

End Uyghur Forced Labour

Submission to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women by the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region

April 2023

On behalf of the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region (hereafter “Coalition”),¹ we write in advance of the review of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter “the government of China”) by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (hereafter “the Committee”) on its compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (hereafter “the Convention”).

This submission presents evidence of extensive and systematic forced labour in agricultural and industrial workplaces in or around internment camps, prisons, and workplaces across the Uyghur Region and China, perpetrated by the government of China. We provide evidence in relation to violations of **Article 11** of the Convention, and include suggested questions and recommendations for Committee members to consider during the periodic review of the government of China.

Our call is for the government of China to swiftly end the systematic forced labour of Uyghurs, and for all victims of human rights violations, including Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples,² to be provided with adequate and effective remedies and reparation. We ask that the Committee’s recommendations to the State party support this call.

Employment (Art. 11)

List of issues (2021): *“Please provide information on measures taken to independently investigate reports of forced labour among Uighur women, particularly in the textile, apparel production and cotton-picking industries.”* (Paragraph 16)³

¹ See <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org>. The Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region is a coalition of civil society organisations and trade unions united to end state-sponsored forced labour and other egregious human rights abuses against people from the Uyghur Region in China, known to local people as East Turkistan. A list of the Coalition’s members, endorsers, and steering committee leadership is available at <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/>.

² Evidence has shown that Hui have also been targeted for similar persecution, including forced labour, along with Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim-majority peoples. See Chinese Human Rights Defenders, 22 March 2023, Will The Hui Be Silently Erased? <https://www.nchr.org/2023/03/will-the-hui-be-silently-erased-a-groundbreaking-report-on-muslim-hui-minoritys-crisis-of-survival-amid-chinese-government-policies-aiming-to-eliminate-hui-identity/>.

³ List of issues and questions in relation to the ninth periodic report of China*, CEDAW/C/CHN/Q/9, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FCHN%2FQ%2F9&Lang=en.

State party reply (2023): “Workers of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang choose jobs on their own will, sign labor contracts with employers and receive remuneration on the principles of equality, free will and consensus, without any coercion and in accordance with laws and regulations such as the Labor Law and the Labor Contract Law.” (Paragraph 55)⁴

Suggested questions for state-party review:

- 1. Why do economic development programs for women include language, culture, and ideological components that promote Han culture or are designed to ‘re-educate’ Uyghur women?**
- 2. The ILO Committee on the Application of Standards stated in 2022 that it “deplored the use of all repressive measures against the Uyghur people, which has a discriminatory effect on their employment opportunities.” What steps has the government taken to work with the ILO to eliminate discriminatory treatment of Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim-majority workers, both formally and substantively?**
- 3. Will the government of China provide access to factories by independent experts, as recommended by the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards? How will the government of China ensure labour audits and inspections are free of intimidation of workers, as several experienced auditing firms have asserted?⁵**
- 4. Why do regional and local government directives indicate that when a worker refuses to “improve their vocational skills, [and] economic conditions” that they should be considered a religious extremist or terrorist?⁶**

Coalition submission response to government of China claims

As this submission evidences below, the government of China is perpetrating human rights abuses, including systematic forced labour, on a massive scale in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (hereafter “the Uyghur Region”) and other regions of China targeting the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples on the basis of their religion and ethnicity. Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim-majority workers are subject to invasive surveillance, monitoring, restrictions on freedom of movement, and other measures on the basis of their ethnicity in the workplace. Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim-majority women suffer from particular and intersectional forms of discrimination in this environment.

⁴ Replies of China to the list of issues and questions in relation to its ninth periodic report, CEDAW/C/CHN/RQ/9, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FCHN%2FRQ%2F9&Lang=en.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, 7 October 2020. “Social Audit Reforms and the Labor Rights Ruse,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/07/social-audit-reforms-and-labor-rights-ruse>.

⁶ State Council Information Office, September 2020. “Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang,” http://english.scio.gov.cn/whitepapers/2020-09/17/content_76712251_3.htm. See also: “新疆局地组织民众识别75种宗教极端活动” [Local people in Xinjiang organise people to identify 75 religious extremist activities], Observer Network, 24 December 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141229192351/http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-12-24/093231321497.shtml>.

In June 2022, the ILO Committee on the Application of Standards stated that it “...deplored the use of all repressive measures against the Uyghur people, which has a discriminatory effect on their employment opportunities and treatment as a religious and ethnic minority in China, in addition to other violations of their fundamental rights.”⁷ The Committee of Experts recommended that China “...accept an ILO Technical Advisory Mission to allow the ILO to assess the situation together with the support of ITUC and IOE.” The Coalition supports this recommendation and requests that the Committee include such a recommendation during its review of the State party.

In February 2023, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations reiterated “its deep concern in respect of the serious allegations of discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang, which appears to be based on policy directions expressed in numerous national and regional policy and regulatory documents.”⁸

There is a substantive body of evidence that the government of China is subjecting the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples to state-imposed forced labour as part of state programmes, including so-called ‘poverty alleviation’, ‘vocational training’, ‘re-education through labour’ and ‘de-extremification’, focused on eliminating Uyghur culture and religious practices.⁹

Forced labour transfers: According to reports, at least 80,000 Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples were forcibly transferred from the Uyghur Region to factories in eastern and central China between 2017 and 2019¹⁰—a practice that has continued until at least 2022.¹¹ These transfers occur as part of a state-sponsored transfer-of-labour scheme, marketed as ‘Xinjiang Aid.’ Under the ‘Xinjiang Aid’ scheme, companies receive government subsidies to participate in two ways: (1) opening satellite factories inside the Uyghur Region or (2) hiring Uyghur workers for their factories located outside the Uyghur Region.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, 17 February 2023. Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations p.608, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_868115.pdf.

⁹ Research organisations, including the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Worker Rights Consortium, the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University, and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and investigative journalists from The Wall Street Journal, the BBC, Associated Press, The New York Times, The Globe and Mail, ABC Australia, Radio Free Asia, Reuters, and other outlets have documented specific cases of forced labour in the apparel and textile industry, including in gloves and shoe manufacturing, in PPE production, in the solar industry, in the automotive industry, in electronics, in hair products, and in tomato processing in the Uyghur Region and wider China.

¹⁰ Fergus Ryan, Danielle Cave, and Nathan Ruser, ‘Mapping Xinjiang’s ‘re-education’ camps’, (Barton, Australia: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2018), <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/mapping-xinjiangs-re-educationcamps>.

¹¹ Adrian Zenz, June 2022. ‘Unemployment Monitoring and Early Warning: New Trends in Xinjiang’s Coercive Labor Placement Systems,’ Jamestown Foundation, <https://jamestown.org/program/unemployment-monitoring-and-early-warning-new-trends-in-xinjiangs-coercive-labor-placement-systems/>.

The vast majority of workers forced into these “labour transfer” schemes, however, have been transferred within the Uyghur Region itself—either to another prefecture or county.¹²

Uyghur women are systematically targeted through programs involving ‘satellite factories’ within the Uyghur Region. The satellite factories are small workshops built in villages to put women and others with household and childcare responsibilities to work outside the home. These programs are ostensibly designed to bring work opportunities to those, mainly women doing at home care work who are unable to leave the village to take up non-rural or non-farming jobs, but are used to impose language and cultural assimilation while putting Uyghur women under government supervision. Government documents indicate that these programs are designed with ‘thought transformation’ in mind to convince women to participate in satellite factories, and some documents arguing that the satellite factories liberate women and combat extremism at the same time, leading Uyghur women into an acceptance of ‘modern culture’ meaning Han Chinese culture, not Uyghur culture and identity.¹³

In one case of labour transfers outside the Uyghur Region, a group of around 600—mostly Uyghur women from Hotan and Kashgar prefectures—were transferred to Qingdao Taekwang Shoes Co. Ltd, a shoe factory located in Laixi City on the northeast coast of China. Uyghurs working at the factory were compelled to take ‘night classes’ to study Mandarin, sing the Chinese national anthem and receive ‘vocational training’ and ‘patriotic education,’ and were not allowed to go home for holidays.¹⁴

In another case, a Chinese company producing automotive parts, Xinjiang Guangwei Huichang Auto Products Co., announced in 2020 that it had “driven 386 rural women in the village to find employment” in the company’s ‘poverty alleviation’ industrial park.¹⁵

Coerced labour of the rural poor in the ‘poverty alleviation programme’: To ensure that these individuals have the ‘skills’ required for the factory jobs, they are mandated to go through training in so-called ‘centralised training centres.’ Regional and local government directives indicate that refusal to participate in poverty alleviation in the Uyghur Region is considered a sign of the ‘three evils’—terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism—which are punishable by internment or imprisonment.¹⁶ Research indicates that extractive and manufacturing industries

¹² Adrian Zenz, March 2021. ‘Coercive Labor and Forced Displacement in Xinjiang’s Cross-Regional Labor Transfer Program,’ Jamestown Foundation, p.17, <https://jamestown.org/product/coercive-labor-and-forced-displacement-in-xinjiangs-cross-regional-labor-transfer-program/>.

¹³ Adrian Zenz, July 2019. ‘Beyond the Camps: Beijing’s Grand Scheme of Forced Labor, Poverty Alleviation and Social Control in Xinjiang,’ p.13-14, <https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/Beyond%20the%20Camps%20CECC%20testimony%20version%20%28Zenz%20Oct%202019%29.pdf>.

¹⁴ Anna Fifield, 29 February 2020. ‘China compels Uighurs to work in shoe factory that supplies Nike,’ *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/china-compels-uighurs-to-work-in-shoe-factory-that-supplies-nike/2020/02/28/ebddf5f4-57b2-11ea-8efd-0f904bdd8057_story.html.

¹⁵ Laura Murphy, Kendyl Salecito, Yalkun Uluyol, and Mia Rabkin (December 2022). ‘Driving Force Automotive Supply Chains and Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region,’ p.44, Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice and NomoGaia, <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/driving-force>.

¹⁶ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Employment and labor rights.’ Section I, para. 1, Employment in Xinjiang, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/42312/Document/1687707/1687707.htm>.

in particular have made use of workers through these programs, including for solar energy components,¹⁷ PVC plastics,¹⁸ and automotive parts.¹⁹

Forced labour of current and ex-detainees, including in internment camps: In a separate but parallel policy to China’s public poverty alleviation plan, the government has also enacted a public re-education policy that involves internment in centres with high fences, police watchtowers, and barbed wire. Internees are then released to factories in nearby industrial parks or camp factories. The exact number of former detainees who have been coerced into working in a factory is not known, but estimates based on interviews and government statements are that at least 100,000 former detainees have been forced to work in garment and textile factories.²⁰

In one case, videos posted on social media in September 2020 showed groups of young Uyghur women being sent to work in factories after release from detention camps. The videos give accounts of young Uyghurs from Uchturpan county, Aksu prefecture who were sent to work at a textile factory.²¹

Prison labour: Some Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples are within the traditional prison population rather than in the internment system discussed above. The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), for example, administers its own prison system and factories.²² XPCC—a quasi-governmental paramilitary organisation—is reported to force its own prison population to conduct commercial activities, mainly in cotton harvesting and production.²³ In addition to harvesting cotton, the Citizen Power Initiative (CPI)’s evidence suggests that prisoners are responsible for the manufacture of textiles, apparel, and footwear.²⁴

State-owned enterprises and private companies accepting subsidies to use forced labourers from the Uyghur Region: The government offers incentives to Chinese-owned companies to incorporate the Uyghur population into their operations.²⁵ The Xinjiang government has offered subsidies and inducements to encourage Chinese-owned companies to invest and build factories

¹⁷ Laura Murphy and Nyrola Elimä, May 2021. ‘In Broad Daylight: Uyghur Forced Labour and Global Solar Supply Chains,’ Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/in-broad-daylight>.

¹⁸ Laura Murphy, Nyrola Elimä, Jim Vallette, June 2022. ‘Built on Repression: PVC Building Materials’ Reliance on Labor and Environmental Abuses in the Uyghur Region,’ Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice and Material Research, <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/built-on-repression>.

¹⁹ Laura Murphy, Kendyl Salcito, Yalkun Uluyol, and Mia Rabkin, December 2022. ‘Driving Force Automotive Supply Chains and Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region,’ (Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice and NomoGaia, <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/driving-force>.

²⁰ Amy Lehr and Mariefaye Bechrakis, 16 October 2019. ‘Connecting the Dots in Xinjiang: Forced Labor, Forced Assimilation, and Western Supply Chains,’ Center for Strategic & International Studies.

²¹ Radio Free Asia, 1 October 2020). ‘‘Uyghur Women Released From Camps Work Long Hours For Low Pay in Forced Labor Scheme’’, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/labor-10012020174034.html>.

²² Laura T. Murphy, Nyrola Elimä, and David Tobin, July 2022. ‘‘Until Nothing Is Left’’: China’s Settler Corporation and its Human Rights Violations in the Uyghur Region,’ Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, <https://www.shu.ac.uk/helena-kennedy-centre-international-justice/research-and-projects/all-projects/until-nothing-is-left>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lianchao Han, Cotton: The Fabric Full of Lies: A report on forced and prison labor in Xinjiang, China, and the nexus to global supply chains (CPIFC Monograph Series Book 2), p. 4, Citizen Press.

²⁵ Lehr, Connecting the Dots.

within the ‘vocational training compounds’ or next to such compounds.²⁶ Additionally, according to CSIS, companies have been encouraged to build ‘satellite’ factories in villages to ensure that they are able to control and coerce every resident to work.²⁷

For example, a Chinese company, Luthai Textile, made a significant investment in the Uyghur Region for a spindle cotton spinning project in Awati County, Aksu prefecture. A 2018 article in Xinhua explained that at the time of writing, Luthai had recruited 1,154 people for employment, among which ‘ethnic minority’ employees account for 80%. The article goes on to state that since 2018 Aksu’s Human Resources and Social Security Bureau organised “intensive training in the textile and apparel industry for over 10,000 workers, promoting the transformation of rural minority surplus labor into industrial workers.” The article further states that 60% of Xinjiang Luthai’s employees are women, who were once housewives but have been turned away from the “stovetop” and are now “blue-collar workers.”²⁸

United Nations reporting

There is now a strong record of reporting and communication from independent UN human rights bodies, establishing the gravity of these concerns and the need for urgent action. These include:

In March and April 2021, the **UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights**, in a Joint Allegation Letter, noted that “We are concerned that these workers who are allegedly forcefully relocated across the country, are subjected to forced labour as part of what the Government describes as development and poverty alleviation policy...”²⁹

In its 2022 report, the **ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations** stated it was “...bound to observe...that the employment situation of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in China provides numerous indications of coercive measures many of which arise from regulatory and policy documents.”³⁰

In July 2022, an annual report by the **Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery** found that “...forced labour among Uighur, Kazakh and other ethnic minorities in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing has been occurring in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China.”³¹ The report concludes that “...given the nature and extent of powers exercised over

²⁶ Zenz, *Beyond the Camps*.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ ‘鲁泰棉业：带动南疆群众走出贫困的“领头雁”’, *Xinhuanet*, 28 November 2018, <https://news.sina.com.cn/o/2018-11-28/doc-ihpevhcm1457836.shtml>.

²⁹ Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises, March–April 2021, see letters here: <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TmSearch/RelCom?code=CAN%206/2020>.

³⁰ 2022 Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122) – China (ratification: 1997), https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_836653.pdf.

³¹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 19 July 2022. Contemporary forms of slavery affecting persons belonging to ethnic, religious and linguistic minority communities, Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, Tomoya Obokata, p.7-8, <http://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/51/26>.

affected workers during forced labour...some instances may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity.”

A report from the **Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights**, on 31 August 2022, found that “arbitrary and discriminatory detention” of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples, taking place within the context of other restrictions, “may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity.” Human rights organisations, including Amnesty International³² and Human Rights Watch,³³ have determined the repressive policies in the Uyghur Region amount to crimes against humanity, and an independent legal tribunal,³⁴ the United States government, and multiple national parliaments have recognised the abuses as amounting to genocide and/or crimes against humanity.³⁵

³² See Amnesty International. ‘Like We Were Enemies in a War’: China’s Mass Internment, Torture, and Persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang, June 2021, [ASA_17_4137-2021_Full_report_ENG.pdf \(amnesty.org\)](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa/17/4137/2021/full/report/eng.pdf).

³³ Human Rights Watch, “Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots’: China’s Crimes against Humanity Targeting Uyghurs and Other Turkic Muslims’, April 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>.

³⁴ Patrick Wintour, 9 December 2021. ‘Uyghurs subjected to genocide by China, unofficial UK tribunal finds’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/09/uyghurs-subjected-to-genocide-by-china-unofficial-uk-tribunal-finds>.

³⁵ The Uyghur Human Rights Project has compiled resolutions by national governments and parliaments at <https://uhrp.org/responses/>.