

## Civil Society Calls for Urgent Measures to Protect Uyghurs at Risk of Refoulement

*No return is safe for Uyghurs!*

June 17, 2022

On World Refugee Day 2022, a group of 22 refugee and human rights groups and 50 Uyghur organizations are calling on governments and international organizations to take urgent steps to protect Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples at imminent risk of refoulement. As atrocity crimes unfold in the Uyghur region of China—including mass detention, forced labour, and torture—Uyghurs outside China, including human rights defenders, are subject to persistent barriers to international protection and risks of deportation.

Uyghurs have increasingly been recognized as **experiencing persecution as a particular group in their region of origin**, yet little is known about transnational repression they face in the diaspora. Uyghurs who are not firmly settled in third countries are facing an exceptional risk of detention and refoulement. Many have faced harassment and intimidation by local authorities, often at the request of Chinese authorities, and in some cases have been subjected to prolonged detention.

While access to international protection mechanisms like the UNHCR remains limited, transnational repression acts as deterrence to human rights activism and a practical threat to the exercise of individual rights, including the right to be protected from torture, and inhumane and degrading treatment.

In order to provide adequate protection to Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples at risk, immediate steps should be taken. Importantly, access to protection should not be impeded by a lack of documentation. Our organizations call on:

- Governments to implement proactive resettlement programs where there is a risk of refoulement, and be alert to cases of imminent deportation on an emergency basis;
- Governments to reject criminal justice cooperation requests against Uyghurs that put them at risk of refoulement, and ensure that Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples are effectively protected against the misuse of international databases and alerts by the Chinese authorities;
- Parliamentary committees who have passed resolutions denouncing human rights violations perpetrated against the Uyghur people and other Turkic peoples to launch enquiries on transnational repression, and engage civil society organisations in this process; and
- UNHCR to continue registering Uyghurs in need of international protection, including in detention, and to issue a non-return advisory for China regarding groups systematically persecuted, such as Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples.

For over two decades, Uyghurs living outside China have faced **efforts by Chinese authorities to pressure foreign governments to detain and forcibly transfer them back to China**. Research shows that more than 1,500 Uyghurs, including many who are human rights

defenders, have been detained or forcibly returned to China where many have faced imprisonment and torture in custody.

Since 2016, the Chinese government has intensified repression and carried out a policy of mass, arbitrary detention of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, subjecting them to severe policies including the prohibition of most religious, linguistic, and cultural practices; state-sponsored forced labour; imprisonment; and forced sterilization and birth prevention policies.

Uyghurs are targeted on the basis of ethnic origin and religious affiliation, but **detention and imprisonment have also been based, in many cases, on connections outside China.**

Uyghurs who have worked or studied abroad—and even those who have communicated with family or friends abroad—have been targeted for detention and imprisonment. It is well-established that all Uyghurs and Turkic peoples forcibly returned to China would be at serious risk of persecution.

The principle of non-refoulement, binding to all states regardless of ratification of the Refugee Convention, firmly establishes that no one should be returned to a country where there is a real risk of persecution, torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or any other human rights violation.

On World Refugee Day, we recall that the 1951 Refugee Convention, signed by 149 States to date, was drafted in response to the forced displacement and deportations that took place during the Second World War. The international community must live up to these principles and make good on its duty to protect Uyghurs at risk of facing mass atrocities in their homeland. No return is safe for Uyghurs. Immediate steps are urgently needed to ensure their protection.

Signatories:

1. Alberta Uyghur Association
2. AMERA International
3. Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
4. Asian Parliamentarians for Human Rights
5. Australian East Turkestan Association
6. Australian Uyghur Association
7. Australian Uyghur Tangritagh Women's Association
8. Austria Uyghur Association
9. Belgium Uyghur Association
10. Boat People SOS
11. Campaign for Uyghurs
12. The Center for Uyghur Studies

13. The Center for Victims of Torture
14. Church World Service (CWS)
15. Committee for Religious Freedom in Vietnam
16. Dutch Uyghur Human Rights Foundation
17. East Turkistan Education and Solidarity Association
18. East Turkestan Union of Muslim Scholars
19. East Turkistan Nuzugum Culture and Family Association
20. European East Turkistan Education Association
21. European Uyghur Institute
22. East Turkistan Association of Canada
23. East Turkistan Union in Europe
24. Eastern Turkistan Foundation
25. Fair Trials
26. Finnish Uyghur Culture Center
27. Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect
28. Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)
29. HIAS
30. ILPA (Immigration Law Practitioners' Association)
31. International Pen Uyghur Center
32. International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)
33. International Union of East Turkistan Organizations
34. Isa Yusup Alptekin Foundation
35. Japan Uyghur Association
36. Jubilee Campaign USA
37. Lawyers for Uyghur Rights
38. MENA Rights Group
39. Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies (MIGS)
40. Norwegian Uyghur Committee

41. Refugee Congress
42. Refugees International
43. RefugePoint
44. René Cassin
45. Safeguard Defenders
46. Satuq Bugrakhan Foundation of Science and Civilization
47. Society Union of Uyghur National Association
48. Stop Uyghur Genocide
49. Sweden Uyghur Union
50. Swiss Uyghur Association
51. Uighur Society of the Kyrgyz Republic
52. Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation
53. Uyghur American Association
54. Uyghur Academy Australia
55. Uyghur Academy Canada
56. Uyghur Academy Europe
57. Uyghur Academy Foundation
58. Uyghur Academy Japan
59. Uyghur Academy USA
60. Uyghur Center for Human Rights and Democracy
61. Uyghur Cultural and Education Union in Germany
62. Uyghur Human Rights Project
63. Uyghur Projects Foundation
64. Uyghur Refugee Relief Fund
65. Uyghur Research Institute
66. Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project
67. Uyghur Transitional Justice Database
68. Uyghur U.K. Association

69. Uyghur Youth Union in Kazakhstan
70. Victoria Uyghur Association
71. World Uyghur Congress
72. World Uyghur Congress Foundation

**Further sources on transnational repression:**

[Beyond Silence: Collaboration Between Arab States and China in the Transnational Repression of Uyghurs](#), Uyghur Human Rights Project (2022)

[“Your Family Will Suffer”](#): How China is Hacking, Surveilling, and Intimidating Uyghurs in Liberal Democracies, Uyghur Human Rights Project and Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs (2022)

[Involuntary Returns – report exposes long-arm policing overseas](#), Safeguard Defenders (2022)

[Returned Without Rights, State of Extraditions to China](#), Safeguard Defenders (2022)

[Hide and seek: China’s extradition problem. A manual to counter extradition to China](#), Safeguard Defenders (2022)

[Refugee Espionage: An EU Model](#), Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation, (February 28, 2022)

[Saudi Arabia: UN experts say Uyghurs must not be extradited to China, urge proper risk assessment](#), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (April 1, 2022)

[China’s long arm: how Uyghurs are being silenced in Europe](#), Index On Censorship (2022)

[Compromised Space: Foreign State Reprisals against Unrepresented Diplomats in Europe](#), Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (April 2021)

[Morocco: UN experts say extradition of Uyghur asylum seeker to China violates principle of non-refoulement](#), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (December 16, 2021)

[“They Sent Her to a Concentration Camp Because She Came to Turkey”](#): The Persecution of Uyghurs Based on their Turkic and Muslim Identity, Uyghur Human Rights Project (2021)

[“Nets Cast from the Earth to the Sky”](#): China’s Hunt for Pakistan’s Uyghurs, Uyghur Human Rights Project and Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs (2021)

[No Space Left to Run: China’s Transnational Repression of Uyghurs](#), Uyghur Human Rights Project and Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs (2021)

[The Nightmare of Uyghur Families Separated by Repression](#), Amnesty International (2021)

[“Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots”](#): China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims, Human Rights Watch (2021)

**-- EMBARGOED UNTIL 9:00 A.M. CET, JUNE 17, 2022 --**

[Chinese authorities accused of intimidating Uyghurs in Australia](#), *ABC News*, March 30, 2019

[Compromised Space: Bullying and Blocking at the UN Human Rights Mechanisms](#),  
Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (July 2019)