

ISRMUN 2021

UNHRC

**United Nations Human
Rights Council**

Committee: United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

Topic: Addressing the mass detention of Uighur Muslims in China

Written by: Tanya Trujillo, Juliana Peña, Bárbara Novau and Ana Paola Rodríguez

I. Committee Background

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is a committee of the United Nations that was created on March 15th, 2006 by the General Assembly. It holds the responsibility of protecting and promoting human rights around the world as well as discussing and addressing violations (Universal Rights Group, 2020). Furthermore, the UNHRC's headquarters are located in Geneva, Switzerland. It consists of a total of 47 member states, which were elected by the General Assembly. Since its establishment in 2006, the Council has responded to numerous human rights violations and has adopted approximately 456 resolutions to far-reaching issues. Moreover, the same year it was created it established the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a process that reviews the human rights records of each UN member state to ensure equal treatment for every country. The Council is currently working on a program to enhance liability as well as treat cases of human rights abuse in businesses as well as working to establish six different projects that have been carefully selected for this specific reason (Welcome, OHCHR, 2020).

II. Topic Information

A. History of the Topic

Islam is the second-largest religion in the world. The followers of this religion are called Muslims. Worldwide, there are approximately 1.8 billion Muslims (History, 2019). Since April 2017, the Chinese government has interred more than 1 million Uighur Muslims into so-called re-education camps. The Uighur community is a Turkic-speaking group that is originally located in the northwestern region of Xinjiang, China. A small number of Uighurs live in the Central Asian republics, while around 10,000,000 Uighurs are found in China and 300,000 in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the purpose of these “re-education camps”, according to the Chinese government, is for the Uighur Muslims to integrate themselves into Chinese society, but in reality, people in the camps often face inhumane situations and are surrounded by a prison-like environment. Most of the children are taken away from their parents and are settled in an orphanage (Maizland, Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

In 2019, there were Chinese government documents leaked that confirmed various human rights violations taking place in the camps. Examples of this include, never being allowed to escape, increased punishment when behaving incorrectly, and only releasing detainees once they have fully transformed their behaviour, language, and beliefs. Moreover, the documents also show how every single aspect of the detainee’s life is being controlled; how they are being watched all the time and how they have to follow strict rules (The Uighurs, BBC News, 2019). The Chinese government relishes from impunity and has denied on various occasions the horror that these camps hold. “The education centers are not prisons. They are not concentration

camps... The basic human rights of the students are respected. They can contact their families and receive visitors," said Deng Li, China's ambassador to Turkey when asked about the claims (DW News, 2019).

The international community has gone in two separate ways, some supporting China and its detention camps while others opposing it. In October 2019, members of the United Nations got together to talk about this issue. On one side a Representative of the United Kingdom issued a statement representing 23 countries, some being the United States, Canada, Japan and Australia raising concerns of human rights violations in Xinjiang. On the other hand, China's ally, Belarus, made its own statements representing 54 countries including Russia, Egypt, Bolivia and Serbia displaying its approval with China's "counter-terrorism" program (Westcott and Roth, CNN, 2019). Various human rights are being violated in China's detention camps, the main one being freedom of religion. Examples of other rights that have been violated are; no torture, no slavery, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, social security and no unfair detainment. All of these human rights infringements have been taking place since Chinese officials are worried about the ideologies of the Uighurs and see them as a threat (CFR, 2020).

B. Current Issues

China: In 2017, the Chinese government took more than 1 million Uighurs from their families and placed them in "re-education camps" in the region of Xinjiang (Ramzy and Buckley, The New York Times, 2019). The president of China, Xi Jinping, and his Communist Party, have been convinced that the practicing of Islam in China, near the borders of Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Pakistan, shall not proceed. At this point, more

than 430 documents have been leaked to the world. These documents clearly state how the president of China has provided directions to authorities in the Xinjiang region, and private speeches he has given regarding this situation, besides a full document that testifies the planning of the extension of these camps. Despite all this evidence, the government of the country has denied any accusation towards them, concerning the state of the camps, even though they have lied to families disputing the fact that most of their relatives are living in inhuman situations. The Uighurs themselves have accused the communist regime of violence against them and have shown many examples of recorded proof (Reuters, 2019). China has done nothing to make this better. They still refuse the existence of these camps and declare that "other countries don't understand the violence in this specific region." According to some of the leaked documents, their goal is to raise "new, and loyal servants towards their communist government" (Data Leak, BBC News, 2019).

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom (UK) has made many moves against the China camps and has clearly stated its disaccord with it. As stated before, the UK represented 23 countries against the detention camps in the UN in October 2019. It continued to show its disagreement throughout the time by urging the UN to access the camps after some leaked footage and by convincing and informing other countries on what is happening in Xinjiang. The UK also recently took action against senior generals in Myanmar who have created a campaign of violence against the Rohingya and have taken part in forced labour camps in North Korea, a problem that has been going on since 2017. Mr. Rabb, a British politician, said that the UK is not afraid to take action since this situation was "not as simple as deciding you can willy nilly sanction X or Y", showing that even if it takes longer to accomplish they will take down these sorts of camps (Data Leak, BBC News, 2019). The UK's involvement in this can be a little

hazardous since even though they are both involved in the UN, both countries have recently been raising bad blood because of the Hong Kong situation and the camps. If this keeps up we can only guess what may come (Timsit, Quartz, 2020).

United States: The United States (US) has stated various times its disagreement with the detention camps in China. A group of senators, in October 2020, presented a solution stating that the “atrocities” committed against Uyghurs in Xinjiang embody genocide. The solution also urges other countries to unite against the Chinese government and for it to release the Uighurs. Additionally, a spokesman of President-elect Joe Biden’s campaign, enunciated that Biden stands against China’s actions in Xinjiang “in the strongest terms” (FRONTLINE, 2020). Additionally, the US has also implemented sanctions against Chinese politicians that take part in the human rights violations such as the director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau, Wang Mingshan, and Chen Quanguo who plays an important role in the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party (Data Leak, BBC News, 2019). Moreover, in July 2020, the Trump Administration prohibited 11 Chinese companies from purchasing American technology without a special license stating that these companies have formed part of China’s human rights violations in Xinjiang. The US has taken several actions to end the re-education camps and will continue to in the future (Ramzy and Buckley, The New York Times, 2019).

C. UN Action

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has expressed her concern for the Uighur Muslims detained in China. Right now, the UN committee is closely analyzing reports, images and videos that have been obtained of

the detention camps. Bachelet said, "These reports came from a variety of sources, but consistent with our usual practice, my team is trying to validate the material we receive on these issues." Moreover, the United Nations has been requesting access to the detention camps to investigate the claims of human rights abuses, however, all requests so far have been denied by the Chinese government (Kenny, Anadolu Agency, 2019). In October 2020, 39 UN member states condemned China for its treatment of the Uighurs. Their collective statement said that they "call on China to respect human rights, particularly the rights of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, especially in Xinjiang." The statement further highlighted alleged crimes committed by China: "There are severe restrictions on freedom of religion or belief and the freedoms of movement, association, and expression as well as on Uighur culture. Widespread surveillance disproportionately continues to target Uighurs and other minorities, and more reports are emerging of forced labour and forced birth control, including sterilization" (Besheer, VOA, 2020).

III. Essential Questions

1. Who are the Uighurs?
2. Why are the Uighurs being imprisoned in China?
3. What are "re-education camps"?
4. What is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
5. What is the United Nations doing to address this issue?
6. What is your country's stance on this issue?
7. Which other organizations are working on this issue? Does your country collaborate with any of them? If so, which ones and in which way?

IV. Resources:

"A Rough Guide to the OHCHR." Universal Rights Group. Universal Rights Group, 20 Mar. 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<http://www.universal-rights.org/human-rights-rough-guides/a-rough-guide-to-the-ohchr/>>.

Besheer, Margaret. "At UN: 39 Countries Condemn China's Abuses of Uighurs." VOA. Voice of America, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/un-39-countries-condemn-chinas-abuses-uighurs>>.

"China's Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang." Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Council on Foreign Relations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uighurs-xinjiang>>.

"Data Leak Reveals How China 'brainwashes' Uighurs in Prison Camps." BBC News. British Broadcasting Corporation, 24 Nov. 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50511063>>.

"How the U.S. Has Reacted to China's Treatment of Uyghurs." FRONTLINE. FRONTLINE, 10 Nov. 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/us-reacted-china-treatment-uyghurs/>>.

"Human Rights Achievements." Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). United Nations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://at20.ohchr.org/achievements.html>>.

“Leaked Chinese government documents show details of Xinjiang clampdown: NYT.” Reuters. Reuters, 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang/leaked-chinese-government-documents-show-details-of-xinjiang-clampdown-new-york-times-idUSKBN1XR04U>>.

Maizland, Lindsay. “China’s Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang.” Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Council on Foreign Relations, 11 Apr. 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-repression-uighurs-xinjiang>>.

Marx, Willem, and Olivia Sumrie. “Uighurs Accuse China of Mass Detention, Torture in Landmark Complaint.” NBC News. NBC Universal News Group, 10 Sept. 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/uighurs-accuse-china-mass-detention-torture-landmark-complaint-n1239493>>.

“Overview of Projects.” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). United Nations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Business/Pages/OverviewOfProjects.aspx>>.

Ramzy, Austin and Chris Buckley. “‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims.” The New York Times. The New York Times, 16 Nov. 2019,. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>>.

Timsit, Annabelle. “UK-China Relations Imploded in 2020-and Things Could Get Worse.” Quartz. Quartz, 23 Dec. 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://qz.com/1949544/uk-china-relations-imploded-in-2020-and-things-could-get-worse/>>.

"The Uighurs and the Chinese State: A Long History of Discord." BBC News. British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>>.

"Uighur Exile in Turkey Describes Cruelty of Chinese Camp." DW News. Deutsche Welle, 14 Dec. 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_O8vfUpXZQI>.

"UK Accuses China of 'Gross' Human Rights Abuses against Uighurs." BBC News. British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-53463403>>.

"UN rights chief worried about Xinjiang Uighurs' plight." Anadolu Agency. Anadolu Agency, 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/un-rights-chief-worried-about-xinjiang-uighurs-plight/2071390>>.

"Welcome to the Human Rights Council." Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). United Nations, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/hrc/pages/aboutcouncil.aspx>>.

Westcott, Ben and Richard Roth. "UN Members Issue Dueling Statements over China's Treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang." CNN. Cable News Network, 30 Oct. 2019. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/29/asia/china-xinjiang-united-nations-intl-hnk/index.html>>.

ISRMUN 2021

"Xinjiang: US Sanctions on Chinese Officials over 'abuse' of Muslims." BBC News. British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020. Web. 21 Jan. 2021. <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53355697>>.