

# WASAMUN 2023

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## Human Rights Committee

**Topic Guide:** The question of torture of Uyghur Muslims

### Introduction

The Uyghur Muslims (alternatively spelt Uighurs, Uygurs or Uigurs), are a Turkish ethnic group originating from and culturally affiliated with Central and East Asia. The group is recognised as native to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. There are about 12 million Uyghurs, mostly Muslim, living in this region. Human rights groups have said at least one million people have been incarcerated in camps which the Chinese government describes as "re-education" centres. The government in Beijing is claiming that mass "vocational education and training" is necessary for this ethnic group in far-western Xinjiang to counter terrorism and alleviate poverty. This terrorism points to attacks in 2013 and 2014 which the Uyghur militants claimed responsibility for.

However, there have been reports of arbitrary detention, forced labour, forced medication and sexual abuse within these camps where the Uyghur Muslims are incredibly ill-treated. For example, it was noted Xinjiang's rate of sterilisation was 243 procedures for every 100,000 inhabitants, compared with a national average of 32.

### General Information

The UN states that to constitute genocide, there must be a proven intent on the part of perpetrators to physically destroy a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. Cultural destruction does not suffice, nor does an intention to simply disperse a group.

Xinjiang has been under control of China since it was annexed in 1949. Many Uyghur's still identify their homeland by its previous name, East Turkestan. The land is on a designated "special economic zone" due to its rich oil and mineral supplies and is China's largest producer of natural gas and is a key part of the country's Belt and Road initiative.

Some laws have been passed by the Chinese government against the Uyghur Muslims. In 2017 a law was passed prohibiting men from growing long beards and women from wearing veils. Dozens of mosques were also demolished.

### UN Involvement

The UN rights council in October voted down a Western-led motion to hold a debate about alleged human rights abuses by China against Uyghurs and other Muslims in Xinjiang in a victory for Beijing as it seeks to avoid further scrutiny. As a result, they voted not to discuss allegations of abuses against minority Uyghurs. The defeat - 19 against, 17 for, 11 abstentions - is only the second time in the council's 16-year history that a motion has been rejected and is seen by observers as a setback to both accountability efforts, the West's moral authority on human rights and the credibility of the United Nations itself.

A UN report was published which does not mention genocide unlike the US government and others have claimed, but says allegations of torture, including forced medical procedures, as well as sexual violence were all "credible". It said that the authorities had deemed violations of the three-child official limit on family size to be an indicator of "extremism", leading to internment. The UN characterised this as "serious human rights violations" that could amount to crimes against humanity. The report was particularly critical of the Chinese governments anti-extremism doctrine which underpins this behaviour. The UN pushed back on Beijing's claims that facilities were schools or training centres where participants were free to join

and leave and the report said such “placements” led to a deprivation of liberty: being held without consent. Two thirds of detainees interviewed by the UN human rights council reported treatment that would classify as torture.

In the wake of the UN report, Uyghur groups had urged the UN Human Rights Council to establish a commission of inquiry to independently examine the treatment of Uyghur’s and other minorities in China and called on the UN Office on Genocide Prevention to immediately conduct an assessment of the risks of atrocities, including genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang.

#### Further Reading

- UN News: China responsible for ‘serious human rights violations’ in Xinjiang province: UN human rights report
  - <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1125932>
- BBC News: Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide?
  - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-22278037>
- Council of Foreign Relations: China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang
  - <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>
- PBS News: What is happening with the Uighurs in China
  - <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/features/uighurs/>