

URGENT ACTION

UIGHUR STUDENTS AT RISK OF FORCIBLE RETURN TO CHINA

According to media reports, around 150 Uighurs have been detained in Egypt and have either already been, or are currently at imminent risk of, being forcibly returned to China. If returned, they are at real risk of serious human rights violations.

The New York Times, citing anonymous Egyptian aviation officials, reported on Thursday 6 July that at least 12 Uighurs had been deported from Cairo to Guangzhou, China on Egypt Air, and that another 22 Uighurs were being detained for immediate deportation. The Uighurs were all students at Al-Azhar University, in Cairo.

The scale of the detentions remains unclear at the moment. The Uighur Human Rights Project (UHRP) stated to Amnesty that Egyptian authorities are detaining at least 150 Uighur students, including 70 in the Chinese embassy in Cairo, where Chinese security officials reportedly questioned and forced them to sign documents declaring their membership in the Turkistan Islamic Movement. A source close to the Uighur community in Egypt stated to Amnesty that harassment of Uighur students started three months ago, when Chinese authorities detained families of several students, demanding that Uighur students in Egypt return home by 20 May. The source claimed that some students that returned were tortured and some sentenced to 15 years in prison for "spreading extremism."

This comes after Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported in May that the Chinese authorities in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) had initiated a policy to compel all Uighur students studying abroad to return to the XUAR. According to RFA, authorities in the XUAR were detaining relatives of overseas Uighurs as a way to force the students to come back. Authorities in the XUAR are currently fighting what they describe as an "anti-terrorism people's war" in state media. Uighurs from China's XUAR may be at risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment if forcibly returned to China. Amnesty International has documented cases in which Uighur asylum seekers who were forcibly returned to China, were detained, reportedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated and in some cases sentenced to death and executed.

Please write immediately in Arabic, English or your own language:

- Expressing serious concern that 12 Uighurs have already reportedly been returned to China, where they might be at real risk of torture and other other-ill-treatment, arbitrary detention, persecution and unfair trials;
- Urging authorities to ensure that any Uighurs who have been detained have the effective opportunity to seek asylum, a review of their individual cases and judicial oversight over their detention and intended forced removal;
- Asking what assurances the Egyptian authorities have received from their Chinese counterparts that the Uighurs will not be subjected to arbitrary detention or other human rights violations after return, and how the Egyptian authorities will fulfil their obligations to ensure ongoing information and independent and effective monitoring of the situation of the individuals after their return.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 AUGUST 2017 TO:

Interior Minister

Magdy Abdel Ghaffar
Ministry of Interior
Fifth Settlement, New Cairo, Egypt
Fax: +202 2794 5529
Email: center@moi.gov.eg or
E.HumanRightsSector@moi.gov.eg
Twitter: @moiegy
Salutation: Your Excellency

President

Abdel Fattah al-Sisi
Office of the President
Al Ittihadia Palace
Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt
Fax: +202 2391 1441
Email: p.spokesman@op.gov.eg
Twitter: @AlsisiOfficial
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Deputy Assistant Minister of Foreign
Affairs for Human Rights
Laila Bahaa Eldin
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Corniche el-Nile, Cairo, Egypt.
Fax: +202 2574 9713
Email: contact.us@mfa.gov.eg
Twitter: @MfaEgypt

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR NASSER AHMED KAMEL ALI, Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 26 South Street W1K 1DW, 020 7499 3304/2401,

Fax 020 7491 1542, eg.emb.london@mfa.gov.eg and etembuk@hotmail.com Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

According to Radio Free Asia, the Chinese authorities began to compel Uighur students that were enrolled in universities abroad to return to China. Sources told Radio Free Asia (RFA) that the students who had returned to China had not been heard from since. According to media reports, the Chinese government has also confiscated the passports of Uighurs, in another effort to control their movements.

Uighurs are a mainly Muslim ethnic minority who are concentrated primarily in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in China. Since the 1980s, the Uighurs have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations. This includes arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights. Local authorities maintain tight control over religious practice, including prohibiting all government employees and children under the age of 18, from worshipping at mosques. Chinese government policies limit the use of the Uighur language, impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion and encourage sustained influx of Han migrants into the region.

Violations of Uighurs' human rights have persisted for many decades, but have intensified in recent years. Following the attacks on the United States of America (USA) on 11 September 2001, the Chinese authorities utilized the "war on terror" to justify an intensification of repression of Uighurs. Since then, the authorities have cast Uighur discontent within the framework of international terrorism, and frequently interpret expressions of Uighur cultural identity not validated by the state as evidence of "separatist" behaviour.

In May 2014, a one-year "strike hard" campaign was launched in the XUAR, and officials prioritized speedy arrests, quick trials and mass sentencing. The government called for greater "co-operation" between prosecuting authorities and courts, raising additional concerns that accused individuals would not receive fair trials. The "strike hard" campaign has been extended for in subsequent years, and the authorities have massively increased their expenditure on police and the social stability maintenance forces. Under such circumstances, many Uighurs make the decision to flee the country. The Chinese authorities have responded by harassing the relatives of those who have left in order to pressure them to return and increasing attempts to curtail the political and human rights activities of Uighur activists in other countries. This has led to growing fears among many Uighurs abroad, including asylum seekers and refugees, of being forcibly returned to China. In recent years, dozens of Uighur asylum seekers have been forcibly returned from South East Asian or Central Asian countries, to China.

For example, in December 2009, the Cambodian authorities forcibly returned 20 ethnic Uighur asylum seekers. Of these 20, five are reported to have been sentenced to life imprisonment, while eight others are reported to have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 16 to 20 years, after closed trials. In December 2012, Malaysia forcibly returned six Uighurs, whose claims for asylum were pending with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). It has been difficult to confirm information concerning individuals returned. In July 2015, after diplomatic pressure from China, Thailand deported 109 Uighurs to China.

Egypt is party to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and is obliged not to expel or return individuals to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

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