

GECMUN 6: CREATE!

UNHRC

RE-EDUCATION CAMPS IN CHINA'S XINJIANG
PROVINCE
CHAIR REPORT

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIRS

Dear Delegates, Advisors, and Guests,

It is our pleasure to invite you all to GECMUN 6's Human Rights Council (HRC). We have all been involved extensively in our school's Model United Nations (MUN) program since we were in middle school, and MUN has been an integral part of our journey in high school.

This year's topic for the HRC is one that we are personally very interested in seeing debated due to the wide range of discussion points that can be unpacked. HRC delegates will collaborate with each other to come up with feasible solutions on the topic of re-education camps in Xinjiang, China. These camps have drawn grave concern from the international community regarding China's violation of fundamental human rights such as freedom of religion and freedom of movement. While there have been calls for the Chinese government to respect and protect the cultural rights of all religious and ethnic groups in China, there has been notably little action from the United Nations (UN). In part, this is due to the fact that some countries have voiced their support for what they describe as China's appropriate counterterrorism measures.

Topics like this one prompt us to consider a wide range of perspectives. Through your experience in this simulation of the HRC, you will deepen your appreciation for the complexity of this topic. We hope that you develop empathy by considering what it would be like if you or a family member were to be detained in a "re-education camp" because of your cultural practices or religious beliefs. It will be important to seek to understand why China has taken this action. What internal forces have prompted China to behave this way and to what extent are these factors also present in your own country? You will need to ask yourself questions like "What is the best solution that benefits not only my country and its citizens, but ALL countries represented in this committee?" And, of course, you should be asking the key questions that prompt further investigation and debate: "Why?" and "How?"

No matter if this is your first conference, or your tenth, you will learn much more than the basics of MUN. Rather, you will develop the skills of a highly effective negotiator tackling a multi-faceted problem. We, therefore, look forward to assisting you through the process of researching this topic and throughout the duration of the conference.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at 22patrickl@students.tas.tw, 21nicoles@students.tas.tw, and 22kristinc@students.tas.tw.

Best Regards,
Patrick Lin, Nicole Scheidel, and Kristin Chang

INTRODUCTION

Since early 2014, as part of the Strike Hard Campaign against Violent Terrorism, the Chinese government has been developing "reeducation camps" in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. Human rights groups report that these detention facilities hold up to a million Uighurs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups. Discrimination towards these minority groups broadened and intensified after the "Regulations on De-extremification" were adopted in March 2017 followed by further local legislation giving the Xinjiang government the legal authority to take action against any behavior that it regards as "extremist." China maintains that these measures are necessary to counter terrorism and ensure social stability. However, instead of bringing stability and lasting peace, the regulations are in the process of bringing China worldwide condemnation. Leaked documents and firsthand accounts show that the "re-education camps" resemble life in prison. The camps are equipped with wire fences, watchtowers, and armed police. Interviews with former detainees also reveal the lack of humanity in the camps. They report that inmates are electrocuted, forcefully administered unknown medication, and required to study communist ideology. Despite widespread concern about human rights abuses and torture, the international response has been mixed. Led by the United States, the US and its allies have

issued condemnations and called for the United Nations (UN) to intervene, while Chinese-allied countries like Russia and Saudi Arabia have defended the camps, claiming that China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism work in the name of national security. China initially denied the existence of the detention facilities, but in the face of mounting international pressure, China instead began to describe the camps as "education training centers". Chinese authorities have stressed that their purpose is not only to stamp out extremism but also to provide people new vocational skills. Although the issue continues to make world news headlines, little has been done regarding the camps. The international community must work together towards a solution that respects and protects the cultural rights of Uighurs and all religious and ethnic minorities in China while also respecting China's sovereignty.

KEY TERMS

Belt and road initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a Chinese government-sponsored plan to revive the Silk Road network of land and sea trading routes and, in so doing, connect China with Europe and Asia. The BRI aims to tackle problems of poverty and regional isolation through infrastructure and other development projects designed to boost economic growth. As of May 2019, more than 60 countries (two-thirds of the world's population) have established BRI projects or have expressed interest in doing so.

Xinjiang

Xinjiang, China's biggest region, lies in the northwestern corner of the country bordering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Rich in natural resources, it was once a thriving region of China due to ancient Silk Road trade. It is now a hub for the Belt and Road Initiative. The region has long experienced tension between the indigenous Uighur people and Communist government rule. Although officially an autonomous province, much of Xinjiang is actually controlled by the central Beijing government, according to the BBC. The population of around 20 million people includes various Muslim minority groups, the largest of which are the Uighur.

Uighur (also spelled Uyghur)

Defined by Merriam Webster as "a member of a Turkic people powerful in Mongolia and eastern Turkestan between the 8th and 12th centuries AD who constitute a majority of the population of Chinese Turkestan." The Uighurs are the largest of the Muslim minority groups to have been detained in re-education camps. There are approximately 11 million Uighurs in western China; the main ethnic division is 45% Uighur and 40% Han Chinese. Uighurs feel their culture and livelihoods are under threat due to the mass migration of Han Chinese to Xinjiang over the past few decades, a period of considerable economic development. The Communist government has blamed Uighur separatists for several violent attacks since the 1990s.

Re-education Camp

"A camp or prison where ideological dissidents undergo reeducation or indoctrination." The Chinese government under Xi Jinping describes the internment camps where Uighurs and other ethnic groups have been reportedly detained as re-education or vocational training centers. The Hong Kong-based group, China Human Rights Defenders, used official data to support its report that more than one-fifth of all arrests in China in 2017 took place in Xinjiang despite the fact that the region comprises only 2% of China's total population.

Extremism

Defined by Merriam Webster as the "advocacy of extreme measures or views; radicalism." The eradication of extremism is one of the main reasons Chinese authorities give to justify the camps. China says the extremist threat comes from separatist Islamist groups and that the authorities must combat violent terrorist criminal activities. Extremism is also included under "The Three Evil Forces", a term created by Chinese administrators to describe the three core ideas that disrupt social stability. The Three Evil Forces are terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. (Separatism and extremism described below.)

Separatism

Defined by Merriam Webster as "a belief in, movement for, or state of separation". Ethnic separatism is also included under "The Three Evil Forces". The Chinese government, which officially recognizes five religions (Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism), has long feared that foreigners could use religion to encourage separatism. This would lead to instability and loss of power for the central government. A September 2018 editorial in the Chinese state-run newspaper, the Global Times, argued that Xinjiang faces a threat from Islamist militants who plot attacks to stir up dissent and a desire for greater separation between the people of the region and the central administration. Furthermore, Western claims of poor governance by Xinjiang authorities have only emboldened separatists and stirred up more unrest, according to the editorial. Therefore, a main goal of the re-education camps (as well as other forms of government surveillance in the region) is to prevent terrorism related to Islamic separatism by re-educating locals in Chinese history, language, and culture. Rights groups such as Human Rights Watch describe this more as an effort to wipe out local culture and force locals to renounce Islam.

Terrorism

Defined by Merriam Webster as "the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion". Terrorism is also included in "The Three Evil Forces" by Chinese administrators. The Chinese government blames the terrorist attacks in the Xinjiang region and elsewhere in China on the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, a group founded by Muslim Uighurs that has been linked to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. By identifying the root cause as separatist ideas in the wider Uighur society reinforced by cultural and religious practices, Chinese officials justify their actions of sending Uighurs to re-educational camps as part of the Global War on Terrorism. The governor of Xinjiang, Shohrat Zakir, has stated that the Chinese government is fighting "terrorism and extremism" in accordance with UN resolutions. Human rights groups, however, state that while some Uighur Muslims have joined militant Islamic groups, the unrest in Xinjiang stems from China's oppression of people there. Exiled Uighur groups accuse China of exaggerating the threat in order to justify repression and even question the existence of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

Genocide

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group or forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. Rights groups and exiled Uighurs assert that the Chinese government has not only inflicted both physical and mental harm, but is also separating children from their families. The BBC reported in July 2019 that in possibly thousands of cases, when one or both parents are being detained, their children are sent to state-run boarding schools separated from their Muslim faith and family members and no longer allowed to speak their Uighur or other local language. In other instances, family members are kept separate by the Chinese government denying permission for families to reunite overseas. Governments such as Australia have formally sought permission for family members to be permitted to exit China and reunite overseas. The Chinese government has also been accused by the World Uyghur Congress of participating in cultural genocide, erasing the culture of the minority groups residing in Xinjiang through a program of forced indoctrination to eradicate the Uighurs' culture, customs, and language.

MAJOR MEMBER STATE STANCES

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

When human rights groups reported in 2018 that Muslim minorities in the region were being detained in mass numbers and forced to undergo psychological indoctrination, the Chinese government switched from denying the mass detention entirely to asserting these were re-education camps. Human Rights Watch was among the groups to report that approximately a million people had been detained in re-education camps. HRW explained that they were being rounded up for a variety of reasons such as for having relatives in apparently "sensitive" countries like Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Turkey or for using WhatsApp to get in touch with people overseas. Inmates are made to swear their loyalty to President Xi

Jinping and renounce their religion. Human Rights Watch's Geneva office issued a July 2019 statement: "Governments are increasingly recognizing the suffering of millions of people in Xinjiang, with families torn apart and living in fear, and a Chinese state that believes it can commit mass violations uncontested." HRW also has reports on the deployment of surveillance technologies by Chinese authorities to track lawful behavior. According to Sophie Richardson, the China Director of HRW, through these surveillance technologies, the police and government officials of China have access to an app through the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP) that allows them to track personal information about individuals.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International was also amongst the other human rights organizations to report on the situation in Xinjiang. The organization's East Asia Director, Nicholas Bequelin, has spoken out about the situation in Xinjiang, saying that "The Chinese government must not be allowed to continue this vicious campaign against ethnic minorities in northwest China. Governments across the world must hold the Chinese authorities to account for the nightmare unfolding in the XUAR." Along with their reports and statements, Amnesty International has also taken action by interviewing more than 100 individuals outside of China, that have either been put through these detention camps or know of relatives living in the Xinjiang region that are missing. Many families have reached out to Amnesty International for news of their missing relatives and close ones.

UNITED STATES

The United States government and lawmakers have been very vocal regarding the situation in Xinjiang. The US government has also been threatening sanctions on the basis that China is abusing the Uighurs' fundamental human rights. In the Senate, bipartisan legislators have been working on a new policy that calls for the Chinese government to close the political re-education camps. In August 2018 they wrote: "Muslim ethnic minorities are being subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, egregious restrictions on religious practice and culture, and a digitized surveillance system so pervasive that every aspect of daily life is monitored. ...The Chinese government is creating a high-tech police state in (Xinjiang) that is both a gross violation of privacy and international human rights." Randall Schriver, who leads Asia policy at the U.S. Defense Department, accused the Chinese government of "using the security forces for mass imprisonment of Chinese Muslims in concentration camps." This is some of the strongest U.S. condemnation to date.

The bill introduced by Senator Marc Rubio, Robert Menendez, Representatives Chris Smith and Tom Suozzi would require the FBI, US State Department and numerous other US agencies to analyze the situation at hand, a special coordinator for Xinjiang, the ban of US tech that the Chinese might be using in Xinjiang, and numerous sanctions to control the crimes against humanity.

Although the United States has been engaged in high-level trade negotiations with China, the Trump administration has not yet raised human rights criticisms as a point in their trade talks. All economic leverage and previously discussed sanctions have currently been set aside by the Trump Administration in efforts to achieve a deal that would benefit the United States economy. Despite the fact that officials at the State Department and the National Security Council approved of the sanctions, the action faced less support by senior administration officials at the Treasury Department. In terms of Congress, however, the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act introduced in January 2019 was passed in May 2019 by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act calls for an end to the detention and harassment of the Uighur communities in China and strongly opposes the human rights violations against the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. The bill requires reports on the Uighur situation in China, but has yet to be passed on the Senate floor.

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The People's Republic of China is the nation directly involved in the issue. Although Xinjiang is an autonomous territory in northwest China, due to the fact that the majority of the population there are Uighur Muslims who tend to consider themselves culturally, ethnically, and linguistically closer to Central Asia, China has held tight control over the region. Despite condemnation from foreign nations and human rights organizations and calls to open up the re-education centers

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to foreign journalists, the Chinese government prohibits investigators from visiting the detention center grounds and have installed high security around the area to ensure this.

They have also established regulations and passed laws to legitimize the use of re-education centers as a way to eliminate extremism and curb separatist ideas [refer to the timeline below for specifics of the legislation]. Muslim Uighurs now find that some of their common religious practices such as growing long ("non-standard") beards and wearing veils in public are prohibited and will result in being sent to a camp for "de-extremification" training.

The Chinese government does not believe that these detention centers infringe upon the Uighurs' human rights. Chinese authorities have, in fact, expressed the wish to have the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visit Xinjiang but have yet to agree on the terms. China says it has restored peace and security to the region through its counterterrorism measures and vocational training and the proof is that there have been no further terrorist attacks since December 2016. Early in 2019, China started inviting small groups of foreign journalists to visit several re-education camps. The resulting reports prompted claims (such as from the United States) that these visits were highly choreographed.

KAZAKHSTAN

The Kazakhstan government is a strategic, economic and political partner of neighboring China; therefore, Kazakhstan has been cautious about addressing the situation in Xinjiang, especially the allegations regarding the re-education camps. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan opened its borders to many ethnic Kazakhs outside its borders. This resulted in an influx of immigration but also the separation of Chinese and Kazakh families across the border. Although Chinese Security Forces have been imprisoning not only Uighurs but ethnic Kazakhs, too, the Kazakh foreign minister, on a visit to Beijing in March 2019, stated that his country "understands and supports the measures" taken in Xinjiang, essentially recognizing China's rights and good intentions to "battle terrorism" in Chinese territory and denies asylum to those fleeing Xinjiang re education camps. Along with the statement, on March 10, 2019, the Kazakh court arrested Serikzhan Bilash, an activist for Xinjiang Kazakhs, on charges of inciting ethnic discord when he accused Beijing of perpetrating "genocide" against Turkic minorities in Xinjiang. The court's actions reinforce the idea of the Kazakhstan government prioritizing its relations with the PRC rather than the people detained in China. Nevertheless, Bilash was unexpectedly released in August instead of serving his sentence of seven years in jail, on the condition that he give up his activism. British newspaper, The Guardian, suggested this may have been due to international pressure over his case.

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan has been directly influenced by the Belt and Road Initiative as it has enhanced the cooperation of trade between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Even though China has also detained Kyrgyz in their re-education camps, the Kyrgyz government has avoided taking a stance on the re-education camps in Xinjiang. The Kyrgyz President, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, has stated to "bear in mind that we are talking about the citizens of China. How can we interfere with the internal affairs of another country?".

TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan is one of Central Asia's most isolated countries and does not participate in most of the formal institutions in the region, preferring to remain a neutral observer. Together with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan signed the July 2019 letter to the HRC supporting China (while the other three Central Asian states were absent from either letter). Turkmenistan is China's largest supplier of natural gas and China is Turkmenistan's largest trading partner. The majority of the population is Muslim.

RUSSIA

Russia and 35 other countries supported China in a letter accusing the West of "politicising human rights" and commended what it called China's "remarkable achievements" in human rights. Russia is also one of China's allies and economic partners, and one of the BRI's most involved members. However, Russia first met the BRI with reluctance, concerned that there would be a conflict with Russia's own Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). More recently, Russian President Putin decided to link the EEU with the BRI, but Russia's alliance with China is unbalanced since Russia's economy

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and trade volume is only one eighth of the trade volume of China. The BRI is likely to widen the gap, which may negatively impact China-Russia relations.

TURKEY

The Uighurs are Turkic Muslims, and they are historically, culturally, and religiously connected to Turkey. The foreign ministry spokesman of Turkey, Hami Aksoy, has issued a statement stating: "It is no longer a secret that more than a million Uighur Turks exposed to arbitrary arrests are subjected to torture and political brainwashing" in reeducation camps in Xinjiang. He also stated that the use of re-education camps is essentially the "reintroduction of concentration camps" and serves as a "serious human rights violation". Lastly, he also called on the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, to "take effective steps to end the human tragedy" there. Countries concerned about the re-education camps are looking to Turkey and other members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to play a greater role in pressuring China to address the issue. Turkey is one of the only majority-Muslim nations to have publicly denounced China's actions against the Uighurs. This is likely because other nations, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Indonesia, have prioritized their economic ties and political relationship with China.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan has long been a refuge for ethnic minorities fleeing China due to its religious policies. Recently, more Uighurs have moved to Afghanistan due to the intensified approach the Chinese government is taking to limit their freedom, religion, and culture. Nevertheless, Afghanistan signed the letter supporting China's treatment of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region. After invading Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the United States is now pulling back its military forces. China, in contrast, has been seeking to strengthen ties through infrastructure projects, and political support of engagement with the Taliban to achieve lasting peace in Afghanistan. China has economic and political interests in achieving stability in Afghanistan, as it been concerned about contact between the Taliban and China's Muslim Uighur militants.

PAKISTAN

The Pakistan government has traditionally been a country that was very vocal about the rights of Muslims and has supported them in territories such as Myanmar and Kashmir. However, Pakistan has been relatively silent on the Uighur situation in Xinjiang. Pakistan is heavily involved with China, for example through a \$62 billion BRI project referred to as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a collection of infrastructure projects currently under construction throughout Pakistan. The project has pushed Pakistan deep into debt with China to the point that, in 2018, Pakistan sought billions of dollars in loans from Saudi Arabia, the International Monetary Fund, as well as China to save its ailing economy.

INDIA

In January 2019, China brought diplomats from 12 countries, including India, on a trip to Xinjiang to prove the Uighur community has been in good hands under Chinese governance. Despite India's tacit support for China on the issue of the re-education camps, India has been disappointed with China's handling of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (a BRI) with India citing concerns over "sovereignty" and "territorial integrity". India has, overall, been flexible in its relationship with China. While it has warned about the potential for the BRI to create unsustainable debt burdens for its neighbors thereby allowing China to take increasing control of the region, India has also sought closer ties to China. Even so, India is wary of China's generally warm relations with Pakistan, India's major rival; at the same time, the US has looked to India to provide a counterbalance to Chinese power in the region.

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh, with the fourth largest Muslim population in the world, has not taken a clear stance on the issue of Xinjiang's re-education camps, possibly because it wants to preserve its political and economic relations with China. Bangladesh is a key strategic partner of China's BRI. Bangladesh did not sign the letter supporting China's human rights policies nor did the country join the call at the UNHRC to look into the treatment of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region. In 2017 when Rohingya

Muslims fled violence in Myanmar they came to Bangladesh as refugees; now Bangladesh is home to the world's largest refugee settlement.

POLAND

Poland remains somewhat neutral on the issue of educational camps in Xinjiang. Poland is one of the few European partners of the Belt and Road Initiative, and under the initiative a railway service was launched, connecting Chendu with Lodz in Central Poland. It is now a popular logistics route for China to trade with Europe, and the fastest direct freight route between the two sides. Chinese news outlets have also been reporting that the railroad has been improving the economy in Poland.

GERMANY

In September 2018, Germany halted the deportation of Uighurs back to their native China. Then in November, the German foreign minister Heiko Maas visited China and called for more transparency on the imprisonment of Uighur Muslims by the Chinese government. In July 2019, during a closed-door UN Security Council Meeting, Germany criticized China for depriving the ethnic Uighurs and other Muslims of their human rights. This prompted the UN ambassador of China to respond saying that Germany along with the US had no right to bring this issue to the Security Council as it is something that should be dealt within their own country. Germany joined the 21 other countries that released a letter to the UN criticizing China on the issue.

ITALY

Italy is the first Group of Seven (G7) nation and the largest EU member to sign the BRI. Chinese investors have agreed to invest in port infrastructure in three of Italy's cities - Trieste, Genoa, and Palermo. Despite its partnership with China on the Belt Road Initiative, Italy was one of the 22 countries that signed off on the letter to the UN, criticizing China's use of re-education camps.

FRANCE

France is part of the group of 22 countries that submitted a statement in mid- 2019 urging China to stop human rights abuses in Xinjiang. France has a long history of emphasising the importance of protecting human rights, and the country has been vocal regarding the issue of Xinjiang reeducation camps, calling for the release of those detained. The French president has also demanded "reciprocity" and "balanced and fair trade" in light of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands called for the release of Muslims detained in re-education camps along with 22 other countries when they released a letter to the United Nations. A Dutch newspaper reported in July 2019 that some of the approximately 1,500 Uighurs in the Netherlands have called on their government to take stronger action because they have been harassed by Chinese officials over the phone and they fear for detained relatives in Xinjiang. People in the Netherlands also protested when Li Keqiang, the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China visited the Netherlands back in October 2018 to drum up support for the BRI; however, with the sixth-largest GDP in Europe, the Dutch Prime Minister has expressed both cautious interest in the BRI as well as some concern over transparency.

UNITED KINGDOM

In August 2018, British diplomats visited Xinjiang and confirmed that reports of mass numbers of ethnic minorities being held in internment camps were "broadly accurate". A dozen ambassadors from Western countries, including the UK, wrote to the Chinese government seeking a meeting with Chen Quango, Xinjiang's Communist Party chief, to address the issue, but reportedly received no reply. In February 2019, the UK joined with Turkey to express deep concern about the "persecution of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang" during the main annual session of the HRC in February 2019.

AUSTRALIA

The Australian government has been calling for the release of those detained in Xinjiang Province and has described the use of re-education camps as deeply concerning. Diplomats in China on behalf of the Australian government have been denied entry to Xinjiang Province, and China has blocked other attempts for Australia to offer consular support to dual citizens. China claims that Australia was among several countries to have rebuffed an opportunity to visit Xinjiang, but Australia denies this and says it has committed to continuing its efforts to seek access to Xinjiang and to share its concerns through the HRC. Australian citizens have been raising concerns about relatives missing in Xinjiang Province. Several prominent Australian clothing companies have declared they will investigate their supply chain because they have sourced their cotton from Xinjiang in the past.

NORTH KOREA

Like Russia, North Korea is one of the 35 countries that publicly signed the letter supporting China. China is North Korea's most important ally and one of the isolated country's very few trading partners. Although relations between the two nations have been strained at times, they have recently recommitted themselves to closer communication and strengthened military exchanges.

JAPAN

Japan has not formally joined the Belt Road Initiative, but it has committed itself to spending \$110 billion on infrastructure projects in Asia. Japan's government has pledged to work with China on third world country projects, and has promoted cooperation between the Belt Road Initiative and regional investment institutions like the Asian Development Bank. Japan has, however, signed the letter criticizing the actions that the Chinese government is taking on the Uighurs in Xinjiang.

PHILIPPINES

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has largely sought to avoid angering China over disputed territory in the South China Sea by simply not raising the issue despite the fact that the UN's Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague ruled against many of China's historical claims and affirmed the Philippines' rights. Duterte has visited China multiple times since his election in 2016 but has also faced criticism at home for acquiescing to what China wants. There are signs that Manila may take a harder line with China in the future. In his domestic politics, Duterte has taken a hard line on the war against drugs and enjoys high approval ratings; however, he was accused of eroding democratic institutions and limiting press freedoms through his crackdown on dissent in a report from ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights in June 2019. The Philippines was a signatory to the letter of support for China's counterterrorism efforts in Xinjiang and China's achievements in the field of human rights.

MYANMAR

Myanmar signed the letter of support for China in response to the claims of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Myanmar has been a part of China's BRI since the early stages. At the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing in April 2019, Myanmar's State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi declared that her country will continue to participate in further such beneficial projects with China. Myanmar has, itself, been the focus of widespread condemnation for state violence against its Rohingya Muslim minority. China has provided not only economic assistance but also political support by using its position as a permanent member of the Security Council to veto the efforts of other members of the council to pressure Myanmar to bring those responsible for the Rohingya attacks to justice. China has also taken steps to facilitate peaceful dialogue between countries and groups affected by the ethnic violence and resulting refugee crisis, including Bangladesh, and has supported the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. China is the only country that has been willing to support Myanmar economically, politically, and militarily.

THAILAND

China has pressured governments to send Uighurs who have fled the country back to China, and in 2015, Thailand forcibly repatriated more than 100 Uighurs to China. Thailand has not signed a letter condemning or supporting China's actions regarding re-education camps. Work on China's BRI projects in Thailand has been frequently delayed due to Thailand's

concerns over loan agreements, land rights, and questions about commercial viability despite announcements from both China and Thailand expressing the desire for cooperation.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia has been quiet regarding reports of Islamic faith-based discrimination in Xinjiang despite its own significant Muslim population. However, in July 2019, Malaysia's Islamic Affairs Minister posted on Facebook about his eight-day trip to China, including a visit to a "training and vocational center". He made no mention of any concerns about mistreatment of Muslim Uighurs. Malaysia has been involved in the Belt and Road Initiative but relations have been tense over the past several years. Elected in 2018, Malaysia's prime minister had campaigned against overpriced BRI projects and BRI corruption related to his predecessor. He canceled \$22 billion worth of BRI projects, but new agreements were reached and the northern Malaysia train project was restarted in July 2019 after promises to cut costs by a third.

INDONESIA

Indonesia has the world's largest population of Muslims. Indonesian Islamic groups have demanded an explanation on the situation in Xinjiang. However, the Vice President Jusuf Kalla said in an interview in July 2019 that Indonesia does not want to "intervene in the domestic affairs of another country." Similar to neighboring Malaysia, government leaders in Indonesia have been vocal in sharing their concerns about the treatment of the Palestinian people and the Rohingya Muslims but have not spoken out against the treatment of Uighurs in China. Indonesia has sought ways to become involved in China's BRI due to its interest in improving Indonesia's infrastructure - but on its own terms. Indonesia has previously indicated that the country would prioritize environmental sustainability and the use of local labor while also requiring the sharing of technology and expertise.

EGYPT

Egypt is a focal point in the BRI as the Suez Canal is the only maritime access and connection between Africa and Asia. Egypt and China's relationship has grown into a commercial partnership with China's interest in Egypt's location. Egypt was among the coalition of nations involved in the letter stating that the allegations against China are inaccurate. Over the past several decades, Egypt has typically sought to develop good relations with China and Russia, even while it has also sought to maintain its crucial alliances with the US and Persian Gulf allies.

SAUDI ARABIA

The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia reportedly told Chinese State Television that "China has the right to carry out anti-terrorism and de-extremization work for its national security," while on an official visit to China to sign deals on 35 joint projects valued at 28 billion dollars, one of them a 10 billion oil deal. China is the largest trading partner of Saudi Arabia, and the Crown Prince has expressed his desire for the Kingdom to move away from dependence on oil through the Belt and Road Initiative.

DJIBOUTI

Djibouti hosts several foreign military bases including both a Chinese and an American presence. Due to its position at the gateway to the Suez Canal, it has become a strategically important location in the Horn of Africa and across the Arabian Peninsula despite its small size. Since Djibouti lacks natural resources, this location has become a major source of income for the country. China has financed a railway, built a pipeline to supply safe drinking water, supported anti-piracy efforts in the region and offered to mediate the Djibouti-Eritrea border conflict. China's involvement has raised questions about its geopolitical intentions and the projects have left Djibouti carrying a large debt burden. At the same time, Djibouti has been beset by legal battles involving itself and state-run enterprises from the UAE and China. Djibouti belatedly joined the letter to support China's policies in Xinjiang, giving credit to China's efforts to counter terrorism in the region.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

1955

In the early 1900s, the Uighurs briefly declared independence from the rest of China but the region was brought under the control of China's new Communist government in 1949, which implemented policies to regulate the minorities settled in the region. In 1955, the Xinjiang province is officially declared as an autonomous region under China.

July 2009

Riots break out in Urumqi, the regional capital of Xinjiang, killing at least 200 people, mostly Han Chinese. Violent attacks blamed on Xinjiang separatists continue in the following years, prompting the Chinese government to crack down on Muslims in Xinjiang.

October 28, 2013

A car is driven into a crowd of people in Tiananmen Square, killing three people inside the car, two tourists, and another male citizen. A total of 38 people were injured. Chinese authorities identify the driver as Uighur, and blame the attack on the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a Xinjiang-based separatist group. The government crackdown on Muslims in Xinjiang intensifies.

March 1, 2014

Another terrorist attack, this time in Kunming, China, is blamed on Xinjiang separatists. The assailants killed 29 people and injured another 130 with knives and machetes.

May 2014

The Strike Hard Campaign Against Violent Terrorism in Xinjiang is launched. As described by Foreign Policy magazine, the Strike Hard Campaign Against Violence Terrorism is "the Chinese's government's response to growing tensions between Han Chinese and the Uighur population of Xinjiang itself, the recruitment of Uighurs to fight in the Syrian civil war, and several terrorist attacks orchestrated by Uighur separatists." The government collects people's DNA, scans their irises, records voice samples, investigates the contents of their digital devices, uses digitally coded ID cards to track their movements, and implements CCTV cameras in their homes, streets, and marketplaces. It includes increased aggression towards Uighurs who do not cooperate with local officials. Detention of Uighurs in re-education camps begins.

April 1, 2017

The Xinjiang People's Congress (local government) passes China's first official anti-extremism legislation. It is designed to identify and prevent behaviors that indicate extremism such as: wearing full-face coverings and long beards, refusing to watch state television, and forcing people not to associate with other ethnic groups (for example, not allowing children to attend government schools, and not allowing marriage outside of the Uighur community). Although some of these restrictions were already in place, this legislation officially sanctions them.

August 2018

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expresses alarm over what it describes as credible reports of at least a million ethnic Uighurs in detention and up to double that number enduring forced re-education.

October 10, 2018

The Xinjiang People's Congress passes new local legislation: The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region Regulation on De-extremification. This law provides the Xinjiang government with the legal authority to address any behavior that it regards as "extremist" and in so doing significantly expands the definition of extremism.

February 4, 2019

Fifteen human rights and civil society organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and other organizations make a joint statement calling for a Xinjiang Resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council. They

state that the HRC should “urgently adopt a resolution establishing an international fact-finding mission” in order “to investigate credible allegations that up to one million Turkic Muslims are being arbitrarily detained”.

June 15, 2019

The UN's Head of Counter-Terrorism, Vladimir Voronkov, a Russian diplomat, issues a statement at the end of his 3-day visit to Xinjiang. He makes no reference to human rights concerns there. Human rights groups issue swift criticism, calling this a propaganda gift to Chinese authorities. The US State Department expresses grave concern that the UN's failure to speak out against China's detention of Uighurs effectively gives China permission to continue. In response, the Chinese Foreign Ministry accuses the US of spreading false rumors and meddling in China's internal affairs.

July 2019

This month, two coalitions send competing letters to the president of the UN Human Rights Council and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights criticizing or supporting China's Xinjiang policies.

The first letter from a group of 22 countries called on China to end its detention program and called on the UN to take action on this issue. The letter cited “credible reports of arbitrary detention” in Xinjiang and “widespread surveillance and restrictions on freedom of movement” particularly targeting Uighurs and other minorities. In the letter, nations also urged China to follow international humanitarian and human rights law as a matter of the country's membership of the HRC. No Muslim-majority country signed the letter of criticism.

Days later, another coalition, this time of 37 countries, writes to the United Nations to support the Chinese government's “courageous moves” to counter terrorism in Xinjiang province. The letter states “Faced with the grave challenge of terrorism and extremism, China has undertaken a series of counter-terrorism and deradicalization measures in Xinjiang, including setting up vocational education and training centers.”

Commentators point out that several significant countries appear on neither list of signatories: much of Eastern Europe and Central Asia is absent. The US, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Malaysia are also absent. Indonesia has the world's largest Muslim population, India has the world's third-largest, and Bangladesh the fourth largest. The US does not appear on either list of countries since it pulled out of the HRC in June 2018, accusing the council of being a protector of human rights abusers.

July 30, 2019

According to an announcement by top officials in the regional government of Xinjiang, most of the Muslims in re-education camps are released. Exiled Uighurs and US State Department spokespersons dismiss the announcement as vague and unverifiable. They also express concern that this may signal a new phase of detention in which those reportedly freed nevertheless remain in captivity, including being forced into labor programs instead.

PAST ACTIONS

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reviewed a report on China in August 2018. In this report, UN committee experts noted the great concern towards racial discrimination in the anti-terrorism laws, especially targeting the Uighurs and other ethnic minorities. The committee expressed its concern over reports of “mass surveillance disproportionately targeting ethnic Uighurs”.

Resolution Condemning persecution of religious minorities in the PRC, October 2018 (S.RES.667). This resolution was issued by the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, condemning the persecution and mistreatment of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region and actions that “limit their free expression and practice of faith”. The resolution also reaffirms the commitment of the U.S to promote and protect religious freedom, calls on the government of the PRC to recognize human right to freedom of religion, condemns the restriction of religious material, and strongly condemns the use of reeducation camps, internment camps, or concentration camps.

Joint Statement calling for Xinjiang Resolution at the United Nations Human Rights Council, February 2019. This was a statement issued by multiple human rights organizations calling for a resolution regarding the Xinjiang reeducation camps from the United Nations Human Rights Council. The statement argues that the Chinese government, despite stating that its "Strike Hard Campaign counters extremism and terrorism" is actually aiming to "eradicate Muslim's distinct identity and to ensure their loyalty to the government and Chinese Communist Party". It also states that the Human Rights Council should aim to conduct a "fact finding mission, so that it can consider the allegations of widespread violations in Xinjiang and take appropriate next steps".

Statement by the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, March 2019. On March 2019, the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, has requested access to Xinjiang to "verify" the "worrying reports [they] are receiving" of re-education camps holding millions of Uighurs". She has also stated that she "wishes to engage China in a serious dialogue on this pressing matter" and that she "will continue to push for permission to visit Xinjiang soon". China has since called on Bachelet to "respect China's sovereignty".

Resolution on China, notably the situation of religious and ethnic minorities 2019/2690(RSP). The European Union has taken a strong stance on the current conditions of the Uighurs in Xinjiang with a resolution adopted in April 2019 on China and the situation of religious and ethnic minorities. The resolution recognizes the abuse of human rights in Xinjiang, stating that the Chinese government "stepped up its hostility" towards "the freedoms of expression and religion". The resolution "calls on the Chinese Government to immediately end the practice of arbitrary detentions". It further encourages actions such as halting all exports of technology that help with China's cyber surveillance and calls for the release of information on the missing people in Xinjiang. The EU also posted a press release in April 2019, in which the parliament called on "the Chinese Government to put an end to arbitrary detentions, without any charge, trial or conviction for a criminal offence, of members of the Uyghur and Kazakh minority and Tibetans".

A closed-door meeting of the Security Council on the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia on July 2019 was described by some participants as a heated exchange. It was followed by a formal rebuke of China's mass detention of Muslims in a letter to the UN signed by 22 mostly Western countries. The response to this letter came from China's allies in another letter to the UN. See the timeline entry above for July 2019 listing which nations joined the coalition criticizing China's camps, which joined the coalition supporting China's actions, and which have refrained from choosing a side.

In all, the global response has been divided and limited largely to issuing statements.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Please note, the solutions below do not comprise an exhaustive list. Delegates are encouraged to develop their own solutions remembering that the HRC works with not only governments but also regional organizations, national human rights institutions, and civil society. Negotiated cooperation is one of the most important UN mechanisms to bring human rights violations to an end. Bear in mind that the HRC has no executive powers. It is not the Security Council and cannot therefore impose sanctions or provide a mandate to intervene. Nevertheless, precisely because the HRC is not the SC, it can pass resolutions despite the opposition of the country concerned. This also means that resolutions cannot be vetoed by a country trying to avoid international attention.

The work of the HRC involves promoting human rights by making recommendations (calling on States to take specific actions or uphold certain principles), organizing fact-finding missions and international inquiries, and monitoring questions of concern - thus bearing witness to human rights abuses. The Council also manages the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a process through which each UN Member State's overall human rights record is reviewed. With the UPR and the passage of HRC resolutions each session, the UN shows that the international community holds out the prospect of accountability for human rights abuses.

SANCTIONS

By imposing sanctions (country by country, or in political blocs with a common interest), the Chinese government may be compelled to limit their violations of the human rights of Uighurs in the Xinjiang region. Additionally, for countries that currently run Belt and Road Initiative projects, the future of projects can be considered as leverage to help pressure China into taking action that would satisfy the wider international community.

Many countries are reluctant to impose sanctions on China because of the economic repercussions that will result from it. Therefore, as some countries prioritize their economic and strategic relationship with China, governments choose to ignore human rights abuses. This includes Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, and other Muslim-majority countries. Sanctions can also lead to economic repercussions for the global market and result in economic loss.

DENIAL OF EXPORTS

By denying exports of technologies (etc) that could be used to continue the abuse of targeted groups in the Xinjiang region, nations could be directly reducing the amount of control the Chinese government has over the Uighurs in the Xinjiang region, and in so doing, protecting their privacy online as well as their freedom of movement.

This can, again, result in economic repercussions because countries would be reducing the amount of trade of particular products between themselves and China. Therefore, countries may be reluctant to deny exports of technology and other items that facilitate abuse. However, they can mitigate this consequence by engaging in greater trade and cooperation among country groups that do not include China.

UN INVESTIGATIONS

A UN fact-finding team will have more credibility than a small group of reporters travelling to and reporting on the conditions of Xinjiang.

To create a UN team dedicated to fact-finding missions may take a long time to develop and to negotiate the terms of a visit, if China permits this at all.

EDUCATION AND CULTURAL EXCHANGES

By focusing on sharing the cultural elements of the Uighur community (that China has not identified as extremist) between regional groups within and beyond Xinjiang, with the rest of China, and with the world, the UN can work to preserve Uighur culture.

The Chinese government could object to these exchanges, but even if they do, it would be widely publicized and would essentially bring international pressure and tension back on China for rejecting a peaceful cultural exchange.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS WITHIN XINJIANG

By supporting development projects within Xinjiang, the standard of living will increase and this will likely resolve some unrest within the region, which would help China meet goals for social stability and national security.

Unless funds are dedicated to a specific development project and overseen by a third party, there may be little incentive for nations to provide money that the Chinese government could use to serve its own interests.

DIPLOMATIC ATTEMPTS

Encouraging high-level diplomats from Muslim-majority countries and international Islamic organizations to start and continue to visit Xinjiang and report back to their local Muslim organizations and the HRC on the situation would exert pressure on China to be accountable to its Muslim-majority country allies. A visit is more powerful than a statement or a news report in a state-run newspaper. The presence of high-level Muslim-nation diplomats may also bolster good will with local Xinjiang groups and a sense that they are supported beyond the Chinese border by the wider Muslim community.

The issue should not become a "Muslim problem" but rather remain of interest to all nations. Politicians and diplomats have to serve their own country's complex interests and therefore may respond to the situation in Xinjiang either positively or negatively but not simply because of concern for minority groups in China.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

All nations share an interest in maintaining peace and security at home and working to prevent extremism and terrorism. Focusing on common goals builds trust. Countries can cooperate to share information, expertise and resources to combat terrorism.

It has so far proven difficult to agree on definitions of extremism. A lack of trust between nations has limited cooperation. The importance of protecting human rights has often been secondary to achieving national security. It is the task of the United Nations and this HRC to continue to promote collaboration to promote the protection of human rights as a pillar for achieving lasting peace.

CONCLUSION

The letters written to the HRC in July 2019 by two coalitions of countries, one of condemnation and one expressing support for China's governance of Xinjiang, may appear to reflect an international community that is strictly divided over this issue. Chinese diplomats attack condemnation of China's re-education camps as misleading or blatantly false statements from hypocritical Western nations. Chinese allies champion the country's example as a successful strategy to counter terrorism, one that the rest of the world should learn from. Yet, there is greater complexity and, therefore, opportunity for negotiation and debate on this issue than the two lists of signatories might suggest.

Even while acknowledging China's economic leverage and international standing, China has nevertheless responded to international pressure on this issue by changing its official policies and rhetoric about the re-education camps. At first, China denied their existence, then admitted to them, and then more recently reported that most detainees were released. Although this has not satisfied many of the countries and organizations that are applying the pressure most forcefully and vocally, it nevertheless indicates that China is susceptible to that pressure. Several key countries remain largely silent and have so far chosen not to act. When they do, they may significantly shift the discussion in a new direction - particularly as some are prominent Muslim-majority nations and/or China's Central Asian neighbors. Meanwhile, some of the countries that appear outwardly to have sided with China are nevertheless engaging in a flexible back-and-forth on related issues in order to serve their own domestic interests. Then there is the fact that Xinjiang is a key location in China's Belt and Road Initiative which also presents an opportunity because each project represents a country partnership with China that can be continually renegotiated, not only in terms of concrete and steel, but also in terms of diplomatic relations.

The Human Rights Council, established in 2006, has allowed countries to assess each other's human rights records, make recommendations, and provide assistance for improvement. It has adopted hundreds of resolutions to address a wide range of human rights issues because of its capacity to promote collaboration among member states. Therefore, in this simulation of the HRC it is important for GECMUN delegates to embrace the complexities of international relations and nevertheless work together to evaluate the situation, recommend solutions, and provide assistance to improve and protect freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and cultural rights of all religious and ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What action could be taken to prompt China to comply with Human Rights regulations without violating the nation's sovereignty?

- Which NGOs, IGOs, private entities, or individuals from outside China could potentially exert pressure on China to change its policies? How might these groups or individuals be encouraged to use their influence to promote human rights protections? What about groups or individuals within China?
- What sort of relationships is China developing with other countries through its Belt and Road Initiative? While China clearly has significant economic power in each of these partnerships, in what way can the Belt and Road projects be used by China's partners to exercise their own power and influence over China?
- What steps could local Xinjiang government and non-government stakeholders take towards solving the problem of re-education camps? What options do local government officials and representatives of minority groups have to prevent more suffering? How can the international community support these local groups/efforts?
- What are ways to fight violent extremism that a large majority of countries can agree upon? What are some examples from your own country's experience that you could highlight to help solve the issue?
- What recommendations could HRC delegates include in a resolution that would help to strengthen both cultural diversity and political stability in Xinjiang? How can technology be used to positively promote both goals? What about the arts?
- What are the Chinese government's goals in Western China, exactly? What are some other ways that the central Chinese administration and local authorities could achieve these goals without resorting to human rights abuses? How can UN groups encourage China's pro-human rights actions?
- What role does geography play in this conflict? What role does the economy play? Could action to improve geography or economy-related issues (food and water security, agricultural yields, transportation, communication, infrastructure, the livelihood of local people, etc) also indirectly improve the context of the re-education camp issues?
- How can countries who have openly sided with China on the issue of its re-education camps be incentivized to help improve the human rights situation in Xinjiang regardless?
- What is the significance of the US leaving the HRC? The US has been very vocal about its concerns regarding Xinjiang's re-education camps. The US is involved in a tense trade war with China. But the US is no longer part of the HRC. Would the HRC be better positioned to address the issue of re-education camps if the US were to return as a voting member of the council, or are there advantages to the absence of the US?

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