

China's Mass Incarceration of Muslims in East Turkestan (Xinjiang): Vocational Training Centres or Concentration Camps?

Senate Room

Robertson Hall, Carleton University, Ottawa

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First Speaker: Dr. Olsi Jazexhi is an Albanian-Canadian historian who teaches history at University of Durres and Elbasan in Albania. He finished his PhD at

the European University Institute in Florence, Italy and has been a Fellow at York University in Toronto, Canada. He has been a yearly contributor for the Yearbook of Muslims in Europe and is contributing author of the European Islamophobia Report 2018.

He is a social activist and an independent media critic. His works and interviews have appeared in a number of international publications in Albania, Serbia, Greece, Macedonia, Turkey and Canada. In August 2019 he visited Xinjiang's 'Vocational Skills Training Centers' and witnessed the process of mass detention and forced Sinification of Muslim Uyghurs of China.

Second Speaker: Rukiye Turdush was born in East Turkestan. She is an ethnic Uyghur. She studied history at East China Normal University in Shanghai, and immigrated to Canada in 1998. She continued her studies of International Development at the University of Windsor and studied post – graduate social work at George Brown College. She is the former president of the Uyghur Canadian Society. Ms. Turdush also worked as a stringer for Radio Free Asia Uyghur service. She has published a book in Uyghur language and several opinion pieces in English. She lives in Toronto.

Notes prepared earlier by David Kilgour, but not used at event in favour of speaking spontaneously at end of questions from audience:

Last fall, 646 international scholars from 40 nations signed a statement condemning the internment of Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang region of China, stressing that mass internment of citizens on the basis of ethno-cultural and religious identity is unprecedented in the twenty-first century and should not be accepted by the international community. All of us here today no doubt agree.

The victims are subjected to highly invasive forms of surveillance and psychological stress as they are forced to abandon their language, religious beliefs and cultural practices. Beyond the camps, more than ten million Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are subjected to a dense network of surveillance systems and checkpoints.

The academics called on governments, multi-lateral organizations, businesses, and academic institutions to apply pressure on the Beijing party-state to cease its campaign of unprecedented inhumanity and repression.

Reconquered by China under Mao Zedong in 1949, many Uyghurs became more frustrated in the 1990s as central Asian republics gained independence from the former Soviet Union. Academic Adrian Zenz of Germany estimates that without any due process there are now more than a million Uyghurs of Xinjiang aged 20 – 79 incarcerated in up to 1,200 facilities. In a talk at Harvard's Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, he noted that inmates are exposed to endless hours of "re-education". He added that the intent of the brainwashing is to "kill the memory of who they are, wipe out their separate identity, language and history...even the slightest perceived infraction, such as having a copy of the Koran on a phone or making a contact abroad, can result in incarceration."

In 2017, Xi Jinping began erecting a "re-education" gulag for Uyghur and other Muslim communities. It was similar to the forced labour

camps established across China after mid- 1999 for Falun Gong and other prisoners of conscience. Both networks receive inmates arrested by public security agencies without any pretence of a hearing, trial or appeal.

Author Robert D. Kaplan adds: “The repression of the Turkic Uyghur Muslim community in western China...is a key part of Beijing’s new imperial policy.” He concludes that China’s massive Belt and Road Initiative “requires the complete subjugation of the Uyghur population”.

Last October, the human rights subcommittee of Canada’s House of Commons studied the Uyghur situation. Expert witnesses described unsanitary facilities where starvation prevails, detainees are punished through physical and psychological ill-treatment, and many deaths occur, particularly among the elderly and infirm. Witnesses called for Canada to demand that China allow independent human rights investigators into Xinjiang. They noted that the international community as a whole had to date failed to hold the Beijing accountable. Some urged Canada to coordinate its efforts with like-minded states to condemn publicly the regime for its actions. Others called for the imposition of targeted economic measures against officials who have led the repression.

The brutal campaigns have caused Uyghurs to flee to central and southeast Asia to escape ethnic and religious persecution. They share ethnic, linguistic, and religious ties with Central Asian populations—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which border Xinjiang—and are now economically dependent on China and have yielded to Beijing pressure on Uyghurs. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization has institutionalized the Central Asian countries’ security cooperation, directly targeting Uyghurs.

Organ harvesting from Uyghurs prisoners appears to have preceded that from Falun Gong, which began in 2001. In his 2014 book *The Slaughter*, Nobel Peace Prize nominee and co-founder of the

International Coalition to end Organ Abuse in China, Ethan Gutmann places the persecution of the Falun Gong, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Eastern Lightening Christian communities in context. He explains how he arrived at his “best estimate” that organs of 65,000 Falun Gong and “two to four thousand” Uyghurs, Tibetans and Christians were “harvested” in the 2000 to 2008 period.

The Uyghur leadership, aware of the common plight victims of Chinese oppression face, has shown solidarity with the Falun Gong. States protesting victimization of the Uyghur community should continue to do so. Both faith and secular communities worldwide must speak out strongly about the tragedy unfolding for Uyghurs across Xinjiang.

Thank you for holding this event.