

China's silence deepens fears over disappeared Uyghur returnees a year on, warn UN experts

GENEVA – UN experts* today expressed grave concern about 40 Uyghur Muslim men forcibly returned to China by Thai authorities a year ago, whose fate, state of health and whereabouts remain unknown.

“The disappearances reflect a broader pattern of transnational repression targeting ethnic and religious minorities and individuals perceived to be critical of the Chinese Government,” the experts said.

The experts noted that, on 27 February 2025, Thailand forcibly returned 40 men to China, reportedly under intense pressure from the Chinese Government, and without applying the safeguards required to uphold the customary international law principle of *non-refoulement*. The deportations exposed them to the risk of being subjected to gross human rights violations, including enforced disappearance, torture and arbitrary deprivation of life. Prior to their forced return, these men had been detained incommunicado for more than a decade in Bangkok's Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre, in substandard conditions and without contact with their families, legal representatives or the outside world.

“Despite China's [response](#), the lack of reliable, comprehensive and independently verified information surrounding these men's fate and whereabouts is profoundly alarming,” the experts said. “Families have received no communication, no confirmation of the place of detention or whereabouts, and no indication as to whether their loved ones are even alive.”

“We are dismayed that the forced returns from Thailand were carried out despite urgent and repeated appeals from the United Nations, international human rights mechanisms, Thailand's National Human Rights Commission, and civil society organisations,” the experts said.

“We remain astounded by the persistent and unrelenting use of forced returns and transnational repression, carried out in blatant breach and disregard of international human rights law obligations, as well as of fundamental values of humanity and human dignity.”

The experts deplored China's continued denial of confidential, timely access to legal counsel, noting that many detainees in the country had been refused legal visits for months or even years under broad “national security” claims. Families receive inconsistent or misleading information, making it impossible for them to verify the condition or whereabouts of their loved ones.

According to credible reports and numerous victim testimonies, Chinese authorities systematically subject the relatives of detainees and the wider local communities to tight surveillance, monitoring their movements, communications, and social interactions.

“This pervasive oversight creates a climate of fear in which many families are too afraid to search for their loved ones, seek information, or speak publicly about their cases due to fear of reprisals,” the experts said.

“Denying legal access while intimidating families into silence creates an environment where serious human rights violations can unfold, unchecked,” they warned. “Silencing relatives not only deepens their suffering, but obstructs genuine accountability. Justice cannot be pursued in silence.”

The experts urged China to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of the 40 Uyghur returnees by granting independent monitors unhindered and private access, and by ensuring that their families and local communities are not left in fear and uncertainty.

They further called on Thailand and other States to put an end to the forced return of Uyghurs to China and appealed to the international community to strengthen safeguards against *refoulement* and ensure accountability for acts of transnational repression.

