

The Genocide of the Uyghur People

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Uyghurs are a group of people who are a majority Muslim and are considered to be ethnically and culturally similar to Central Asian nations. There is a population of about twelve million who live in China's north-west region of Xinjiang. Today they make up less than half of the Xinjiang population, although historically they were the majority in the region. Xinjiang is governed similarly to Tibet where they do have some self governance powers yet they are still mainly under the control of the Chinese government. The Chinese government is being accused by the global community of committing crimes against humanity and genocide against the Uyghur people and other Muslims groups in the north-west region of Xinjiang. Genocide is defined by the United Nations as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Under international law, crimes against humanity are considered to be part of the gravest human rights abuses.

In 1949 China gained control of the Xinjiang region and began to encourage Han Chinese to move there, which is when tensions began to rise in the area. Later in 2009 there was rioting in Xinjiang's capital as the Uyghur people protested against the encouragement of the Han Chinese migration to their region and the economic and cultural discrimination they received as a result of it. The protest resulted in about two hundred deaths and was a turning point in relations between the Uyghur people and the Chinese government. The government began to push a false narrative of the Uyghur people in the years to follow claiming they were terrorists and terrorist sympathizers, even blaming them for attacks on local government offices, train stations, and Tiananmen Square.

The "re-education camps" as the Chinese government calls them are believed to have started in 2014 and significantly expanded in 2017. Detainees in the camps have been targeted for a variety of reasons like simply contacting people from one of the twenty-six countries China

considered to be sensitive such as Turkey or Afghanistan. Other reasons include going to a mosque, having more than three children, or having texts or emails that contain verses from the Quran. In essence, the government is labeling these people as extremist and dangerous when the only “crimes” they are committing is practicing their religion. By labeling the Uyghur people as dangerous they are justifying their use of the camps as effective tools to re-educate people in an effort to prevent terrorism and get rid of Islamic extremists in the region. Although China stands by this claim there was a quote by Maisum Jiang Maimuer who is a Chinese religious affairs official speaking about the Uyghur people where he said, “Break their lineage, break their roots, break their connections, and break their origins.” Showing that this is much more than an anti terrorism practice but rather a genocide against group of people who have done nothing wrong.

Human rights groups believe that China has detained more than one million Uyghurs over the years at their camps in Xinjiang. The conditions of the camps have been extremely dangerous and unsafe for the people inside. It was discovered that they have a shoot-to-kill policy for anyone who tries to escape the camps. There have also been claims made that the Chinese government has forcibly sterilized women, separated children from their families, and forbid any cultural or religious practices. It is all too common for Uyghur women to be victims of rape and sexual harrasment at the camps. Of the people at these camps at least one hundred thousand people are being used for forced labor on the cotton fields in Xinjiang. Prior to the legislation passed by the United States government banning companies from using the forced labor in Xinjiang, brands such as Adidas, Coca-Cola, and Nike all used the forced labor from the camps.

There has been a global response to this crisis, yet it seems to have done little to help the Uyghur people in China. Countries including the United States, Untied Kingdom, Canada, and

Netherlands have all formally accused China of committing genocide. The United States also passed legislation called the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which requires all companies operating in Xinjiang to prove they don't use forced labor otherwise they can not sell their products. They have also imposed visa restrictions on Chinese officials as well as blacklisting over two dozen Chinese companies linked to the region making them unable to buy products from the United States. There have also been sanctions imposed on the Chinese government by the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and the European Union. In 2022 Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, United States, Japan, and Denmark all boycotted the Beijing Olympics as a form of protest against the Chinese government's actions. Besides this there have been several efforts by the United Nations and other human rights organizations reaching out to the Chinese government urging them to stop targeting the Uyghur people. Unfortunately these attempts have been unsuccessful and the Chinese government continues to deny any wrongdoing. They insist that there is nothing wrong happening at these camps in Xinjiang and refuse to let journalists or foreign investigators examine the camps.

The Chinese government has used the media as a way to publically attack those who speak out against them and the camps. Women who speak out and talk about the rape and sexual abuse in the detention camps have been harrassed and smeared in the news. BBC found that of twenty two people who left Xinjiang and now live abroad they have all reported receiving threats, harassment, and even attacks in the Chinese media. This is all in an attempt to silence those who want to speak up about the conditions of Muslims in Xinjiang. The government is doing what they can to control the narrative of the conditions in the camps through the media, but thankfully even with the harassment and threats people are coming forward and media outlets are doing their best to report the facts. Unfortunately it still remains that this issue does not

receive as much attention as it should in the media and global community as some other international stories do. This can be mainly attributed to the fact that the Chinese government has been able to silence so many people with fear, as many people never come forward with their experience living in Xinjiang. This is an example of how sometimes communication through the media can actually create problems rather than solve them.

This crisis in China shows the power of international communication because without it, it's very possible that there would be even less information than we currently have about the conditions in Xinjiang. Although it's clear that more needs to be done to spread awareness of this issue and to get more nations involved, it is a good sign to see so many nations speak up and take action. The sanctions and boycotts are all effective ways that the global community can speak up and try to help the crisis in China. This ensures that the Chinese government isn't the ones controlling the narrative allowing for the facts to be heard by the public. Another major part of the international communication used during this crisis are the journalists who do their best to report this story and report it accurately. It is difficult to report on this topic because of how secretive the Chinese government has been yet there are still journalists out there who are doing their best to research and find facts. All the while doing reporting can be dangerous for the reporters yet they continue to use the internet as a way to communicate with people around the world what is happening. This is the perfect example of how important global communication is, without internet and news outlets we would have never known of the crisis happening in Xinjiang. It has allowed a way for the Chinese government to not hold all of the power in this case because there are people on the outside in other countries watching and spreading the facts to protect this minority group. It has also been a way for survivors of the camps to speak up and have the world hear their stories and the truth of what is happening to their people.

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