



## DEBATE PACK

CBP-0047 (2020) | 6 March 2020

# China's policy on its Uighur population

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 11 March 2020

2:30-4:00pm

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# 1. Background

Amid wider concerns about freedom of religion or belief in China, there are specific concerns about human rights abuses of Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region in north-west China. [Xinjiang](#) is China's largest administrative region and has been an Autonomous Region since 1955. The largest ethnic group is the Muslim, Turkic-speaking Uighurs.<sup>1</sup>

A number of NGOs and UN bodies have chronicled the restrictive and oppressive measures employed by the Chinese authorities against ethnic minorities in Xinjiang province (Members referred to such reports during a [debate on human rights in Xinjiang](#) in Westminster Hall January 2019).

## UN report

The [UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#)<sup>2</sup> published a report in August 2018 which has been regularly cited by Members and the UK Government. The Committee expressed alarm at the reports of:

- the detention of large numbers of ethnic Uighurs and other Muslim minorities under the pretext of countering religious extremism
- mass surveillance disproportionality targeting ethnic Uighurs, including scanning of mobile phones and mandatory collection of biometric data
- restrictions on travel with the requirement that all residents must apply for permission to leave the country
- the forcible return of Uighurs who had left China<sup>3</sup>

The committee made eight recommendations to China, including for the immediate halt to detaining individuals in what it called extralegal detention facilities who have not been lawfully charged, tried and convicted and the immediate release of all individuals held in such circumstances.

## NGO reports

In a 2018 report, Human Rights Watch described the Chinese government's "[mass arbitrary detention, torture, and mistreatment](#)" of Xinjiang's Muslims. HRW reports [China is collecting biometric data](#) (DNA, fingerprints) from residents in the region. Amnesty International has similarly [reported on restrictions](#) placed on ethnic minorities in

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<sup>1</sup> "[Xinjiang profile – full overview](#)", BBC News, 17 November 2016

<sup>2</sup> The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is a body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) by its State parties

<sup>3</sup> "[Concluding observations on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China](#)", International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 30 August 2018.

Xinjiang. Human Rights Watch reported as recently as 20 February 2020 more evidence of what it described as "[horrific abuses](#)" in Xinjiang.

Media have also reported on detention camps. In November 2019 BBC Panorama, with other international media, reported sight of leaked documents which show hundreds of thousands of [Muslims are mistreated in high security camps](#).

In February 2020 the Associated Press news agency obtained details of a database with dossiers on hundreds of individuals interned in the province. AP says the database "[emphasises that the Chinese government focused on religion as a reason for detention](#)" by providing the reason for detention – often everyday activities such as praying or attending a mosque. China denies discrimination based on religion and argues the detention centres are for voluntary job training.<sup>4</sup>

### **UK government position**

The UK government is calling on China to allow UN observers "[immediate and unfettered access](#)".

China remains a human rights '[priority country](#)' for the UK. The Government has repeatedly expressed its "[serious concerns about deepening crackdown by the Government of China on religious and ethnic minorities](#)". In the Human Rights and Democracy report 2018 the government said:

There were credible reports (in 2018) of more than one million Uyghur Muslims and members of other ethnic minority groups being held in extrajudicial 'political re-education' camps, of widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities, and of families detained and children forcibly adopted.<sup>5</sup>

The government believes "China's actions against its ethnic minorities in Xinjiang are disproportionate and indiscriminate".<sup>6</sup>

The Foreign Office says it has raised concerns about the situation in Xinjiang on a number of occasions, including during China's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council in November 2018, and at the UN Human Rights Council in autumn 2019.<sup>7</sup> There are [some concerns](#) that China is using the UN Human Rights Council to deflect criticism of its conduct in Xinjiang.<sup>8</sup>

The UK representative to the UN delivered a [joint statement on behalf of 23 countries](#) on Xinjiang at the Third Committee Dialogue of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in October 2019. The Group of 23 countries share the concerns raised by the Committee in its August 2018 report and called on the Chinese government to implement the Committee's eight recommendations, including halting

<sup>4</sup> "[China's 'war on terror' uproots Uighur families, leaked data shows](#)", Al Jazeera, 18 February 2020

<sup>5</sup> "[Human rights and democracy report 2018](#)", FCO, 5 June 2019

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, "[China and the Rules-Based International System: Government response](#)", 21 June 2019, HC 2362 2017-19

<sup>7</sup> [PQ19024](#), 3 March 2020

<sup>8</sup> "[Is China undermining human rights at the United Nations?](#)", Council on Foreign Relations, 9 July 2019; "[UN human rights council divided over China's Xinjiang policies](#)", Voice of America, 17 July 2019

arbitrary detentions. The 23 countries also called on China to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Procedures immediate unfettered, meaningful access to Xinjiang.

### **Foreign Affairs Committee report**

The Foreign Affairs Committee, in a 2019 report, discussed China's approach to human rights, concluding:

In the area of human rights, the evidence suggests that China does not intend to reform the rules-based international system but rather intends to subvert it, by promoting an alternative version of human rights which stresses economic development at the cost of the universality of individual civil and political freedoms. It also appears that China may have an increasingly favourable international audience for such efforts.<sup>9</sup>

The Committee said it was "extremely concerned" by the treatment of the Muslim population in China's Xinjiang province, where, the committee said "there is credible evidence to believe that more than a million Uighur people and other minorities have been held in detention camps". The Committee warned "China is sowing the possibility of conflict into its future".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee "[China and the rules based system](#)", 4 April 2019, HC 212 2017-19

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Press articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

### [China transferred detained Uighurs to factories used by global brands – report](#)

The Guardian  
Lily Kuo  
1 March 2020

### [China's Biosecurity State in Xinjiang Is Powered by Western Tech](#)

Foreign Policy  
Jessica Batke and Mareike Ohlberg  
19 February 2020

### [China's global power damps criticism of Uighur crackdown](#)

Financial Times  
23 December 2019

### [Leaked documents reveal details of China's 'shown no mercy' Uighur detention policy](#)

Daily Telegraph  
Jamie Fullerton  
17 November 2019

### [We must stand up to China's abuse of its Muslim minorities](#)

The Guardian  
Sen. Marco Rubio  
31 October 2019

### [Fear and oppression in Xinjiang: China's war on Uighur culture](#)

Financial Times  
Christian Shepherd  
12 September 2019

### [China's Uighur policy is human rights 'stain of the century' – Pompeo](#)

The Guardian  
19 July 2019

### [Which Countries Are For or Against China's Xinjiang Policies?](#)

The Diplomat  
Catherine Putz  
15 July 2019

### [Muslim Leaders Are Betraying the Uighurs](#)

Foreign Policy  
Azeem Ibrahim  
8 July 2019

### 3. Press releases

#### [Joint statement on human rights violations and abuses in Xinjiang](#)

**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

**29 October 2019**

*Statement delivered by Ambassador Karen Pierce, UK Permanent Representative to the UN at the Third Committee session on the Committee for the elimination of racial discrimination.*

Mr. President,

I have the honour to read this statement on Xinjiang on behalf of a group of 23 countries including:

Albania, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, United States of America and of course the United Kingdom.

We share the concerns raised by the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in their August 2018 Concluding Observations on China regarding credible reports of mass detention; efforts to restrict cultural and religious practices; mass surveillance disproportionately targeting ethnic Uighurs; and other human rights violations and abuses in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

We call on the Chinese government to uphold its national laws and international obligations and commitments to respect human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, in Xinjiang and across China. The Chinese government should urgently implement CERD's eight recommendations related to Xinjiang, including by refraining from the arbitrary detention of Uighurs and members of other Muslim communities. In view of these concerns, we call on all countries to respect the principle of non-refoulement.

Furthermore, we call on the Chinese government to allow the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Procedures immediate unfettered, meaningful access to Xinjiang.

Mr. Chair, I'll close with a question: What measures should the Chinese government undertake to address the concerns raised in CERD's Concluding Observations regarding restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief and the right to freely participate in cultural life?

**EU statement on human rights in Xinjiang**  
**Foreign and Commonwealth Office**  
**30 October 2018**

The UK supports the below EEAS statement issued on 26 October on the revision by the Chinese authorities of the 'Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification'.

Statement by the EEAS Spokesperson on the situation in Xinjiang:

The revision by the Chinese authorities of the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification" highlights the deteriorating human rights situation in Xinjiang. There are credible reports of mass detentions in political "re-education camps" affecting Uighurs and other minorities; of mass surveillance; of restrictions on travel; and of Uighurs abroad allegedly being returned to China involuntarily.

These revisions run counter to the recommendations provided by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which call on China to change its policy in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

In this context, the EU expects China to respect freedom of religion or belief, and freedom of expression, as well as the rights of persons belonging to ethnic or national minorities, as guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory.

## 4. PQs

### [China: Uighurs](#)

21 Oct 2019 | 560

**Asked by: Jonathan Lord**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the (a) governance of and (b) humanitarian situation in (i) Uighur and (ii) Xinjiang province, China.

**Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We have serious concerns about the human rights and humanitarian situation in Xinjiang, where there are credible reports of over a million Uyghurs and other minorities being detained in so called "re-education camps." British diplomats in China visit Xinjiang regularly, most recently in May, in order to see the situation at first-hand. Their observations have supported much of the recent open source reporting, including reports of widespread surveillance measures, restrictions targeted at specific ethnic groups, and restrictions on the ability to freely practice religion.

### [China: Uighurs](#)

17 Oct 2019 | 261

**Asked by: Yasmin Qureshi**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to reports that forced labour linked to mass detentions in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has been used to produce cotton for export, if his Department will take steps to help ensure that cotton products on sale in the UK did not originate in prison camps in Xinjiang.

**Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The UK is taking steps to ensure products on sale in the UK do not originate from sources that use forced labour. The UK is also committed to ending modern slavery and forced labour by 2030, as unanimously adopted in the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development, and jointly launched the 'Principles to Combat Human Trafficking in Global Supply Chains' with the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand at the UN General Assembly in September 2018.

Further, the Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires applicable commercial organisations to publish a modern slavery statement for each financial year of their organisation. It applies to all commercial organisations which carry on a business, or part of a business, in the UK, supply goods or services and have an annual turnover of £36m or more. The modern slavery statement must set out what steps they have taken during the financial year to ensure that modern slavery is not taking place in their supply chains and in their own organisation.

We continue to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang where there are credible reports of over a million Uyghurs and other minorities being detained in so called "re-education camps", along with widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities.

### [China: Uighurs](#)

**04 Oct 2019 | 291326**

#### **Asked by: Emily Thornberry**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent representations he has made to his Chinese counterpart on the detention of Uighur Muslims in China.

#### **Answering member: Dominic Raab | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

On 26 September during an Urgent Question on Hong Kong, I set out the UK's serious concerns about the credible reports of over a million Uyghur Muslims being held in so-called "re-education camps". As I stated in the House, we will continue to ensure that these concerns are expressed directly with Chinese authorities. We also raise the issue multilaterally: the UK recently co-hosted an event on Xinjiang at the UN General Assembly where the Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad, called for China to allow UN observers unfettered access to the region. The former Foreign Secretary highlighted our concerns about Xinjiang with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his last visit to China. The former Minister of State for Asia and the Pacific did the same with Vice Minister Guo Yezhou during his last visit to China.

### [China: Human Rights](#)

**01 Oct 2019 | 290310**

#### **Asked by: Lyn Brown**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the implications for (a) human rights and (b) the rule of law of the risk assessment system used by the Chinese Government in Xinjiang.

#### **Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We follow the situation in Xinjiang closely and Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials regularly travel to the region to attempt to verify reports about the restrictions targeted at specific ethnic groups; they most recently visited in May 2019. We are not aware of individuals receiving 'yellow' or 'red' designations in Xinjiang and we have limited insight into the Chinese government's risk assessment system. However, we have serious concerns about the human rights situation in the region where the measures being taken are disproportionate and indiscriminate. We are aware of credible reports of widespread surveillance, ethnic and religious profiling, and restrictions on the ability to practice religion freely.

[China: Minority Groups](#)

**01 Oct 2019 | 290308**

**Asked by: Lyn Brown**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an assessment of the extent of detention on the basis of allegations made against family members among the Uighur and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, China.

**Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We do not have reliable figures to estimate of the number of forced confessions for terrorism-related offences in detention camps in Xinjiang, China in the last three years, nor the extent of detention on the basis of allegations made against family members of religious minority groups. However, we have repeatedly highlighted the credible reports of over a million Uyghurs and other minorities being detained in so called "re-education camps", along with widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities.

[China: Uighurs](#)

**30 Sep 2019 | 290307**

**Asked by: Lyn Brown**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make an estimate of the number of forced confessions for terrorism-related offences in detention camps in Xinjiang, China in the last three years.

**Answering member: Heather Wheeler | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We do not have reliable figures to estimate of the number of forced confessions for terrorism-related offences in detention camps in Xinjiang, China in the last three years, nor the extent of detention on the basis of allegations made against family members of religious minority groups. However, we have repeatedly highlighted the credible reports of over a million Uyghurs and other minorities being detained in so called "re-education camps", along with widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities.

[China: Uighurs](#)

**27 Aug 2019 | HL17226**

**Asked by: The Earl of Sandwich**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what recent representations they have made to the government of China on the treatment and living conditions of the Uighur people in Szechuan province; and how they intend to resume their national dialogue on human rights.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon  
| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are concerned about the human rights situation affecting Uyghur Muslims in China. We have serious concerns about the situation in

Xinjiang where there are credible reports of over a million Uyghurs and other minorities being detained in so called "re-education camps", along with widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities.

### **China: Surveillance**

**21 Aug 2019 | HL17192**

#### **Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that UK investors hold shares totalling £800 million in companies that supply CCTV and facial-recognition technology used to track Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

##### **| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The British Government has not undertaken analysis of British investor shareholdings in Chinese surveillance companies. However, we are aware of the recent reports.

### **Asylum: China**

**24 Jul 2019 | 279450**

#### **Asked by: Yasmin Qureshi**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of granting Uighur asylum seekers the automatic right to remain in the UK.

#### **Answering member: Caroline Nokes | Department: Home Office**

The Home Office is unable to report on how many applications for asylum from Chinese Uighurs it has received since 2015; and what proportion of those applications have been successful, as to obtain this information would require a manual trawl of records and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. We do, however, publish data on those who have been granted asylum in the UK, with main applicants broken down by country of nationality. The latest release, published 24th May 2019, can be found in tab as\_01 at volume 1 of the quarterly Immigration Statistics release:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-year-ending-march-2019/list-of-tables#asylum>

The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it, in accordance with our international obligations under the Refugee Convention and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Where someone establishes a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm in their country they are normally granted protection and are not expected to return there.

Our assessment of the situation for Uighurs in China is set out in the relevant country policy and information note, which is available on the Gov.uk website

All asylum and human rights claims from Chinese nationals are carefully considered on their individual merits in accordance with our international obligations. Each individual assessment is made against the background of the latest available country of origin information and any relevant caselaw.

**[China: Uighurs](#)**

**23 Jul 2019 | 277175**

**Asked by: Steve Baker**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the accuracy of reports of Uighur Muslim children in western Xinjiang being separated from their parents; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member: Dr Andrew Murrison | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Reports about forced separation of children, including Dr Adrian Zenz's report of 4 July 2019, add to the growing body of evidence about the disturbing situation that Uyghurs and other minorities are facing in Xinjiang. We assess that there could be more than a million Uyghurs and other minorities who have been or are currently detained extra-judicially in detention camps in the province. As Mr Field explained in a Westminster Hall debate on 29 January 2019, these detentions have split up families and have had a significant impact on the children of those detained.

We also frequently raise our concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang bilaterally with the Chinese Government and in multilateral fora. Most recently on 3 July at the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, we noted our increasing concern at the growing use of detention camps in Xinjiang and re-iterated our call on China to allow UN observers unrestricted access.

**[China: Uighurs](#)**

**22 Jul 2019 | HL17001**

**Asked by: The Lord Bishop of St Albans**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what representations they have made to the government of China about reports of (1) forcible separations, and (2) re-education, of Uighur children in the eastern province of Xinjiang.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon  
| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We have serious concerns about the detention of more than a million Uyghurs, along with widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities. British diplomats in China visit Xinjiang every few months, in order to see at first-hand the situation there. They most recently visited in May 2019, and their observations have supported much of the recent open source reporting about the restrictions targeted at specific ethnic groups.

Ministers and senior officials frequently raise the human rights issues in the region with their Chinese counterparts, most recently in a public statement on 3 July at the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council. The Foreign Secretary also highlighted our concerns with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his most recent visit to China, in July 2018. Later that month, the Minister for Asia and the Pacific did the same with his Chinese counterpart Vice Minister Guo Yezhou. Additionally, our Embassy in Beijing regularly raises the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang with the Chinese authorities.

Reports about forced separation of children add to the growing body of disturbing evidence highlighting the situation Uyghurs face in Xinjiang. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and raise our concerns with the Chinese government at all levels bilaterally and in appropriate UN fora, including the Human Rights Council.

### **[China: Uighurs](#)**

**22 Jul 2019 | HL16968**

#### **Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of reports that Muslim children are being separated from their families, faith and language in schools in Xinjiang; and what representations they intend to make about such separations to the government of China.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

##### **| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We have serious concerns about the detention of more than a million Uyghurs, along with widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities. British diplomats in China visit Xinjiang every few months, in order to see at first-hand the situation there. They most recently visited in May 2019, and their observations have supported much of the recent open source reporting about the restrictions targeted at specific ethnic groups.

Ministers and senior officials frequently raise the human rights issues in the region with their Chinese counterparts, most recently in a public statement on 3 July at the 41st session of the UN Human Rights Council. The Foreign Secretary also highlighted our concerns with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his most recent visit to China, in July 2018. Later that month, the Minister for Asia and the Pacific did the same with his Chinese counterpart Vice Minister Guo Yezhou. Additionally, our Embassy in Beijing regularly raises the treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang with the Chinese authorities.

Reports about forced separation of children add to the growing body of disturbing evidence highlighting the situation Uyghurs face in Xinjiang. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and raise our concerns with the Chinese government at all levels bilaterally and in appropriate UN fora, including the Human Rights Council.

**China: Human Rights**

**13 Jun 2019 | 261230**

**Asked by: Jim Shannon**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what assessment he has made of the human rights situation in China in (a) 2019 comparative to (b) 1989.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Over the past 30 years China has ratified a number of United Nations instruments relating to human rights. However we have serious concerns about the continued lack of respect for civil and political human rights in China, particularly relating to the rights of ethnic minorities; the death penalty; freedom of expression, association and assembly; and freedom of religion or belief.

The advent of advanced surveillance technologies has facilitated increased restrictions on the rights of citizens in China. This has been particularly noticeable in Xinjiang, where there are credible reports of over a million Uyghurs and other minorities being detained in so called "re-education camps". Reliable reporting suggests the region is subject to widespread surveillance, overt discriminatory profiling of members of ethnic minorities, and an omnipresent security apparatus. British diplomats most recently visited Xinjiang in May 2019 and their observations supported much of the recent open source reporting about the situation in the province.

We urge the Chinese authorities to safeguard their citizens' rights as enshrined in China's constitution and in international law.

**China: Islam**

**15 May 2019 | 251292**

**Asked by: Lyn Brown**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what estimate he has made of the extent of demolition of Islamic religious sites in Xinjiang, China in each of the last five years.

**Answering member: Mark Field | Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are aware of, and concerned by, reports of mosques, shrines, and other places of worship in Xinjiang being targeted by Chinese authorities. While we do not have an accurate measure on what proportion of mosques are being destroyed, available evidence, including that recently presented in the Guardian newspaper following a joint Guardian/Bellingcat investigation, suggests that it is significant. British diplomats in China visit Xinjiang every few months in order to see at first-hand the situation there. Their observations have supported much of the recent open source reporting about the restrictions targeted at specific ethnic and religious groups.

We regularly raise our serious concerns about the situation in Xinjiang with the Chinese authorities at senior levels, and will continue to do so.

At the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Lord Ahmad, raised our concerns during his opening address on 25 February. The UK also spoke about Xinjiang during our "Item 4" national statement on 12 March, and co-sponsored and spoke at a side event on Xinjiang, which helped to raise awareness of the situation among the international community. The Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, raised our concerns about Xinjiang with Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi during his last visit to China in July 2018. I also raised our concerns with Vice Minister Guo Yezhou during his visit to China on 22 July 2018. Our Embassy in Beijing also regularly raises our concerns with the Chinese authorities.

### **China: Uighurs**

**16 Apr 2019 | HL15073**

#### **Asked by: The Marquess of Lothian**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the Chinese authorities' treatment of Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang region; whether they raised this issue during the 40th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC); and what discussions were held during the UNHRC session on the establishment of an independent international fact-finding mission to Xinjiang.

#### **Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**

##### **| Department: Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and the Chinese Government's deepening crackdown; including credible reports that over one million Uyghur Muslims have been held in re-education camps, and reports of widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at ethnic minorities. Visits to Xinjiang by diplomats from our Embassy in Beijing have corroborated much of this open source reporting.

At the most recent session of the UN Human Rights Council, I raised our concerns about Xinjiang during my opening address. The UK also raised concerns about Xinjiang during our Item 4 National Statement and we were among a group of states to co-sponsor a US-led side event on the topic.

We were aware of calls by non-governmental organisations for the establishment of an independent international fact-finding mission to Xinjiang but no state took this up at the Human Rights Council. We believe that China should grant access to Xinjiang to independent international human rights mechanisms and implement the recommendations of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). We reiterated these points both in the formal session of the Human Rights Council and in the US-led side event through our Permanent Representative in Geneva.

## 5. Debates

### [Human Rights: Xinjiang](#)

**29 Jan 2019 | House of Commons | 653 cc323-347WH**

Motion that this House has considered human rights in Xinjiang. Agreed to on question.

## 6. FCO Human Rights report

### [Human Rights and Democracy: the 2018 Foreign and Commonwealth Office report](#) [Extract]

5 June 2019

Cp104

#### China

Civil and political rights in China continued to be eroded, with the situation in Xinjiang in particular attracting international condemnation. China became more active in the UN Human Rights Council, attempting to shift the international understanding of human rights to focus more on development, and on social and economic rights. The continuing detention and trials of human rights lawyers and defenders, and lack of due process and judicial transparency, remained important concerns.

China's escalating crackdown in Xinjiang, particularly against Uyghur Muslims, was a major human rights concern for the UK in 2018 and was an important focus for our lobbying. There were credible reports of more than one million Uyghur Muslims and members of other ethnic minority groups being held in extrajudicial 'political re-education' camps, of widespread surveillance and restrictions targeted at minorities, and of families detained and children forcibly adopted. China cited 'de-extremification' as its motivation. We assessed that China's actions were indiscriminate and disproportionate, and risked fuelling ethnic tensions.

Restrictions to the freedom of religion or belief and restrictions targeted at ethnic minorities continued across China, particularly in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other Tibetan areas. Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk was sentenced in May to 5 years in prison. Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the Dalai Lama's choice of Panchen Lama, remained missing. There were reports of self-immolations in Sichuan.

New regulations introduced in February gave the authorities more control over how individuals practised their religions. In September, the Vatican signed an agreement on the appointment of bishops with China. However, reports of the persecution and detention of Christians continued, and Beijing's largest house church (the Zion Church) and the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu were closed.

Members of the Falun Gong movement continued to be targeted for peacefully following their belief. Some observers, including some MPs, continued to be concerned that Falun Gong practitioners might be victims of organ harvesting.

The authorities tightened their control over freedom of expression, association, and assembly. Tens of thousands of social media accounts were made illegal, millions of online posts deleted, and many online news outlets closed. LGBT relationships were banned from being shown in the media and forced 'conversion therapy' continued. Chinese Foreign NGO legislation continued to close off international links, causing continued damage to local civil society development. Freedom

House again ranked China bottom in the world for Net Freedoms. Reporters Without Borders once again ranked China as the country with the most journalists in jail, with 60 in detention.

Lawyers and human rights defenders continued to come under significant pressure. Lawyer Wang Quanzhang was tried on 26 December, having spent over three years in pre-trial detention. Lawyer Yu Wensheng was detained in January, but was not brought to trial. Gao Zhisheng remained missing. Many lawyers working on 'sensitive' issues had their licences revoked. In July, Liu Xia (widow of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo) was allowed to leave China, but the next day veteran pro-democracy campaigner Qin Yongmin was sentenced to 13 years in prison. Swedish national (and Hong Kong bookseller) Gui Minhai was detained in January.

The People's Assessors law, adopted in April, sought to promote public participation in the justice system. However this was preceded by the introduction of the National Supervisory Law in March, which legalised extrajudicial detention without access to a lawyer for up to 6 months, including for foreigners. China continued to use the death penalty, with the number of people executed remaining a state secret.

The Prime Minister, Theresa May, raised human rights concerns with President Xi and Premier Li during her visit to China in January. The Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, also raised concerns during his visit in July; and ministers and senior officials issued statements and raised concerns with their counterparts. Ministers and officials met human rights defenders, and British diplomats attempted to attend trials, but were not allowed access. We made recommendations to legislators on several draft laws. We funded projects across China, including on improving access to justice in the criminal system and expanding space for civil society. China did not agree dates for the 25th round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue.

The UK was vocal in the UN Human Rights Council. We included China in our Item 4 (situations which require the council's attention) statement at every session, supported EU statements, and participated in China's Universal Periodic Review.

In 2019, we will continue to monitor the human rights situation and to raise our concerns on the full range of human rights issues; we expect our focus will continue to be on Xinjiang.

There was increased pressure on Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy and the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Joint Declaration; particularly freedom of expression and press freedoms. Examples included the refusal of a visa extension and subsequent denial of entry to the Financial Times Asia news editor and the prohibition of the pro-independence Hong Kong National Party.

## 7. Further reading

### Reports

#### [Uyghurs for sale](#)

Australian Strategic Policy Institute

Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Danielle Cave, Dr James Leibold, Kelsey Munro and  
Nathan Ruser

1 March 2020

### Websites

#### [Xinjiang homepage](#)

Human Rights Watch

#### [China homepage](#)

Amnesty International

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