

# URGENT ACTION

## UYGHUR DETAINED INCOMMUNICADO AGAIN

Mahira Yakub has been sent back to Yining Detention Centre in China's Xinjiang region in late November 2020 and is still without access to her family and a lawyer of her choice. A Uyghur who worked in an insurance company, she first went missing in April 2019 and was indicted in January 2020 for "giving material support to terrorist activity" after transferring money to her parents in Australia. She was temporarily released from custody on 4 September 2020 and subsequently hospitalized for unknown reasons. There are grave concerns for Mahira Yakub's condition and wellbeing, especially as she suffered from liver damage during a previous detention.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

*Deputy Procurator of Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture People's Procuratorate  
Han Jielong  
Lane 4, Sidalin (West) Lu  
Yining Shi 835000  
Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture  
Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region  
People's Republic of China*

*Dear Deputy Procurator Han:*

*I am writing to express my concern about Mahira Yakub (亚库甫·玛依拉), a Uyghur insurance company worker who is being held in Yining Detention Centre without access to her family and a lawyer of her choice. She first went missing in April 2019 and was indicted for "giving material support to terrorist activity" (资助恐怖活动罪) in January 2020 for transferring money to her parents in Australia. I understand that she was released from detention on 4 September 2020, after which she was taken to hospital for unknown reasons, but she was returned to Yining Detention Centre in November 2020. Throughout this time, Mahira Yakub's family has not been able to get in touch with her.*

*It is alarming to learn that Mahira Yakub's relatives residing in Xinjiang have been harassed by the Chinese authorities because other relatives living overseas shared updates about her on social media. This type of intimidation has no legal basis and is aimed solely at curbing others' right to free expression.*

*Without access to her family and lawyer of her choice, I am deeply concerned about Mahira Yakub's health and wellbeing, especially as she did not receive adequate medical treatment when she suffered from liver damage in a "transformation-through-education" facility from March to December 2018.*

*I therefore call on you to:*

- *Release Mahira Yakub, unless there is sufficient, credible and admissible evidence that she committed an internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards;*
- *Allow Mahira Yakub access to her family as well as prompt and adequate medical care, as necessary or requested, facilitate her right to have effective legal representation of her choice, and ensure she is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;*
- *Stop all kinds of harassment and intimidation against Mahira Yakub's relatives.*

*Yours sincerely,*

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mahira Yakub worked at China Life Insurance Co. She also sold walnuts in local markets and taught Uyghur children Mandarin Chinese at night. After Mahira Yakub went missing in April 2019, her sister who was living in Australia reached out to the Australian authorities for their help. It was only in September 2019 that she learned, through communications between the Australian authorities and the Chinese embassy in Canberra, that Mahira Yakub had been arrested on 15 May 2019 and “prosecuted in July 2019 for allegedly financing terrorist activities and is currently in good health”.

Mahira Yakub’s parents are accused by the Chinese authorities of being “fleeing terrorists” despite being able to visit China without incident in 2015 and 2016. They have not been targeted in any way by the Australian authorities for suspected criminal activities.

According to her sister, Mahira Yakub transferred money to her parents in June and July 2013 to help them pay for a house in Australia. Mahira Yakub’s sister has kept the documentation, including the bank transfer receipts and records of the house purchase. The Chinese authorities also claimed that Mahira Yakub possessed items, including 66 photos, that promoted extremism. Mahira Yakub’s sister believes that the photos were of herself, Mahira and their mother wearing headscarves. No reasons were provided for Mahira Yakub’s detention in a “transformation-through-education” facility from March to December 2018. It is unclear if this detention was related to her money transfers to her parents.

When Mahira Yakub was taken away on 5 September 2020, her family members were told that she would be taken to Yining People’s Hospital for unknown reasons. However, her family members were not able to speak to her even on phone. According to her sister, Mahira Yakub has not been able to engage a lawyer because she is a Uyghur. Amnesty International has documented cases in which members of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang were unable to hire lawyers because the lawyers feared retaliation for representing them. Mahira Yakub’s aunt and uncle, Gulbekram Memtimin (麦米提敏·古勒拜克热木) and Qasim Tohti (托合提·哈斯木), were indicted on the same charges. They are currently released on bail.

Xinjiang is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in China. More than half of the region’s population of 22 million people belong to mostly Turkic and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, including Uyghurs (around 11.3 million), Kazakhs (around 1.6 million) and other populations whose languages, cultures and ways of life vary distinctly from those of the Han who are the majority in “interior” China.

In March 2017, the Xinjiang government enacted the “De-extremification Regulation” that identifies and prohibits a wide range of behaviours labelled “extremist”, such as “spreading extremist thought”, denigrating or refusing to watch public radio and TV programmes, wearing burkas, having an “abnormal” beard, resisting national policies, and publishing, downloading, storing, or reading articles, publications, or audio-visual materials containing “extremist content”. The regulation also set up a “responsibility system” for government cadres for “anti-extremism” work and established annual reviews of their performance.

It is estimated that up to a million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim people have been held in the “transformation-through-education” centres. The Chinese authorities had denied the existence of such facilities until October 2018, when they began describing them as voluntary, free “vocational training” centres. They claim that the objective of this vocational training is to provide people with technical and vocational education to enable them to find jobs and become “useful” citizens. China’s explanation, however, contradicts reports of beatings, food deprivation and solitary confinement that have been collected from former detainees. China has rejected calls from the international community, including Amnesty, to allow independent experts unrestricted access to Xinjiang. Instead, China has made efforts to silence criticism by inviting delegations from different countries to visit Xinjiang for carefully orchestrated and closely monitored tours.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Chinese, English

You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 18 February 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Mahira Yakub (she)

**LINK TO PREVIOUS UA:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/2391/2020/en/>