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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by The Organization for Poverty Alleviation and Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Indictment by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of Beijing for 'Crimes against Humanity' in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China, Deserves Effective Follow-Up

Our organisation would like to draw the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Council to the human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development of the Uyghur community, especially the continued persecution of Uyghur migrants in Europe, who are being subjected to transnational repression, emanating from China.

An increase in international attention has arisen in recent years regarding the treatment of the Uyghur community in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China. A continuous stream of reports from numerous media outlets, as well as by various civil society groups such as non-governmental organisations and think-tanks, have raised the attention of the United Nations towards the human rights violations being committed towards this ethnic group, under the pretext of countering religious extremism. These violations have included, but are not limited to, arbitrary and discriminatory detention, torture, slavery, racial and religious discrimination, forced medical treatment and gender-based violence. The location for many of these violations have been the newly built internment camps located throughout Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China, which are officially labelled 'vocational education and training centres' by Chinese authorities. Established in 2017 by the Chinese Communist Party for the purposes of indoctrinating the Uyghur community, these camps have become the location of widespread surveillance and detention of many Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Muslims in the nation. The extent and severity of these human rights violations was reason enough for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to consider labelling these actions as "crimes against humanity" in its August 2022 report. Furthermore, the 47 member States of the UN Human Rights Council have publicly criticised China for its treatment of the ethnic group in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China and urged the country to comply with international law regarding the protection of human rights.

While China's inhumane treatment of the Uyghur community within its borders has received significant attention from the international community, little consideration has been paid to the persecution that Uyghur immigrants continue to face after they arrive in Europe. It has been taken for granted that Uyghurs have found safety once they are within the borders of Western democracies, when in reality, first-person testimonies of Uyghurs reveal that Chinese repression follows them overseas.

The invaluable work of investigative journalists from NBC News and researchers from organisations such as Amnesty International has helped uncover the extensive, global network of monitoring set up by the Chinese government that targets Uyghurs in foreign nations. Many Uyghurs who currently reside in Europe have come forward with their stories of being personally approached by the Chinese authorities and ordered to spy on their behalf, as well as keeping quiet in the presence of the media. Targeted individuals have been instructed to take pictures at pro-Uyghur rallies, while others are directed to work for non-governmental organisations, such as Amnesty International, and report back their activities.

To maintain their compliance, a frequent tactic used by Chinese police on Uyghurs abroad is to limit their communication to family members back in China. All video and phone calls made by Uyghurs overseas are rigorously monitored by the Chinese government, which restricts their capacity to converse openly with one another. Furthermore, Uyghurs are explicitly informed of the severe repercussions that will befall their family members should they disobey the will of the Chinese government. Returning to China is also not an option for these Uyghurs, as they face immediate detention by the Chinese government upon their return. These practices are a blatant example of transnational repression conducted by China, and should be thoroughly denounced by all UN member States. According to leading experts in the field, all Uyghurs living abroad are victims of this repression, which is described as limiting "their rights to free speech and associations, as well as the capacity to maintain their culture". This harassment is even experienced by Uyghurs with non-Uyghur relatives.

Julie Millsap, an activist born in the United States of America, who is married to a Han Chinese man and works in Washington DC, has also reportedly been targeted by Chinese authorities, and had her extended family threatened with violence.

It is important that the severity of this issue should not be underestimated by the Human Rights Council. Up to 60% of British Uyghurs have experienced harassment from Chinese officials, according to reports from the British Foreign Office. One European nation that demands additional consideration in this regard is Türkiye, which is home to the largest Uyghur diaspora in Europe, with 45,000 immigrants. For years Türkiye had served as a shelter for Uyghur immigrants due to the nation sharing deep linguistic and cultural links with the ethnic group. However, political analysts have warned that this may be beginning to change due to the growing economic ties between Ankara and Beijing.

Türkiye's economic problems, which include high inflation, high cost of living and high unemployment, have resulted in its economy becoming increasingly reliant on China in recent years. China has made significant efforts to get involved in Turkish politics and last year overtook the United States of America as the nation's top importer. Additionally, Chinese investors have financed infrastructure projects in places like Istanbul, and in 2018 Türkiye and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) reached an agreement for a \$3.6 billion loan package.

These growing economic ties between the two countries have come at the expense of the further oppression of Uyghurs immigrants in the country. Surveys conducted among Uyghurs in Türkiye have revealed that almost 80% of respondents reported receiving similar threats towards their families from Chinese authorities. Furthermore, many Uyghurs have found it much harder to get residence permits or citizenship in the country over the past ten years. Many Uyghurs in Türkiye are now forced into a difficult situation, where they are unable to make a living, but are also at risk of being interned if they go back to Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (UAR), China. Despite being aware of these issues, Turkish authorities have been slow to assist the Muslim minority group and have mostly stopped publicly criticising China for their religious intolerance. It is paramount that Türkiye and other European nations continue to show solidarity with the Uyghur population and resist China's repressive foreign policy measures.

These intimidation techniques towards Uyghurs abroad likely serve at least two purposes for the Chinese government. In addition to gathering intelligence, these tactics also aim to instil fear and suspicion among the Uyghur population. The hope of the Chinese State is believed to be that Uyghurs will be unable to properly form connections while abroad, either with the outside world or with their homeland. Although it is still unknown how effective China's efforts to infiltrate the Uyghur community have been in producing spies, its tactic of international repression is succeeding in sowing internal discord. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has reported that many community members have begun to heavily criticise their fellow Uyghurs who provide help to Beijing, even when it is under duress. Additionally, fewer young people are attending Uyghur protests or voicing their concerns and engaging in activist movements due to worries of spies being active in the organisations.

The United States of America government has already begun to address the issue with the introduction of the Transnational Repression Policy Act, but many believe this is still insufficient. In order to truly curtail the continuation of these blatant attacks against the minority group, a united front needs to be established within the United Nations. With this in mind, it is the recommendation of our organisation that the Human Rights Council establish an independent fact-finding mission to thoroughly investigate alleged human rights violations being conducted by China towards Uyghurs both in and outside their national borders.

The mandate of this fact-finding mission should be to establish the facts and circumstances surrounding the alleged violations; to collect, consolidate and analyse evidence of such violations and preserve evidence; and to engage with all relevant stakeholders, including China, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and any relevant United Nations entity or human rights organisations.

The Council should call upon the government of China to cooperate fully with this international fact-finding mission and grant unhindered access to any relevant information to allow for the proper fulfilment of its mandate. Following this, a comprehensive report on its findings needs to be presented to the Council. Assuming that these violations have been verified and if they continue to discriminate against the Uyghur population, we urge this Council to invoke any punitive leverages that are available to it against China.

This predicament warrants the Council's full attention, as does China's flagrant disrespect for human rights, especially in the absence of alternative voices to speak on behalf of the Uyghurs. In summary, the UN and its member States must intensify their efforts to hold States accountable for the human rights crimes they perpetrate against religious minorities.

The European Foundation for South Asian Studies, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.