

This is an updated and translated version of a motion published by the ULB in November 2018.

Uyghur academics in China: ULB stands in solidarity with imprisoned, detained or endangered colleagues in the Uyghur region.

15 September 2019

Since 2016, an estimate of 1.5 million Uyghurs, a Turkic-speaking people who live in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (also called East Turkestan), have been detained in a **large network of internment camps**¹. This situation also affects other ethnic groups (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Kirghiz, Hui, Mongols and even members of the Han majority) who live in the region. But its transformation into a surveillance state marked by the rise of Islamophobia across China², targets first and foremost Uyghurs who have been recast as an extremist collective³.

Following alarming reports revealed by the UN in August 2018, Chinese officials denied on the record the existence of such camps, before normalising them as “vocational training camps” or “boarding schools” and showcasing them as examples of the Chinese state's “altruism” towards its minorities⁴. However, **reports of enforced disappearance, psychological and physical abuses, and forced political indoctrination** within the camps contradict the official discourse of “education” under the guise of combating poverty or religious extremism⁵.

Outside the camps, Uyghurs live in constant fear, for the most part cut off from their detained families, as well as relatives and friends overseas. Furthermore, through various political campaigns, Uyghurs are required to **disavow religious, cultural, linguistic and ethnic identity markers** that do not fit into the national narrative of a “historically united Chinese nation”⁶. According to reports, thousands of children are deliberately separated from their families and sent to orphanages⁷. In sum, the largest mass incarceration of the 21st century goes hand in hand with a state-orchestrated “standardisation” and “normalisation”, or systematic **erosion of Uyghur cultural identities**.

Amongst detained and disappeared Uyghurs are intellectuals, artists, activists, publishers and scholars. The whereabouts of internationally recognized and established scholars remain unknown – like leading anthropologist **Rahile Dawut**, Xinjiang Normal University philosopher and poet **Abdulqadir Jalaleddin**⁸, among others. Recently, Amnesty International has launched a campaign for EPHE Doctor Honoris Causa and geographer **Tashpolat Tiyp**, also the former president of Xinjiang University⁹. At least fifteen scholars from Xinjiang Normal University, thirteen from Kashgar University, six from the Xinjiang Social Sciences Academy and six from Xinjiang Medical University have been forcibly detained, condemned or sent to camps¹⁰. **Halmurat Ghopur**, for instance, former president of Xinjiang Medical University Hospital in Ürümqi, has been sentenced to death for

¹ Scholars have used forensic analysis of government procurement documents and satellite imagery to show that approximately 10% of the adult Uyghur population is involuntarily detained in up to 1,200 camps without legal recourse. See for instance: <https://jamestown.org/program/evidence-for-chinas-political-re-education-campaign-in-xinjiang/>

² See <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01292986.2018.1457063>

³ See <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14672715.2018.1454111?src=recsys>

⁴ See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/22/from-denial-to-pride-how-china-changed-its-language-on-xinjiangs-camps>

⁵ See <http://www.jpolarisk.com/brainwashing-police-guards-and-coercive-internment-evidence-from-chinese-government-documents-about-the-nature-and-extent-of-xinjiangs-vocational-training-internment-camps>

⁶ Some scholars denounce a cultural genocide: <https://theconversation.com/despite-chinas-denials-its-treatment-of-the-uyghurs-should-be-called-what-it-is-cultural-genocide-120654>

⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/05/asia/xinjiang-muslims-china-intl-hnk/index.html>

⁸ See <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/abdulqadir-jalaleddin-china/>

⁹ See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/1006/2019/en/>

¹⁰ See report here: <https://uhrp.org/press-release/update---detained-and-disappeared-intellectuals-under-assault-uyghur-homeland.html>

« exhibiting separatist tendencies »¹¹. Others have died during or after detention in unclear circumstances, like **Hamit Himit**, director of the Department of Tourism at Xinjiang University¹².

Besides prominent intellectual figures, the Chinese state ordered Uyghur students based overseas to return home in 2017, threatening their families if they showed resistance or unwillingness to collaborate. Students who returned have been reportedly arrested and detained in camps¹³. Scholars at Risk has highlighted the case of **Gulginé Tashmemet** who returned home in December 2017 after she graduated from the University of Technology in Malaysia and was preparing for a PhD in the same university. Back home, she was arbitrarily detained and disappeared. Before visiting China, she had been asked by the Chinese authorities to provide a DNA sample and a copy of her passport, and she had been unable to contact her relatives at home¹⁴. She is one amongst many students whose families and friends overseas have lost contact with.

The plight of our colleagues, leading ethnographers, linguists, scientists, economists or medical doctors who have become captives exemplifies the persecution of Uyghur intellectuals that started in 2014, when **Ilham Tohti**, professor at the *Minzu* University of China in Beijing, was charged with separatism for questioning state policies in the Uyghur region, even though solid evidences based on methodical research backed his claims. Sentenced to life and unable to freely contact others, his health and living conditions remain unknown. This situation shows how Beijing considers a **highly educated Uyghur intelligentsia as a threat**, or rather a serious opposition force against discriminatory and assimilationist policies that are implemented in the Uyghur region.

Outside of China, our Uyghur colleagues and students also face pressure and threats from Chinese authorities¹⁵. They are asked to provide personal information such as identity documents, home and office addresses, student cards or employment contracts. Applications to renew their Chinese passports are often rejected and their families are threatened if they refuse to go back to China or comply with request from the Chinese Intelligence. In this context, many of our colleagues are **condemned to live in exile**, to cut off contact with their families and friends in the Uyghur region, and are frequently dissuaded by Chinese embassies or police to speak up for their imprisoned or disappeared colleagues.

Over the past few years, the ULB actively developed relationships with Chinese universities and research institutions, through student mobility, professor exchanges and research collaborations. The ULB also established an **internationally recognized expertise on East Asia through its research centre EAST** (East Asian Studies), of which China studies represent a substantial part. Therefore, with full background knowledge, and willing to maintain sensible and unprejudiced partnerships with China, the ULB wants to **publicly express its concerns about arbitrarily detained or threatened Uyghur colleagues and students**, and their families. The ULB calls for **unconditional solidarity** with the Uyghur people.

Condemning all forms of obscurantism and authoritarianism, the ULB affirms its unwavering commitment to freedom of speech and academic freedom across the world. The ULB also **calls other universities** in Belgium and in the world – especially those with close collaborations with Uyghur colleagues or institutions in the Uyghur region – **to openly denounce**

¹¹ See <https://concernedscientists.org/2018/10/another-uyghur-professor-imprisoned-in-china-facing-two-year-suspended-death-sentence/>

¹² As reported by the EPHE in its press release on Prof. Tiyip Tashpolat: https://www.ephe.fr/documents/fichiers/presse/2018_10_09_communique_tiyip_taspholat_ephe.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0YwH4Az1k59jWItv-YzQZu8vyf2qIph4XIbS3naFalBz1W-6SJ_VnyA9Q

¹³ See <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/28/a-summer-vacation-in-chinas-muslim-gulag/>

¹⁴ See <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2018-05-29-university-of-technology-malaysia/>

¹⁵ See <https://www.dw.com/en/how-china-intimidates-uyghurs-abroad-by-threatening-their-families/a-49554977>; <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/china-uyghur-repression-espionage-informants-muslim-terrorism-a8626526.html>

the massive repression of the Uyghurs and to relay any information on forced disappearance of Uyghur colleagues in China and on endangered Uyghur scholars abroad.

Silence and self-censorship have caused mass arrests and massive violations of basic human rights in the Uyghur region. The ULB calls to **break the silence**, to support knowledge and freedom of science, and to think beyond political ideology.

Non-exhaustive list of Uyghur scholars who have been disappeared, imprisoned or condemned

Xinjiang University

Rahile Dawut, Teyip Tashpolat (Président), Arislan Abdulla, Azat Sultan (ancien vice-Président), Gheyretjan Osman, Zulpiqar Barat Ozbash, Nebijan Hebibulla, Askar Rozi, Muhammad Salih, Arkin Batur, Abdusalam Ablimit, Alim Ahat, Dilmurat Turun, Batur Eysa, Rahim Rehmulla, Erkin Imirbaqi, Nurbiye Yadikar, Arslan Abdulla (émérite), Hamit Himit.

Xinjiang Normal University

Abdubehir Shukri, Adbuqadir Jalaeddin, Yunus Ebeydulla, Ababekri, Nureli

Xinjiang Medical University

Halmurat Ghopur, Abbas Eset, Nurmuhhammad

Xinjiang Social Sciences Academy

Abdyrazaq Sayin (Président), Kurash Tahir

Xinjiang Education Institute

Ablet Abdurishit Berki

Xinjiang Vocational University

Kamil Rehim

Kashgar University

Gulnar Obul, Erkin Omer, Muhter Abdughopur, Qurban Osman, Erkin Oghuz (emeritus), Matrehim Haji, Enwer Qadir, Enwer Ismayil, Ablajan Adbuwaki

Minzu University of China

Ilham Tohti