ABLIKIM ABDIRIYM

How many of us have heard of the country East Turkestan? Probably few of us as it technically no longer exists but is called XUAR for short, Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region of China (Xinjiang means New Territory). Don’t let the word ‘autonomous’ fool you as although the Uighurs (pronounced weegers) briefly declared independence in the early part of the 20th Century, they were brought under the complete control of communist China in 1949. Like Tibet, it is officially described as autonomous. However, the predominantly Muslim Uighur population face intense persecution on a daily basis. To make matters worse for the Uighurs, since 9/11 China has taken advantage by portraying the Uighur separatists as auxiliaries of al-Qaeda, though there is no evidence to support this and the Chinese government has exaggerated the threat from terrorism in order to justify their own repression in the region.

Rebiya Kadeer is a Uighur businesswoman and politician who leads the World Uighur Congress and has had numerous clashes with the Chinese authorities by speaking out for her people. She was imprisoned for 8 years by the Chinese government for her outspokenness and spent the first two of those years in dreadful conditions in solitary confinement. As a result of Amnesty International’s pressure, she was released after six years and was allowed to seek medical help in the USA where she now lives with her husband and one of her adult daughters. Before her release, she had to promise not to spread sensitive information about the plight of the Uighur ethnic community, which of course, once safely in the USA, she continued to do. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006.

In June 2006, three of Rebiya’s sons, Alim, Ablikim, and Qahar, were officially charged with state security and economic crimes shortly following Rebiya Kadeer's election as president of the Uighur American Association. In November 2006 Alim, was sentenced to 7 years in prison. In April 2007, Ablikim, was sentenced to 9 years in prison and 3 years deprivation of political rights, reportedly after confessing to charges of ‘instigating and engaging in secessionist activities.’ He was denied legal counsel and representation. The verdict asserted that Ablikim asked the Uighur-language webmaster of Yahoo.com to publish articles entitled ‘Issues to be aware of and prohibited in Jihad’ and ‘Struggle towards Independence.’ There is no Uighur-language Yahoo site!

There are serious concerns that he may have confessed under torture. He had no access to his family for 18 months after he was first detained and when they did visit him, relatives were shocked to find him so pale and weak and claimed he had difficulty in recognising them. He told them he had fainted frequently and fallen into a coma on two occasions. When his family questioned the prison authorities about his health, officials attributed this to a heart condition, suggesting that it could deteriorate further if he refused to ‘cooperate’ or ‘admit his guilt’.

So why am I telling you all this? Because Rebyia’s son Ablikim Abdiriym is the Prisoner of Conscience that the Swansea Amnesty Group is trying to get released, by writing letters to various authorities, and letting the Chinese government know that we in the UK are aware of what is happening to Ablikim and his siblings, which will, at best, result in his freedom or at least, make his stay in prison more comfortable. It has been proved over and over again that authorities who incarcerate prisoners of conscience treat their prisoners better when they know the world is watching.

We meet on the 2nd Monday of every month at 7.30 in Committee Room 3 of the Civic Centre, Oystermouth Road, Swansea or keep up to date with future events by logging on to our website: <http://swansea.amnesty.org.uk>

*Wendy Holborow*

(Secretary Swansea Amnesty)

640 words

(I can send this as an email attachment if you require)