick them, beat them (until they're) bruised and swollen... Until they kneel on the floor crying." "Interrogation" methods included shackling people to a metal or wooden "tiger chair" (rendering them immobile), sexual violence against men and women, electrocutions, and waterboarding. The source said guards forced inmates to stay awake for days and denied them food and water. Authorities accused detainees of terror offenses, but the source said he believed "none" of the hundreds of prisoners he was involved in arresting had committed a crime.

On October 23, the *Globe and Mail* published the account of one Uyghur woman's experiences teaching Chinese in a detention the camp where she described a systematic "dehumanization" campaign targeting the detainees. Due to overcrowding, detainees had to take turns sleeping on the concrete floor. Many of the cells did not have toilets, so detainees used a bucket that they were permitted to empty once a week. According to the *Globe and Mail*, detainees "took on a haunted expression that came with the physical and psychological violence that permeated the camp. The detainees became deeply fearful. Their voices trembled when they answered questions in class."

In June, *Deutsche Welle* reported that during the year several members of the Uyghur diaspora learned authorities had arrested their family members and sentenced them to lengthy prison terms. Sources in Xinjiang confirmed to *Deutsche Welle* that authorities sentenced the brother and sister of Uyghur linguist and refugee from Xinjiang Abduweli Ayup to 14 years and 12 years in prison, respectively. According to Ayup, police had arrested and detained 72 Uyghurs associated with him.

In May, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that Mihray Erkin, Abduweli Ayup's niece, died in November 2020 while being held in an internment camp. Authorities had detained her after she returned to Kashgar (Chinese: Kashi) Prefecture from Japan in August 2019, reportedly at the insistence of her parents. A source from her hometown told RFA that authorities falsified a medical report stating she died of a disease and forced her family members to record video testimonies stating she had this disease and that she died at home. The source said her death may instead have been the result of abuse suffered during interrogation.

RFA reported in July that sources confirmed Uyghur anthropology Professor Rahile Dawut of Xinjiang University, who had been missing and presumed detained since 2017, was sentenced to prison. The charges, length of sentence, and whereabouts of Dawut remained unknown at year's end.

RFA reported in December that sources confirmed Uyghur Shazadigul Tomur died from an unknown stomach ailment while working in a forced labor facility after authorities had denied her medical treatment. Sources told RFA that authorities detained Tomur in 2018 and eventually sent her to an internment camp where they forced her to work in a sock factory. Tomur reportedly informed camp officials that she had severe abdominal pain, but authorities ignored her repeated requests for medical treatment. Sources told RFA that in September 2020 she began vomiting blood, lost consciousness, and eventually died. RFA reported local officials confirmed the details of her detention and death.

In December, RFA reported authorities confirmed a retired Uyghur civil servant, Niyaz Nasir, died in an internment camp in late 2020. According to RFA sources, officials detained Nasir in 2018, although the details of his arrest were still unknown. Nasir's family reportedly requested authorities release him in 2018 due to his deteriorating health, but officials rejected the family's request.

Sources stated authorities continued to use detailed information to rank citizens' "trustworthiness" using various criteria. The *Economist* in 2018 described the rankings as "explicitly racist: people are suspected merely on account of their ethnicity." According to the *Economist*, being labelled "untrustworthy" could lead to being detained by authorities. Officials deemed individuals as trustworthy, average, or untrustworthy depending on how they fit into the following categories: ages 15 to 55 years old (i.e., of military age); of Uyghur ethnicity; unemployed; possessed religious knowledge; prayed five times a day; had a passport; had ever overstayed a visa; wore religious clothing or had long beards; had family members living abroad; homeschooled their children (which was prohibited throughout the country); or had visited one of the "sensitive countries." According to HRW, the 26 "sensitive countries" were Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

RFA reported that in January, Haji Mirzahid Kerimi, an 82-year-old poet, died while serving an 11-year sentence in a Xinjiang prison for publishing "problematic" books on Uyghur history. PRC authorities had previously banned five books written by Kerimi and sentenced him in 2017 despite his significant health issues. According to RFA, an anonymous prison official said Kerimi "jumped and fell."

In February, the *New Yorker* published the accounts of several former detainees, all of whom had been detained in 2017 or later. Erbaqyt Otarbai, an ethnic Kazakh, described lengthy interrogations after being detained for having WhatsApp – which authorities described as "illegal software" – on his phone. Otarbai stated authorities beat him and kept him for long periods of time in "tiger chairs," and that he witnessed the torture of other detainees.

The *New Yorker* article also described a similar experience for Aynur, a primary school teacher, and her husband Nurlan Kokteubai, a mathematics teacher, both ethnic Kazakhs. They had been living in Kazakhstan since 2011, but in 2017 the Party secretary of Aynur's former school in Chapchal County contacted her by phone and WeChat insisting she return to Xinjiang. She arrived in Xinjiang in 2017 after authorities told her she would only need to stay for two weeks. Once there, however, authorities required her to remain longer, so her husband joined her three months later. Police accused Kokteubai of being "under suspicion of having dealings with individuals suspected of terrorist activities." While her husband was detained, authorities forced Aynur to attend "reeducation" training and Mandarin language lessons.

In March, RFA reported that Uyghur textile trader and entrepreneur Kurbanjan Abdukerim had died four days after his February 23 release from an internment camp in Atush (Atushi) City, Kizilsu Kirghiz (Kezileisu Keerkezi) Autonomous Prefecture. While RFA was unable to confirm the exact details of Abdukerim's cause of death, he had reportedly lost more than 100 pounds during three years of imprisonment in an internment camp beginning in early 2018, which raised questions as to whether his death was linked to malnutrition or an infectious disease. Authorities originally imprisoned him for traveling to Mecca several years earlier, which was legal at the time.

In April, the *New Yorker* reported that ethnic Kazakh Sabit from Kuytun City, Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture, who emigrated to Canada, returned to Xinjiang via Kazakhstan in 2017 to manage the affairs of her recently deceased father. At the airport in Urumqi when she tried to depart, authorities flagged her for detainment and "reeducation" due to her international travel. Authorities transferred Sabit back to Kuytun, where they detained and interrogated her for 19 days. They forced her to undergo a medical exam that included giving blood and urine samples, and taking an electrocardiogram, an ultrasound, and a chest X-ray. At the police station, officers took photographs, fingerprints, and a DNA sample. Authorities gave her an iris scan and compelled her to speak into a microphone to capture her voiceprint. The *New Yorker* article said this data was uploaded to the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP), a massive database authorities in Xinjiang maintain that collects a variety of personal information on the lives and movements of individuals. After being initially told she would be allowed to leave the country, officials rearrested Sabit and sent her to a "reeducation" camp where she and other detainees lived in overcrowded conditions and under constant surveillance – including in the toilet and shower areas – and studied CCP propaganda. Sabit said she and the other women had to learn communist songs and sing them loudly before each meal. If they did not show sufficient zeal, guards threatened to withhold food. After 20 months in detention, authorities finally allowed Sabit to leave the country.

In HRW's report *"Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots,"* the NGO reported that ethnic Uyghur Mihrigul Tursun witnessed physical and psychological punishment, ill-treatment, and poor medical care during her time in the detention camps. During a three-month period, she said she witnessed nine deaths. She described "being stripped naked, forced to undergo a medical examination, and being electroshocked and beaten" during interrogations. According to Tursun, 40 to 68 women, chained at the wrists and ankles, were placed in the same 420 square-foot underground cell in which they were expected to urinate and defecate. The cell "had just one small hole in the ceiling for ventilation."

In May, RFA reported that Uyghur businessman Abduhelil Hashim from Ghulja (Yining), Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, died under mysterious circumstances while being treated at a prison hospital. A court had sentenced Hashim in 2020 for “religious extremism.” According to the report, 40 years earlier, Hashim had received religious education from a neighbor, which was the basis for his conviction of extremism. RFA and family members requested more information on the cause of death, but the hospital nurse said the cause was “unclear.” Hashim’s nephew stated he believed Hashim may have died as a result of torture or other mistreatment while in prison.

In September, RFA reported that Yaqub Haji, a Uyghur businessman who donated money for the construction of a mosque in Ghulja, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, and was later arrested for “religious extremism” in 2018, was tortured and died in an internment camp. A friend told RFA that officials tortured Haji because he would not confess to the “crime” of contributing money to the construction of religious buildings.

In December, the *New York Post* reported Tursunay Ziyawudun’s account of detainment in a “reeducation” center in northern Xinjiang. Authorities detained Ziyawudun in 2017 and again in 2018. She reported camp officials required her to sing patriotic songs and told her that Islam did not exist. While in the camp, she said, “I was gang-raped and my private parts were tortured with electricity.” She also reported that officials required her to take “sterilization pills,” which she said rendered her unable to have children.

In February 2020, *Foreign Policy* reported authorities detained Hui Muslims in Xinjiang for travel overseas, including to Pakistan, for work or study, accessing religious content on the internet, performing the Hajj, and visiting mosques. According to one former detainee, authorities treated all Muslim prisoners the same. “It didn’t matter if you were Uighur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Hui... If you had gone to a mosque before, you were there.”

In October, RFA reported that Uyghur imam Qeyimahun Qari died in 2018 after spending two years in an internment camp. Sources said police frequently interrogated Qari inside the camp to try to obtain information on Uyghurs who came to his mosque, and they tortured him when he declined to reveal their names and personal details. Sources also said 59-year-old Qari was healthy at the time of his arrest in 2017 and had previously survived a 15-year prison sentence. The sources said this incident showed recent conditions in the detention camps were harsher than in prisons and other detention facilities before 2017.

In March, Amnesty International reported that Ekpar Asat, a Uyghur journalist and entrepreneur, held a three-minute video conversation with his family in late January. This was his first contact with family since April 2016, when public security officers detained him. Asat reportedly told family members that his health was declining both physically and mentally. His family said Asat had lost significant weight and that he looked pale and had many black spots on his face.

In December, *Metro News* reported that Omer Faruh’s two youngest daughters, ages five and six, had been missing for five years after he, his wife, and two eldest daughters fled Xinjiang. In 2016, Faruh’s wife Meryem called him while he was visiting Saudi Arabia to inform him that authorities had ordered her and their two eldest daughters to turn over their passports. Meryem and the two eldest daughters were able to book flights out of the country. The family left the two youngest daughters, who did not have passports, with Meryem’s parents in Xinjiang. Faruh told *Metro News* that he learned authorities had sent Meryem’s parents to internment camps in 2017.

RFA reported in April that sources learned authorities in Kashgar (Kashi) Prefecture had sentenced renowned Uyghur author Ahtam Omer in a 2018 secret trial to 20 years in prison for “separatism.” Authorities arrested Omer on March 12, 2017, and held him incommunicado. In 2020, authorities included a collection of Omer’s short stories entitled *Child of the Eagle* in a book burning campaign. Sources told RFA authorities arrested Omer, his brother Anwar Omer, and his nephew Iskander Omer ostensibly because Ahtam had sent Iskander to study in Egypt and sent money to him.

In October, the U.S.-based NGO Chinese Human Rights Defenders reported on the arrest and disappearance of three Uyghur intellectuals: Gheytratjan Osman, a professor of Uyghur language and literature at Xinjiang University whom authorities arrested in 2018 and sentenced to 10 years in prison for “separatism”; Qeyum Muhammad, an actor and associate professor at the Xinjiang Institute of Arts; and Tursunjan Nurmamat, a medical researcher at Shanghai Tongji University whom authorities arrested in April.

In September, the NGO Campaign for Uyghurs marked the third anniversary of the disappearance of Gulshan Abbas, a Uyghur doctor missing since September 2018, and noted that the PRC had held her prisoner to “punish family members for speaking the truth about the Chinese regime’s genocidal crimes against humanity.” In December 2020, human rights groups and family members reported

that authorities had sentenced Abbas to 20 years in prison on terrorism-related charges. The government issued the sentence in March 2019 following a secret trial, but Abbas' family only learned of the sentence in December 2020.

In April, USA Today reported that ethnic Uyghur Imamjan Ibrahim, a doctor and medical researcher living in Boston, disappeared in 2017 when he traveled back to Kashgar to visit his parents. Friends in the United States told USA Today they feared PRC authorities had detained him and taken him to an internment camp. A Uyghur American friend who tried to learn his whereabouts said two Uyghur women contacted her and said authorities had released Ibrahim and he was in good condition, but the friend said she thought this was a lie.

In March, Amnesty International profiled several Uyghur families living outside China whose children had disappeared as a result of the government's detention campaign. Mihriban Kader and Ablikim Memtinin left their four children with grandparents when they fled to Italy in 2016 after facing harassment from Xinjiang authorities. Authorities detained the children's grandparents soon thereafter and sent the four children to various orphanages and boarding schools. When Kader and Memtinin received approval in Italy to have their children join them, PRC authorities seized the children on their way to the Italian consulate in Shanghai. Kader stated, "Now my children are in the hands of the Chinese government and I am not sure I will be able to meet them again in my lifetime."

There were multiple reports that individuals sexually assaulted women in internment camps. On February 2, the BBC published accounts of several former detainees and one guard stating they experienced or saw evidence of an organized system of mass rape, sexual abuse, and torture. Tursunay Ziyawudun said authorities removed women from the cells "every night" and one or more masked Han Chinese men raped them. She said she was raped and sexually assaulted on three occasions over the course of her nine-month detention, each time by two or three men. She also witnessed masked men taking several other women away to a "black room" where there were no surveillance cameras. She also described authorities forcibly fitting women with intrauterine devices (IUDs) or sterilizing them. Gulzira Auelkhan, an ethnic Kazakh woman who was detained for 18 months in the camp system, told the BBC that authorities forced her to strip Uyghur women naked and handcuff them, before leaving them alone with Han Chinese men. She said Han Chinese civilians from outside the camp also assaulted detainees and "would pay money to have their pick of the prettiest young inmates." She stated the camp had a system of organized rape. One female detainee told the BBC that prison guards raped her with an electric baton. Sayragul Sauytbay, a former teacher forced to work in the camps, said rape was common and described an incident in which police took turns raping a woman in front of 100 other inmates. During the attack, "they watched people closely and picked out anyone who resisted, clenched their fists, closed their eyes, or looked away, and took them for punishment."

In February, *Bitter Winter*, an online publication that tracks religious liberty and human rights abuses in the country, reported that sexual abuse, including rape, of males, in particular younger boys, was a regular rather than an occasional occurrence in internment camps. Amnesty International also reported camp officials raped male detainees.

In March, Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy reported that former detainees described "systematic mass rape and other sexual abuse in the detention facilities. There [were] also accounts of gang rapes perpetrated by security officials, including references to masked men, the use of an electrified stick," and other methods. Authorities attempted to sexually humiliate detainees by forcing them to "routinely undress, squat in the nude, and smear ground chili pepper paste on their genitals in the shower while filmed." Multiple women said there were surveillance cameras in both toilet and shower facilities, giving detainees no privacy when using them.

In October, CNN reported a former Xinjiang police officer stated he witnessed security officials at the detention centers using sexual torture methods to extract confessions. He said, "We would tie two electrical wires on the tips [of an electric baton] and set the wires on their genitals while the person is tied up." Uyghur scholar Abduwli Ayup stated he was gang raped while in police custody in 2013 after authorities arrested him for teaching the Uyghur language at a kindergarten.

In May, BBC reported that since 2014, the PRC had imprisoned or detained at least 630 Muslim religious leaders in Xinjiang. Many of the detained clerics faced charges such as "propagating extremism," "gathering a crowd to disturb social order," and "inciting separatism." According to testimonies of relatives, these charges stemmed from activities such as preaching, leading prayer groups, and other regular activities of imams. The BBC article drew from a joint Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)-Justice for All report, which stated that of the 630 detained Muslim religious leaders, authorities sentenced 304 to prison rather than sending them to the "reeducation camps." Court documents or testimony indicated 96 percent received sentences of at least five years, with 26 percent receiving sentences of 20 years or more, including 14 individuals who received life sentences. The UHRP-Justice for All report also found evidence that 18 religious figures had died in detention or shortly after their release. Several media outlets reported religious figures, students, imams, and persons who prayed regularly often received lengthy prison sentences.

In February, RFA reported that sources learned that in 2019, authorities sentenced Abdusalam Rozi from Ghulja County, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, to 18 years in prison in a case that was “connected to politics.” Authorities had previously arrested Rozi in 1998 and sentenced him to 18 years in prison on charges of “splitting the country and distributing antigovernment propaganda” following protests in 1997. RFA stated there were other reports of authorities resentencing political prisoners as punishment or for not being “thoroughly reformed.”

In July, Bloomberg News reported PRC authorities continued to deny European Union diplomats access to Xinjiang on the grounds that the diplomats wanted to meet with Uyghur economist Ilham Tohti, whom authorities sentenced in 2014 to life imprisonment for “separatism.” Xinjiang government spokesman Xu Guixiang stated, “They want to talk to Ilham and other criminals – this is disrespect for China’s sovereignty.” Before his imprisonment, Tohti was a professor at Minzu University of China in Beijing and an outspoken critic of relations between Uyghurs and the Han majority. The European Parliament awarded him the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2019.

RFA reported in February that in 2017, authorities in Kashgar Prefecture sentenced Obulqasim Abdurehim, a Uyghur engineer, and 13 other individuals he associated with in a *meshrep*, a fraternal organization that is traditional in Uyghur culture, to lengthy prison terms for “illegal gathering and organizing.” Authorities interrogated Abdurehim for more than six months to force him to admit that 10 years earlier he had paid a fine rather than comply with authorities’ demands that his wife abort their third child – a violation of regulations at the time that restricted ethnic minorities to two children per family. Authorities reportedly claimed Abdurehim and his wife’s refusal to get an abortion constituted evidence of “religious extremism” and sentenced him to 17 years in prison. RFA sources learned in February that another member of the meshrep, Kashgar Prefecture transportation chief Abliz Tohtaji, received seven years in prison for his involvement with the meshrep.

RFA reported in February that it had confirmed authorities sentenced Bakihami Helil, a Uyghur student from Atush City, Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture, to nine years in prison in 2017 for being “opposed to national education” and “pos[ing] a danger” to China. Helil was among 5,000 other Uyghur students Xinjiang authorities ordered to return starting in 2017. Helil had been studying religion in Egypt, but authorities threatened to harass his family if he did not return to Atush City.

According to RFA, in March, authorities upheld the conviction of Mamatali Kashgarli, an ethnic Uyghur and Turkish national, for “terrorist activities.” He was arrested in 2017 and sentenced the same year, although a court overturned the case in 2018. At the retrial, the court reinstated Kashgarli’s 15-year prison sentence. RFA sources indicated that Kashgarli returned to Xinjiang from Turkey in 2001. His family told RFA that Kashgarli’s ties to his family in Turkey were likely the cause for his sentencing. Kashgarli’s brother Ahmet Kashgarli told RFA that he had lived in Turkey for 33 years and never had any problems with the Turkish government and said, “In the view of China, all of us living outside [the homeland] right now are terrorists.”

AP reported in April that Uyghurs Sattar Sawut, former head of the regional education department, and author Yalqun Rozi both received suspended death sentences for charges including writing and publishing school textbooks in 2003 and 2009 that authorities said were designed to “split the country.” Rozi’s son called the charges “absurd,” telling AP, “[t]hese textbooks were sanctioned by the state.” Rozi’s son told AP the textbooks contained historical tales of Uyghurs that had nothing to do with terrorism, and that the prosecutions were aimed at cultural destruction and forced assimilation.

RFA reported that in January, authorities sent Zaytunhan Ismail, a Uyghur village elder in Turpan (Tulufan) City, to an internment camp after accusing her of “religious extremism.” Ismail was a prominent member of her village, participating in a number of community and religious activities such as weddings and funerals. According to a Turpan police officer, in 2020, Ismail had successfully mediated a domestic violence dispute, but authorities detained her for “getting involved in a legal matter.”

In June, RFA reported that according to the Norway-based NGO Uyghuryar Foundation, authorities in Atush City, Kizilsu Kirghiz Autonomous Prefecture, sentenced four Uyghur entrepreneurs to prison in April. Authorities sentenced Iminjan Rahmitulla, founder of a shopping mall and one of the founders of the Grand Bazaar in Kashgar City, to 20 years in prison for “supporting terrorists” for providing donations to the family members of detained Uyghurs. Authorities also detained Rahmitulla’s sister and daughter, but their whereabouts and status were unknown at year’s end. Courts handed down 20-year sentences to brothers Rehimtulla Semet and Abdusopur Semet and a 17-year sentence to Musajan Imam for “engaging in separatist activities.”

RFA reported that on September 1, authorities arrested Arkin Iminjan, an ethnic Uyghur carpenter from Chapchal Xibe (Chabuchaer Xibo) County, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, for making a telephone call to a “marked” person (person under surveillance). Iminjan previously served six years

in prison following 2009 unrest in Urumqi. From 2017 to 2019, authorities held him in a “reeducation” center. A former classmate of Iminjan told RFA, “I believe that, actually, the officials wanted to detain Arkin again in order to meet official quotas on the numbers of Uyghurs to detain.”

On January 4, BuzzFeed News published an analysis of the connection between Xinjiang’s detention centers and forced labor. The report’s analysis of satellite imagery indicated that of the 385 detention centers built in the region since 2017, “at least 135 of these compounds also hold factory buildings. Forced labor on a vast scale is almost certainly taking place inside facilities like these, according to researchers and interviews with former detainees.” Satellite imagery analysis indicated the factory facilities collectively covered more than 21 million square feet. According to BuzzFeed News, detention camp factories were woven deeply into the region’s economy. Former detainee Auelkhan told BuzzFeed News she and other women traveled by bus from their detention center to a factory where they sewed gloves. Former detainees said they were never given a choice to work or not work and that they “earned a pittance or no pay at all.” Dina Nurdybai, who was detained in 2017 and 2018, said at a factory inside the internment camp she worked in a cubicle that was locked from the outside, sewing pockets onto school uniforms.

BuzzFeed News reported that the U.S.-based nonprofit research institute Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS) compared the locations of factories identified by BuzzFeed News to a database that compiles address information from China’s government registry for businesses. C4ADS identified 1,500 Chinese companies located at or directly next to the factories. Of those, 92 listed “import/export” as part of the scope of their business.

In February, the *New Yorker* reported that a government program called Xinjiang Aid transferred more than 150,000 “surplus rural workers” to jobs outside the region since 2018. The *New Yorker* stated, “Official claims that camp populations are declining may therefore be accurate, as detainees are increasingly sent to work in factories and on farms, or else sentenced and transferred to conventional prisons.” A 2020 ASPI report entitled *Uyghurs for Sale* stated workers lived in segregated factory dormitories, underwent organized Mandarin language and ideological training outside working hours, were subject to constant surveillance, and were forbidden from participating in religious observances. ASPI said, “Numerous sources, including government documents, show that transferred workers are assigned minders and have limited freedom of movement.”

In October, ASPI stated that according to PRC media reporting, between 2017 and 2021, 600,000 workers in Xinjiang were scheduled to be trained or transferred to different parts of the country under various labor schemes. ASPI’s research of government documents revealed that the labor transfer programs often sent workers to development projects connected to government-owned entities.

In March, the BBC reported that Xinjiang authorities’ use of labor transfer programs ran a “high risk of coercion and [was] similarly designed to assimilate minorities by changing their lifestyles and thinking.” The report described a video from 2017 showing authorities attempting to persuade workers to sign up for labor transfer schemes that would send them far away from their homes. When no one agreed to sign up initially, authorities went door to door pressuring individuals. Eventually, a young woman reluctantly said, “I’ll go if others go.” The BBC report stated authorities intended through the labor and detention programs to “replace ‘old’ Uyghur loyalties to culture and the Islamic faith with a ‘modern’ materialist identity and an enforced allegiance to the Communist Party.”

The June Amnesty International report *“Like We Were Enemies in a War”* included testimonies of former detainees that showed a clear link between detention centers and compulsory labor. Once detainees had been determined to be ready for release, authorities decided whether to send them to a “skills improvement class.” Some detainees reported they had “little or no choice or control but to accept employment or ‘training placement.’” According to one detainee, authorities said if he volunteered to work as a security guard at one of the camps, he would then be allowed to leave the detention facility.

On May 2, the Jamestown Foundation published a report entitled *Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfer Program*. According to the report, Chinese academics maintained that due to a lack of population mobility “the excessively strong atmosphere of religious belief cannot be diluted, and the development of social modernity is retarded.” Chinese academic publications described labor transfers as a crucial means to fragment Uyghur society and mitigate the “negative” impact of religion. The report stated analysis of government documents showed a “state-run scheme to forcibly uproot [minorities in Xinjiang], assimilate them and reduce their population density.” The Jamestown Foundation report also stated there were “credible grounds for concluding” that the forced labor system met the criteria for crimes against humanity and that “Beijing’s use of coercive labor transfer to suppress religiosity, achieve poverty alleviation targets, and ‘educate’ Uyghurs in the political ideology of the state” directly violated the International Labor Organization’s Convention for the Abolition of Forced Labor.

In early October, Reuters reported a foreign electronics manufacturer employed 365 Uyghur workers from Xinjiang for the company's plant in Qinzhou City, Guangxi Province. According to Reuters, in at least one instance, government authorities paid for a charter flight that delivered the workers under police escort from Hotan City to the plant. A notice posted on an official Qinzhou police social media account in February 2020 also described the transfer. Later in October, the manufacturer told Reuters it decided to "end its relationship with the staffing agency that hired these workers based on feedback on how to best secure its supply chain and in light of ongoing regulatory and legislative changes globally."

The USHMM's November report "*To Make Us Slowly Disappear*" stated official government documents suggested "the CCP views larger families within the Turkic Muslim communities as both being a result of, and a catalyst for, religious extremism and 'splittism.'" The report stated, "Chinese policy appears to be largely directed toward destroying, in substantial part, the Uyghur community's ability to regenerate, primarily through attacking the reproductive capacity of Uyghur women." Starting in 2017, government statistics indicated the government began to implement a series of coercive measures intended to reduce the population growth rate among Xinjiang's ethnic and religious minorities. These policies reportedly included forced sterilizations, forced insertions of IUDs, involuntary abortions, the separation of Uyghur couples of child-bearing age through detentions and forcible transfer, and "the coercion of young, unmarried Uyghur women into marriages with Han Chinese men."

In May, ASPI published a report entitled *Family De-planning: The Coercive Campaign to Drive Down Indigenous Birth-rates in Xinjiang*. Citing the PRC's own population statistics, the ASPI report showed that birth rates in the region dropped nearly 50 percent between 2017-2019. The report stated the largest declines occurred predominately in prefectures with high concentrations of minority communities. According to 2019 and 2020 data, the birth rate across the 29 counties with indigenous-majority populations fell by 58.5 percent from the 2011-2015 baseline average. In counties that were over 90 percent indigenous, the birth rate fell by as much as 66.3 percent in 2019-2020. ASPI also reported that the government deployed other coercive measures, including large fines, disciplinary punishment, extrajudicial internment of men and women, or the threat of internment for "illegal births."

In October, ASPI published a report entitled *The Architecture of Repression: Unpacking Xinjiang's Governance* that examined a series of local government documents from 2017-2021. These previously unpublished documents detailed authorities' approach to preventing births. Starting in 2017, authorities retroactively punished women from ethnic minority groups for violations of family planning policies as far back as 1992. These punishments included fines, forced sterilization, and internment. The report analyzed government documents that indicated that in 2020, the Xinjiang Health Commission spent 140 renminbi (\$22 million) on reducing birthrates and punishing illegal births in southern Xinjiang. In addition, "a taskforce called the 'Targeted Crackdown on Illegal Births Leading Small Group' was created at the prefecture, county, and township levels, as well as inside government departments and companies." At the community, village, and neighborhood level, "[p]unishing illegal births [was] a key performance indicator for local officials, and any violation of family planning regulations [was] grounds for their immediate demotion or dismissal."

RFA reported that in September, the State Council Information Office issued a white paper entitled *Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data*, stating the population of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the region had increased between 2010 and 2016. Independent academics, analysts, and human rights advocates questioned the veracity of the underlying statistics and stated the report ignored the precipitous drop in minority populations from 2017 onward. A human rights attorney stated, "Statistics are the CCP's tool only. They are definitely not credible. China's narrative is to counter Western accusations of genocide."

According to the XUAR government-run news agency *Tianshan*, on September 1, Nurlan Abelmanjen, Chairman of the Xinjiang Regional Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), presided over a meeting of the CPPCC on "promoting the Sinicization of Islam in Xinjiang." Abelmanjen stated it was necessary to study President Xi's writings, actively guide Islamic religious leaders and believers to reform their ideas, promote changes in customs, pursue what he called modern civilization and progress, create a social atmosphere conducive to the Sinicization of Islam in Xinjiang, and implement relevant Xinjiang Party Committee policies and measures.

A September report by UHRP entitled "*They Sent Her to a Concentration Camp Because She Came to Turkey: The Persecution of Uyghurs Based on Their Turkic and Muslim Identity*" included the transcript of a January interview with Zumrat Dawut, a Uyghur woman living in exile who spent two months in an internment camp. In the interview, Dawut described how camp officials and indoctrination teachers told detainees, "You were not originally Muslims. Islam is an infectious virus that reached you later from Arabia."

The November USHMM report stated authorities required imams to undergo training and state certification in order to practice, and that religious weddings and funerals required written permission from the state. Media reported authorities continued to conduct regular, sometimes daily, inspections of private homes to ensure no religious activities were occurring.

In January, RFA reported that authorities restricted Muslims from performing circumcision and the religious rites associated with it. According to a local source, authorities required that circumcisions be performed in designated hospitals. The source said that in January, authorities placed ethnic Uyghur Memet Ibrahim from Alaqagha, Aksu Prefecture, in an internment camp because he had his six-year-old son circumcised outside of a hospital.

Media and human rights organizations reported that 2020 SARA regulations stating only the Islamic Association of China was permitted to organize Muslims' pilgrimage trips remained in effect. These regulations stated that those who applied to join the Hajj must be "patriotic, law-abiding, and have good conduct," must have never before participated in the Hajj, and must be in sound physical and mental health. They also must be able to completely pay the costs associated with going on the Hajj and must oppose religious extremism. According to a notice issued by the Islamic Association of China on June 15, citing the risk of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government suspended all Hajj organization activities; therefore, there were no organized pilgrimage trips during the year.

Reports published from March through May on the official websites of local governments in the XUAR indicated authorities restricted or banned certain groups of Muslims, including CCP members (who were required to be atheists), their relatives, students, and employees of state-owned enterprises and state-run organizations, from observing Ramadan.

In April, RFA reported it contacted a police officer in Sheher (Shufu) County, Kashgar Prefecture, who stated restrictions on fasting during Ramadan eased in 2021 compared with previous years and that authorities told local residents they were free to fast "if they want to." He stated, however, that meetings about Ramadan were "always being held" at his police station, with authorities informing the public to "stay far away from religious extremism." The officer said he had not seen anybody who appeared to be fasting. According to other sources, local Muslims remained afraid of punishment or being associated with extremism if they observed the fast. A resident of Yengisheher (Shule) County, Kashgar Prefecture, when asked by RFA if he intended to observe Ramadan, stated, "Oh no – there's no such thing now." The resident said he and his relatives did not know the dates on which Ramadan fell in 2021.

The government continued to control the administration of mosques and to restrict access to houses of worship, requiring worshipers to apply for mosque entry permits. In March, the Council on Foreign Relations reported that authorities regarded attending services at mosques to be "extremist" behavior. Sending texts containing Quranic verses was also considered "extremist." Individuals who did either of these things risked being sent to detention camps or prison. In May, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported worshippers at the Great White Mosque in Urumqi had to go through x-ray machines and metal detectors, and pass face-scanning cameras to enter.

Witnesses and former prisoners stated authorities forced Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other Muslims in custody to renounce Islam, criticize their own Islamic beliefs and those of fellow inmates, and recite CCP propaganda.

In May, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that only 800 to 900 Muslims attended Friday prayers at the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar City, according to the mosque's imam, Mamat Juma, compared with 4,000 to 5,000 persons a decade previous. He attributed the drop to a natural shift in values, not government policy, saying the younger generation wanted to spend more time working than praying. One imam living in exile told the newspaper attendance at services were "staged" for outside visitors, such as foreign journalists. The imam said, "People know exactly what to do, how to lie, it's not something new for them."

According to human rights groups and international media, in addition to the IJOP big-data collection program, Xinjiang authorities continued to maintain extensive and invasive security and surveillance, in part to gain information regarding individuals' religious adherence and practices. Human rights groups said surveillance was more severe in parts of the country where religious minorities predominated, including the XUAR, compared with other parts of the country with ethnic Han Chinese majorities, due to the connection between religion and the ethnic and cultural identities of these groups.

According to government documents, Han Chinese officials continued to implement a surveillance system, *in which* teams of six – composed of police or local officials and one Uyghur language speaker – went to each house and compiled information on occupants. Since the program began in 2014, more than 200,000 cadres from all levels of the government were deployed to more than 8,500

villages. The teams reported on “extremist” behavior, such as abstaining from alcohol, fasting during Ramadan, and wearing long beards. They reported on the presence of “undesirable” items such as Qurans or occupants’ perceived propensity for “extremist” ideology.

In January, the investigative journalism organization The Intercept reported on a leaked police database that showed how authorities used a vast array of tools to conduct surveillance and monitor ethnic minority communities living in the region. According to the report, police in Urumqi used a tool that plugged into mobile phones, known as the “antiterrorism sword,” that allowed authorities to download the contents of individuals’ mobile phones. This tool was “deployed so frequently that authorities worried it was alienating the populace.” The leaked database detailed the presence of ubiquitous security checkpoints and surveillance cameras on the streets as well as telephone, online, and financial surveillance, “showing how granular surveillance purportedly on the watch for extremism is often simply looking at religious activity.” The Intercept stated these tracking policies succeeded in driving down mosque attendance. The database also offered evidence that “the ‘Physicals for All’ biometric collection program, which authorities insisted was solely a health initiative, [was] intended as part of the policing system.” The Intercept told of one man whom police investigated based on the religious activities of his eldest sister five months prior. The sister and her husband had invited another Uyghur couple to join a religious discussion group on the messaging app Tencent QQ. Because he had contact with his sister, police confiscated the brother’s mobile phone and assigned a cadre member to “control and monitor” him.

In March, Reuters reported the Internet Protocol Video Market (IPVM), which researches surveillance technology, published a report stating the government enlisted a number of technology companies to develop cameras capable of identifying specific characteristics of ethnic minorities using facial recognition software, including eyebrow size, skin tone, hair color, and hair style. The report stated, “It’s the first time we’ve ever seen public security camera networks that are tracking people by these sensitive categories explicitly at this scale.” IPVM and human rights groups said using such criteria would make it easier for authorities to comb different databases for specific individuals, or members of a particular ethnic group such as Uyghurs.

In May, the BBC reported authorities were also combining facial recognition technologies with artificial intelligence to assess individuals’ emotional states in an effort to implement predictive policing. Citing an anonymous software engineer who had worked on this technology, the report stated authorities deployed cameras to detect “minute changes in facial expressions and skin pores.” The software engineer said, “The Chinese government uses Uyghurs as test subjects for various experiments just like rats are used in laboratories.”

In its October report, ASPI stated the surveillance regimen utilized a combination of local neighborhood police stations, neighborhood grid management, home visits conducted by local government and party officials, and “joint households” (families formally assigned to monitor each other) to systematically monitor ethnic minority communities. This system was designed to “collect intelligence,” cultivate informants to report on their neighbors, share party propaganda, and monitor changes in the behavior of individuals of concern.

In its “Summary Judgment” released in December, the “Uyghur Tribunal” concluded based on research and eyewitness testimony that “[b]y means of intense monitoring, surveillance, facial recognition and advanced technologies specifically targeted at Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, parts of Xinjiang have become, to some of those ethnic minorities, an open-air prison... Neighbours, members of families, and other members of the community were incentivised or coerced in various ways to spy on each other.”

According to HRW, officials considered turning off one’s mobile phone repeatedly or using a cellular phone that was not registered to the individual as suspicious behavior. Both actions could lead to detention.

According to media and the accounts of Uyghurs living in exile, authorities continued to have more than one million CCP officials from other parts of the country live part-time with local families, who were required to accept this arrangement. According to a 2018 CNN report, the government instituted these home stays (the “Pair Up and Become a Family” program) in 2014 to target agricultural households in southern Xinjiang. The government said the program was part of efforts to combat “terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism.” The government required families to provide detailed information on their personal lives and political views during the officials’ visits to their homes. A Xinjiang government statement available online in 2018 indicated officials had to inspect the homes in which they were staying for any religious elements or symbols, and the statement instructed officials to confiscate such items if found.

Government demolition of mosques continued under a campaign called “Mosque Rectification” that began in 2016. Based on analysis of satellite imagery, ASPI, in its September 2020 report entitled *Tracing the Destruction of Uyghur and Islamic Spaces in Xinjiang*, estimated approximately 16,000 mosques in Xinjiang (65 percent of total mosques) had been destroyed or damaged as a result of government policies; the majority of the destruction took place since 2017. According to the report,

authorities had demolished an estimated 8,500 outright, with satellite images showing vacant land where they previously stood. Approximately 7,500 had sustained damage. The government had demolished a further 30 percent of important Islamic sacred sites, including shrines, cemeteries, and pilgrimage routes, across the region, mostly since 2017, and damaged or altered in some way an additional 28 percent. ASPI stated, “The Chinese government’s destruction of cultural heritage aims to erase, replace and rewrite what it means to be Uyghur.” According to the *Wall Street Journal*, in response to the report, the PRC Foreign Ministry said there were 24,000 mosques in the region.

In April, the *Global Times*, a CCP-owned newspaper, quoted a spokesperson for the Xinjiang government’s Information Office who stated, “There’s no so-called forced demolition of mosques problem in Xinjiang.” He stated the government was reconstructing or repairing mosques for the safety of worshipers. In May, Reuters reported officials in Xinjiang and Beijing denied that any religious sites in the region had been forcibly destroyed or restricted; the officials said some mosques were demolished while others were upgraded and expanded as part of “rural revitalization.” The report said journalists visited the region where they observed signs outside mosques stating local Muslims needed to register to enter the mosque, and officials banned citizens from outside the area, foreigners, and persons younger than the age of 18 from entry. Functioning mosques featured surveillance cameras and included Chinese flags and propaganda displays declaring loyalty to the CCP. During a series of visits to the region during the year, eyewitnesses observed most mosques were closed throughout the day. Local officials claimed these mosques were closed due to COVID-19 protocols, despite the region’s reporting very low numbers of new cases during the year.

There were reports that authorities continued to remove Islamic features from mosques, minarets, and domes throughout the region. In May, Reuters reported the Jiaman Mosque in Qira City, Hotan Prefecture, was “hidden behind high walls and Communist Party propaganda signs, leaving passersby with no indication that it is home to a religious site.”

In September, the *Telegraph* reported the government had given permission for an international hotel chain to build a hotel on the site of a former mosque in Hotan Prefecture that was destroyed in 2018.

In April, RFA reported that Xinjiang authorities had leased a mosque in Ghulja City, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, to an ethnic Han businessman for use as tourist hotel. The report said videos and photographs showed ethnic Han individuals drinking tea and performing Uyghur-style folk dances alongside ethnic Uyghur dancers in the prayer hall of the mosque, which a Uyghur former detainee identified from the videos as the Uzbek Mosque. According to RFA, these videos caused outrage online among the Uyghur diaspora.

In March, the Catholic news outlet AsiaNews reported that authorities did not demolish the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Ghulja City, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, in February as planned; however, churchgoers were unable to use the building because, in preparation for demolition, authorities removed all furnishings and cut off electricity, water, and other services. Authorities ordered the demolition of the Sacred Heart Church despite the congregation’s having all legal permits to operate. Reportedly, one of the original reasons authorities gave for demolishing the church was that it was “too visible” along a road that leads from the city to the airport in an area slated for commercial development. According to AsiaNews, in recent years authorities destroyed at least four other churches that had legal permits so they could convert the land the churches were built on to commercial purposes: one each in Hami (Kumul) Prefecture and Kuitun City, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, and two in Tacheng Prefecture. AsiaNews stated all the churches had permits, but they were demolished, and the state paid no compensation, contrary to law.

The government continued to enforce laws prohibiting children younger than 18 from taking part in religious observances and traditions. Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities remained strictly prohibited by law from providing their children with any religious education at home, and children younger than 18 were prohibited from entering mosques and fasting during the month of Ramadan. In May, an imam living in exile told the *Christian Science Monitor* the ban on religious education for children meant a significant part of Uyghur culture would disappear. “The next generation will accept the Chinese mindset,” he said. “They’ll still be called Uyghurs, but their mindset and values will be gone.”

Numerous media reports indicated the government continued to operate a network of boarding schools for ethnic minority children whose parents had been detained in Xinjiang’s internment camp systems. In 2020, a research study published online on parent-child separation in Yarkand County, Kashgar Prefecture, analyzed data from government spreadsheets not previously available. According to the study, government statistics showed that between 2017 and 2019, the number of boarding students in primary and middle schools (grades one to nine) increased by 76.9 percent, from 497,800 to 880,500. The data indicated that 53.1 percent of all students in Yarkand lived in boarding facilities. Government records showed that among a subset of 10,000 children with at least

one parent in custody, there were more than 1,000 children who had both parents interned. Nearly all of the children were Uyghur, apart from 11 who were of Kazakh and Tajik ethnicity. No ethnic Han child had a parent in custody.

According to a March *Forbes* report, the government issued a document that stated, “The CCP set a 2020 goal of running one to two such boarding schools in each of XUAR’s over 800 townships.” Government documents indicated that the proliferation of these state-run institutions was specifically intended for children of parents detained in internment camps or relocated under forced labor schemes. Children in these schools studied ethnic Han culture, Mandarin, and CCP ideology. In its November report, the USHMM stated, “Parents and other family members serving as children’s guardians indicated that they were threatened with being sent to detention centers if they resisted the removal of their children and their transfer to these schools. While held there, the children are prevented from practicing their Muslim faith, and are forbidden to use their own language, forcing them to learn Mandarin, thereby erasing the practice of Uyghur culture and religion in the community’s younger generations.”

RFA reported that in September, state media announced the launch of the “Pomegranate Flower” policy. The program assigned Han children from across the country as “relatives” to Uyghur toddlers and young children, with the intention that the Han children would maintain contact with the Uyghur children by phone and in visits to the XUAR. RFA stated the program reflected the government’s slogan that all ethnic groups in the country must “hug each other tightly like pomegranate seeds” to achieve a Chinese nationality that transcends ethnicity. Uyghur activists and analysts criticized the program as forced assimilation. One analyst said, “These children are still in their own homeland, but [the state is attempting to] assimilate them, to eliminate their language, their culture.” RFA stated that according to a report published on September 11 on the XUAR government-run *Tianshan* website, in one week, nearly 40 toddlers and primary school pupils in one Kashgar Prefecture village, including one-year-old Mahliya Mahmut, were matched with 36 pairs of Pomegranate Flower “relatives” from 30 cities across 13 provinces, regions, and municipalities in the country.

On February 11, *Bitter Winter* published an analysis of the SARA’s “Administrative Measures for Religious Clergy,” which entered into force on May 1. According to *Bitter Winter*, registration in the government database of government-approved clergy in the country was “complicated.” Individuals who were not listed in the database but claimed to be clergy would be committing a crime. Individuals unable to obtain a “clergy card” would include anyone not belonging to one of the five officially recognized patriotic religious associations, including the Islamic Association of China. *Bitter Winter* stated individuals had to prove they “support[ed] the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and support[ed] the socialist system.” According to *Bitter Winter*, the regulations created “an “Orwellian system of surveillance, and strengthen[ed] the already strict control on all clergy.”

According to an AP journalist who visited the Xinjiang Islamic Institute in October, textbooks in the government-run school for imams were written in Chinese rather than Arabic. Textbooks encouraged students to learn Mandarin. One lesson stated, “We must be grateful to the Party and the government for creating peace” and another stated, “We must strive to build a socialist Xinjiang with Chinese characteristics. Amen!”

International media and NGOs reported PRC authorities or their representatives continued to pressure Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, and other Muslims from Xinjiang living abroad to spy on fellow expatriates. They pressured individuals to return to China and/or cease advocacy on behalf of residents of Xinjiang, and threatened retaliation against family members still in Xinjiang if the individuals did not comply. The Karakax List, a set of PRC government documents originally leaked in 2019 that described the systematic targeting and imprisonment of Muslim populations in Karakax (alternate Uyghur spelling: Qaraqash, Mandarin spelling: Moyu) County, Hotan Prefecture, contained personal data on more than 300 Uyghurs living abroad.

International media reported the PRC put pressure on foreign governments to deport Uyghur refugees back to China. In June, UHRP published a report entitled *No Space Left to Run: China’s Transnational Repression of Uyghurs* that found that since 1997, more than 1,151 cases of Uyghurs being detained and 395 cases of Uyghurs being deported in 28 countries had occurred.

U.S. News and World Report reported that the Moroccan Court of Cassation ruled on December 16 to refool Turkey-based Uyghur activist Yidiyesi Aishan (also known as Idris Hasan) from Morocco to China. Aishan, originally from Xinjiang, fled to Turkey in 2012 after authorities increasingly harassed him. In Turkey, he was known for advocating for the rights of Uyghurs in the PRC. According to media reports, Moroccan authorities detained Aishan at the airport in Casablanca after he arrived from Turkey in July because of a PRC-filed 2017 Interpol red notice identifying him as “a terrorist.” In August, Interpol cancelled the red notice on the grounds that it violated articles of Interpol’s constitution and was “of a political, military, religious, or racial character.” A panel of experts in the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and international NGOs advocated for Aishan’s release. The UN panel said in a statement that if returned, Aishan “risks serious human rights violations including arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, or torture and other cruel,

inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” On December 20, the Committee Against Torture, a UN-linked body of experts that monitors implementation of the UN Convention against Torture, issued interim measures, requesting Aishan not be extradited under Morocco’s bilateral extradition treaty with the PRC until a complaint regarding his case had been fully examined. At year’s end, Aishan remained in Morocco and international organizations continued to call on the Moroccan government to not send him to China.

UHRP reported in February that since 2019, Xinjiang authorities used “proof of life” videos to pressure overseas Uyghurs into silencing their criticism of abuses taking place in the region. These videos took many different forms, but generally authorities posted videos of family members in Xinjiang stating they were alive and doing well, free to experience their culture and practice their religion, or denouncing their Uyghur relatives overseas for being critical of the PRC. An author of the UHRP report wrote in a February edition of the Hong Kong Free Press that “these pleas have a sinister implication for Uyghurs who know their families are in danger.”

The International Federation of Journalists reported that on April 9, authorities broadcast a video featuring Uyghur TV producer Erkin Tursun making a “confession” and calling on his son, who lives abroad and advocates for Tursun’s freedom, to return to China. Detained by authorities since 2018, at year’s end Tursun was serving a 20-year sentence on charges of “inciting ethnic hatred, ethnic discrimination and covering up crimes.” Erkin’s son said his mother, once detained in 2017, was forced “to speak against me” on a similar propaganda video two years prior.

According to the UHRP report *No Space Left to Run*, since 2017, China’s transnational repression of Uyghurs had “accelerated dramatically.” Repression included intimidation on social media apps, deployment of malware, and threatening or intimidating telephone calls from PRC government officials. Some individuals reported receiving demands to spy on their diaspora community on behalf of the PRC government, backed up by threats and intimidation. UHRP said, “Unreported cases would likely raise these figures substantially, with our database presenting just the tip of the iceberg due to our reliance on publicly reported instances of repression.”

In March, RFA reported a Chinese hacking group called “Evil Eye” was sending links to Uyghurs living abroad, often links to news articles or other items of special interest to their targets, which, when clicked on, allowed the hackers to install malware on their targets’ devices, particularly their mobile telephones. Hackers were then able to monitor their targets’ activity, passwords, and even their physical location. This hacking could also enable authorities to monitor and arrest the individuals’ contacts living in Xinjiang. Facebook reportedly stated it was taking measures to shut down the hacking group’s ability to distribute malware through its products.

In August, UHRP released a report entitled *“Nets Cast from the Earth to the Sky”: China’s Hunt for Pakistan’s Uyghurs*. According to UHRP, one Pakistani gemstone trader from Gilgit-Baltistan, who was married to a Uyghur woman, was denied entry into the XUAR unless he brought his wife with him. After the trader complied and returned to the border with his wife, Xinjiang authorities detained and later incarcerated her. The report included several cases in which PRC authorities detained women married to Pakistani men who were living in Xinjiang.

In August, RFA reported that PRC authorities arrested the relatives of ethnic Uyghurs living overseas, including in the United States, who spoke out against human rights abuses in Xinjiang. One Uyghur activist living in the United States told RFA that ever since she began searching for her sister, authorities had increasingly interrogated and harassed her family. Authorities had also begun to pressure the woman directly to stop her advocacy for her sister, whom the government sentenced sometime after 2017 to 17 years in prison for observing religious rites following the death of their father and for keeping religious books in her possession. The activist said the government treated families of Uyghurs living abroad as “hostages.”

In November, UHRP published a report entitled *“Your Family Will Suffer”: How China is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies* that described the PRC’s efforts to hack, harass, and intimidate Uyghurs living abroad. According to a UHRP survey of Uyghurs living abroad, 95.8 percent of the 72 respondents reported feeling threatened and 73.5 percent reported experiencing “digital risks, threats, or other forms of online harassment.”

In November, HRW reported that starting in October 2016, government authorities began confiscating the passports of XUAR residents for “collective management” or “collective safekeeping” amid what the government described as the rising threat of terrorism. The World Uyghur Congress said that although the measures were ostensibly aimed at all residents of Xinjiang, they effectively targeted the Uyghur community. Government officials continued to exert strict control over the ability of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities to travel abroad. There were additional reports PRC embassies and consulates continued to refuse to renew passports for Uyghurs living abroad. Instead, PRC officials reportedly destroyed their passports and replaced them with one-way travel documents to the PRC in order to force their return.

Advocacy groups, analysts, and media reported the government continued a sustained propaganda campaign launched in late 2020 attempting to counter evidence and international criticism of human rights abuses in the region. In total, the XUAR government, often hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held 59 Xinjiang-related press conferences by year's end. XUAR spokesperson Xu led these press conferences and often invited scholars from universities in Xinjiang to present arguments that Xinjiang was a "beautiful place." In February, spokesperson Xu said, "We welcome foreigners from all fields, including relevant officials of the new U.S. administration, to take a walk and have a look in Xinjiang, so as to understand the real situation of Xinjiang, so as not to be blinded by [the U.S. Secretary of State's] lies. But we also have a bottom line of principle, and we will never accept any so-called 'investigation' of presumption of guilt."

In January, XUAR spokesperson Xu denied that the government forced birth control measures, including IUD insertions, tubal ligations, and abortions, on women in Xinjiang. Xu stated, "The growth rate of the Uyghur population is not only higher than that of the whole Xinjiang population, but also higher than that of the minority population, and more significantly higher than that of the (Chinese majority) Han population."

In January, the PRC embassy in Washington, D.C. posted a statement on Twitter that read, "Study shows that in the process of eradicating extremism, the minds of Uygur women in Xinjiang were emancipated and gender equality and reproductive health were promoted, making them no longer baby-making machines. They are more confident and independent." Days later, Twitter locked the embassy's account, "for violating our policy against dehumanization." The account remained suspended at year's end.

In February, RFA reported that authorities had released a video purporting to show Habibulla Abdurehim, an imam of a mosque in Hotan Prefecture, refuting the U.S. government's determination that the PRC government was committing genocide against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang and saying that the government recently renovated his mosque. A local source told RFA that Abdurehim was not an imam but a former party secretary of Yawa township in Hotan Prefecture, and RFA contacted the police department in Yawa to confirm the source's information. The officer who answered said he was unsure whether Abdurehim was a religious figure or party secretary, but that 50 to 60 of the 70 to 80 religious leaders in Yawa were imprisoned.

In December, ASPI published evidence that the CCP used foreign social media influencers to "shape and push" its propaganda about Xinjiang. ASPI collected data from January 2020-August 2021 that showed foreign social media influencers created content on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms to be amplified on PRC-operated news websites. The report stated, "By leveraging the popularity of foreign media influencers in China, the Chinese state propaganda apparatus can package their messages through potentially more persuasive voices in an attempt to neutralize critical reporting about human rights abuses in Xinjiang and depict a more positive image of the region."

UHRP published a study in December entitled *Meet the "New" Uyghurs: CGTN's Role in Mediawashing Genocide* that examined 307 articles and videos propagated by the state-owned international media organization China Global Television Network (CGTN) between 2017-2020 about "reeducated" Uyghurs being "thankful," designed to counter international criticism of human rights abuses taking place in Xinjiang. The study stated CGTN's goal was to present a narrative that PRC policies in Xinjiang had successfully "transformed Uyghurs from 'extremists' to state-compliant, economically productive individuals."

On March 29, following the announcement that the European Union, United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States had sanctioned officials over human rights abuses in Xinjiang, the PRC held a press conference to address the protection of human rights in Xinjiang, ethnic minority culture, freedom of religious belief, and labor and employment. Spokesperson Xu said, "Xinjiang has gotten rid of terrorism and extreme poverty.... Now that Xinjiang had achieved stability and prosperity, and people's lives are stable and peaceful, the anti-China forces in the United States and the West are not able to achieve their ulterior goals and are very restless, so they try to blame Xinjiang and lie with their eyes open."

In May, AP reported that during a government reception in Beijing held on Eid al-Fitr, several Muslim leaders from Xinjiang spoke, rejecting accusations that the government was suppressing the religious freedom of Muslims in the region. Abdureqip Tomurniyaz, head of the Xinjiang Islamic Association and the School for Islamic Studies in Xinjiang, said of Western nations, "They want to sabotage Xinjiang's harmony and stability, contain China's rise, and alienate relations between China and Islamic countries[.]" Religious leaders from five mosques also spoke at the conference. Mamat Juma, imam of the Id Kah Mosque in Kashgar, stated all ethnic groups in Xinjiang approved of government actions to combat terrorism in the region. He said people were grateful to the ruling Communist Party for restoring stability and promoting economic growth.

In May, AP reported that Chinese state media released dozens of videos showing Uyghurs angrily denouncing the U.S. government's declaration that the PRC government was committing genocide in Xinjiang. PRC officials said these videos were recorded solely by Uyghurs and were "spontaneous outpourings of emotion." AP reported it had obtained proof the government had commissioned the videos and had ordered officials in Xinjiang to find Uyghurs fluent in Mandarin and ensure they included certain talking points in their one-minute videos. Tahir Imin, a Uyghur activist who fled China in 2017, said the videos were almost certainly government-orchestrated and that, since information in Xinjiang was heavily censored, it was highly unlikely Uyghurs in the region would be aware of the U.S. government declaration.

In June, RFA reported Xinjiang government officials held a news conference in which they presented relatives of ethnic Uyghurs who spoke about human rights violations committed in Xinjiang at the "Uyghur Tribunal" in London. Those who spoke at the Xinjiang government conference refuted the statements their relatives made at the London tribunal. Spokesperson Xu said individuals who testified at the tribunal were actors who "make a living by smearing Xinjiang abroad" in exchange for refugee and other benefits. Members of the tribunal later invited Xu to send the news conference participants to the tribunal's next meeting to freely testify. In a statement, Dolkun Isa, president of the World Uyghur Congress, stated, "There's no doubt these family members are being held hostage and were forced to say what they were told against their loved ones by the authorities[.]"

In July, local media reported spokesperson Xu held a press conference following the U.S. government's announcement to impose trade restrictions on several Chinese solar panel production companies for using forced labor in Xinjiang. Xu said, "We have stated many times that Xinjiang-related issues are not human rights, ethnic, or religious issues at all, but are antiviolence, de-radicalization, and antiseparatism issues... Xinjiang has never been afraid of sanctions. All sanctions are a piece of waste paper." During the press conference, he also said U.S. sanctions were "self-serving" for U.S. industries and would only harm U.S. interests.

During the year, the State Council Information Office (SCIO) released two white papers on Xinjiang. In July, SCIO issued the *Respecting and Protecting the Rights of All Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang* white paper, which stated the government upheld "respect for and protection of freedom of religious belief in Xinjiang." In September, SCIO released the *Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data* white paper, which stated, "Xinjiang's evolving demographics are a natural result of local economic and social development, and of industrialization and modernization."

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Because the government and individuals closely linked religion, culture, and ethnicity, it was difficult to categorize many incidents of societal discrimination as being solely based on religious identity. Local sources stated unequal treatment of Uyghurs and Han Chinese continued in parallel with official suppression of Uyghur language, culture, and religion, and promotion of the Han majority in political, economic, and cultural life. Muslims in Xinjiang faced discrimination in hiring and in retaining their positions, and in pursuing other business opportunities. Local sources stated it was difficult for Uyghurs to book hotel reservations for travel.

According to an AP journalist who visited the region in October, although Han Chinese and Uyghurs lived side by side, there was "an unspoken but palpable gulf between them." While the Uyghur language was widely spoken, public signage in some urban neighborhoods was only in Mandarin. Han Chinese enjoyed freedom of movement not available to Uyghurs. In bookstores, Uyghur language materials were available but labeled "ethnic minority language books." Manifestations of Uyghur culture, such as song, dance, and clothing, were packaged as tourist items for visiting Han Chinese in what one Western scholar referred to as the "museumification" of Uyghur culture. The journalist saw signs in Mandarin promoting Lunar New Year, a holiday Uyghur Muslims did not traditionally celebrate.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In July, the Secretary of State met virtually with Uyghur family members, Xinjiang internment camp survivors, and advocates to express the U.S. commitment to calling for the government to end atrocities in Xinjiang. Embassy officials routinely raised concerns about the treatment, and advocated for the human rights, of Uyghur Muslims and members of other Muslim and non-Muslim minority groups in Xinjiang with national and regional government officials. Embassy staff visited the region during the year, although at a reduced rate compared with previous years due to COVID-19

restrictions. When the region was not under travel restrictions, embassy staff could travel there without requesting prior permission, but local governments denied or impeded access to schools, “reeducation camps,” and residences.

During the year, the U.S. government used a variety of diplomatic and economic tools to promote religious freedom and accountability in Xinjiang, including sanctions, visa restrictions, controls on exports and imports, and an updated business advisory raising awareness among U.S.-based companies about the risks of doing business in Xinjiang.

On January 19, the then Secretary of State publicly announced a determination that since at least March 2017, the PRC has committed crimes against humanity and genocide against Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang.

On February 16 during a CNN townhall, the President said the United States would continue to speak out against human rights abuses China perpetrated against, among others, Uyghurs.

During testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 10, the Secretary of State called on the PRC to allow the international community, including the United Nations, access to Xinjiang to confirm the government’s claims it was committing no wrongdoing in the region. While speaking of the PRC’s treatment of Uyghurs, he said, “We’ve been clear, and I’ve been clear, that I see it as genocide, [and] other egregious abuses of human rights, and we’ll continue to make that clear.”

On June 22, the United States joined a group of 44 countries in issuing a Canada-led joint statement expressing grave concern about the human rights situation in Xinjiang, as well as deep concern about the deterioration of fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong and the human rights situation in Tibet. On October 21, the United States joined a group of 43 countries in issuing a France-led joint statement on the human rights situation in Xinjiang. The statement read, in part, “Credible-based reports indicate the existence of a large network of ‘political re-education’ camps where over a million people have been arbitrarily detained. We have seen an increasing number of reports of widespread and systematic human rights violations, including reports documenting torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilization, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children. There are severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and the freedoms of movement, association and expression as well as on Uyghur culture. Widespread surveillance disproportionately continues to target Uyghurs and members of other minorities.”

The embassy continued to amplify Department of State religious freedom initiatives directly to local audiences through postings to the embassy website and to its Weibo, WeChat, and Twitter accounts. The embassy also posted or retweeted a series of posts concerning repression of religious freedom in Xinjiang. For example, in March, the embassy posted the Secretary’s remarks to PRC State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, noting that the Secretary “raised concerns about a range of PRC actions that undermined the international rules-based order and that run counter to our values and interests and those of our partners, including actions related to human rights, Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, the East and South China Seas, and Taiwan.” Following the November virtual meeting between the U.S. and Chinese presidents, the embassy posted on WeChat and Weibo, “President Biden raised concerns about the PRC’s practices in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, as well as human rights more broadly.” On December 17, the embassy reposted the Secretary of State’s tweet: “We are holding to account PRC tech entities that actively support surveillance and tracking of ethnic and religious minorities in the PRC, predominantly Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang.” On December 24, when the President signed the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act “to ensure that goods made with forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the [PRC] do not enter the United States market,” the embassy posted, “President Biden [at]POTUS: Today (December 24), I signed the ‘Prevention of Forced Uyghur Labor Law,’ which is supported by both parties. The United States will continue to use all the tools at our disposal to ensure that the supply chain does not use forced labor – including forced labor from Xinjiang and other parts of China.” Almost 10 million social media users viewed these social media posts, and almost 240,000 engaged with them, participating in online discussions with embassy staff and with each other. The tone of the comments from Chinese social media users was largely critical of embassy posts, especially concerning Xinjiang and Tibet issues, yet the coverage presented the U.S. perspective to a wide Chinese audience.

Read a Section

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ecoi.net summary:

Xinjiang: Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2021)



Country:
China

Source:
[USDOS – US Department of State](#)

Original link:
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/xinjiang/>

Document type:
Periodical Report

Language:
English

Published:
2 June 2022

Document ID:
2073968

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

