

ARISMUN 2020: The United Nations Human Rights Council

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TOPIC A: Addressing the Violation of the Rights of Uyghur Muslims Placed in Mass Detention in China

INTRODUCTION

There has been a long-standing human rights violation; some may call genocide in China. The US State Department estimates that more than one million Uyghurs, as well as members from other Muslim minority groups, have been detained in a sprawling network of internment camps in Xinjiang, where they are reportedly "subjected to torture, cruel and inhumane treatment such as physical and sexual abuse, forced labour, and death." Former detainees have stated that they experienced political indoctrination and abuse inside the camps, such as sleep deprivation and forced injections.

BACKGROUND

Beijing's crackdown on Xinjiang echoes a longtime paranoia about the frontier region and a deep suspicion of its non-Han population among China's rulers, which have historically resulted in oppression and rebellion. In 2009, there were riots in the regional capital Urumqi which killed at least 200 people. Since that incident, there have been several attacks which include a car that was driven into a crowd in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in October 2013. Another attack was on a police station and government officials which killed at least 96 people in July 2014. The Uyghur militants claimed responsibility for all these attacks. After the death of five people in a knife attack in Xinjiang in February 2017, Xinjiang's communist party boss Chen Quanguo encourages government forces to "bury the corpses of terrorists in the vast sea of a people's war."

THE ISSUE

China claims that Uyghurs have extremist views and are a threat to society. Majority of the 11million Uyghurs are Muslims who reside in western China's Xinjiang region. First reported to a UN human rights committee in August 2018, attention was drawn to the claim China had "turned the Uyghur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internment camp." About a million people have been detained in camps and are forced to learn Mandarin Chinese, swear loyalty to President Xi Jinping as well as renouncing their faith. Investigative journalism has also reported stories of mass rape, forced sterilization, family separation and brainwashing. The Chinese government took a specific aim at the Muslim faith and has destroyed mosques, confiscated Qurans, forbidden halal diets, and banned fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. In 2017, the Xinjiang government passed a law prohibiting men from growing long beards and women from wearing veils, and dozens of mosques have been demolished.

ARISMUN 2020: The United Nations Human Rights Council

Initially, Beijing flatly denied the existence of the camps. However, it was later claimed the facilities are voluntary 'vocational training centres' where people learn job skills, re-education programmes that aim to alleviate poverty, Chinese language and laws. The government now insists that the camps are necessary for preventing religious extremism and terrorism.

China has not allowed journalists, human rights groups or diplomats independent access to the camp even after claims by a senior official that most people that were held in the camp have returned to society.

Uyghur families have had Han Chinese officials staying in their home impersonating relatives to watch what they are doing, which acts as a surveillance system. People are monitored online and through numerous CCTV cameras in public places with government officials watching their every move.

The ASPI project deals with the vast scale of both individual detention camps and the entire network of internment camps. They have divided the camps into four different regions that reflect levels of fortification and controls on inmates. About half of said facilities have been expanded and have higher security which indicates that there has been a shift like the central government campaign against the Uyghur Muslims. The reason for the shift to higher security according to the survivor testimony is that "a significant number of detainees have not shown satisfactory progress in political indoctrination camps has transferred to higher security facilities, which expanded to accommodate them." The same report also found that some camps have had security controls reduced, internal fences and perimeter walls were grounded.

Today, Uyghur activists are pushing for Xinjiang to become an independent country with the name "East Turkestan".

INTERVENTIONS

Almost 24 countries confronted China at the UN in October 2019 voicing their outrage about the "credible reports of mass detention; efforts to restrict cultural and religious practices; mass surveillance disproportionately targeting ethnic Uyghurs; other human rights violations and abuses." They called on China to comply with its national and international obligations to respect human rights as well as freedom of religion and allowing the UNHR monitors access to detention centres.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Some possible solutions are to call on the international community to open an independent investigation to gather information on the internment camps and other abuses in Xinjiang. Others urge the Chinese authorities to close all camps and to let go of all persons detained because of their religion and beliefs.

ARISMUN 2020: The United Nations Human Rights Council

TOPIC B: COMBATTING RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND RELATED FORMS OF INTOLERANCE

INTRODUCTION

The international Convention of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) defines racial discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." Since the adoption of this definition in 1965, the world conferences have made progressive efforts to combat this issue; yet, racial discrimination and related forms of intolerance, such as xenophobia, are still prevailing global issues that have significant implications for the social development of the world.

BACKGROUND

The slave trade (transatlantic and sub-Saharan) and colonization of African and Asian countries are responsible for the manifestation and are the primary sources of racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. From the transatlantic slave trade alone, some 60 million Africans died as a result of this brutality. Since then, an uncountable amount of African Americans have died as a result of racial discrimination; 1 in 3 immigrants have received some sort of intolerance against their ethnic background; Finally, in South Africa, between 2000 and 2008 67 people have died from xenophobic attacks. Shining light on the fact that even though racial discrimination and intolerance have been ongoing for more than 400 years, there has not been a substantial amount of change when it comes to combatting the issue.

THE ISSUE

For years, minority groups have suffered discrimination based on their race and or ethnic background. This intolerance poses a significant threat to these minority groups as they are often at risk of being targeted by radically motivated acts. Racial discrimination and related forms of intolerance also make it extremely difficult for people from different descents to access equal opportunities and services as their majority peers (caucasian descents). Discrimination, hate and other expressions of dislike for a social group often transform into institutionalized prejudice and incite physical and emotional abuse.

Such trends are seen in many "first world" countries, like the US. In this country, between the years 2014 and 2019, 6557 people were shot and killed by law enforcement. Twenty-five per cent of these people were documented as unarmed African Americans who were presented by unnecessary force by the law enforcement officers. Also, almost fifty per cent of convicted minority criminals reported having been falsely incarcerated as a result of their

ARISMUN 2020: The United Nations Human Rights Council

race or ethnicity. An even closer example of the injustice based on race was of the recent George Floyd incident when officers of the law murdered the unarmed African American male. Studies show that these acts are as a result of racial discrimination and intolerance that have since integrated into the United States judiciary system.

In the UK, there is considerable evidence of ethnic and racial inequalities in unemployment, housing and even in the judiciary systems. Stigmatization is focused on the Black and Muslim minority populations.

In 2019, South Africa suffered a xenophobic incident in which 12 people were killed, and hundreds were arrested. The situation arose after a mob of hateful south Africans attacked foreign-owned shops in Johannesburg because of ignorance and overall intolerance. Lastly, in many instances, asylum seekers, who are forced out of their country as a consequence of political instability, are met with discrimination in the region they seek refuge in. They are confronted with hate crime and are sometimes dehumanized and placed in detention camps, as seen in the United States.

From the examples stated above, it is clear that racial discrimination and related intolerance are serious issues that need to be addressed adequately and eradicated as it can severely endanger the lives of those being discriminated against.

However, the most outstanding issue of racial discrimination and related intolerance is combating racial discrimination and intolerance. The task of addressing these issues is somewhat daunting for the UNHCR as it is a global problem and it is integrated into the societies and systems of almost every country in the world, thus, making it seemingly impossible to eradicate it.

INTERVENTIONS

There have already been conferences over the past decades on finding solutions to combat racial discrimination and related intolerance; these include the world conference "Against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and other related intolerance", held in Durban from the 31st of August to the 8th of September 2001. Within this conference, it was recognized that there is an ongoing battle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other related forms of discrimination and these acts were defined as "devasting evils of humanity." In the same conference, there was also an affirmation that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of minorities, where they exist, must be protected and that persons belonging to such minorities should be treated equally and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination of any kind. The UN agency, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), played a crucial role in this conference as they aided in organizing and mobilizing education relevant to the protection of human rights. Unesco also formulated some declarations, such as the Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution to the Mass Media, this was used to strengthen peace and promote international understanding of human rights.

ARISMUN 2020: The United Nations Human Rights Council

In a general assembly conference in 2014, it was noted that several countries had made headway in fighting this long term issue. In Azerbaijan, for example, there was an ethnic policy added to the constitution, which says: "The State guarantees equality of rights of all citizens, irrespective of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, property status, occupation, beliefs or membership of political parties, trade unions or other voluntary associations. Human and civil rights and freedoms may not be restricted on the grounds of race, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, origin, beliefs or political or social affiliation."

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

In attempts to curb this issue, some solutions are to collaborate with UN human rights mechanisms, to start routine country visits to monitor signs of racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and tracking and reporting hate crimes; as early detection is crucial in preventing more expressions of discrimination.

ARISMUN 2020: The United Nations Human Rights Council

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