



Four Years After Landmark UN Assessment, Uyghur Forced Labour Persists *Human Rights Groups Call on UN High Commissioner to Act*

August 31, 2026

On the fourth anniversary of the release of the 2022 [OHCHR Assessment of Human Rights Concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region](#) (Uyghur Region), human rights groups call on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to publicly report on the status of the assessment's recommendation that China investigate allegations of forced labour, particularly in light of evidence that state-imposed forced labour has intensified in the years since.

Four years on from the assessment report, which found that the arbitrary and discriminatory detention of Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples “may constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity” in the context of wider restrictions and deprivation of fundamental rights, we are concerned by the lack of substantive follow-up.

Within that pattern, OHCHR found credible indications of forced or compulsory labour linked to the Uyghur Region, arising from placements in so-called “Vocational Education and Training Centres”, through the criminal justice system, and through labour transfer and “surplus labour” schemes tied explicitly by the government’s own policy documents to the prevention of “religious extremism”. The assessment raised serious concerns about the extent to which labour placements linked to these systems could be considered fully voluntary, given the constant “menace of penalty” facing those involved.

On this basis, the assessment called on the government of China to take prompt steps to release all individuals arbitrarily deprived of their liberty and to promptly investigate allegations of forced labour and other abuses. Four years later, there is no credible evidence to suggest that the government of China has taken these steps, and the international community’s response remains insufficient. Since 2022:

- Uyghur forced labour has continued and, according to independent researchers, has shifted in form. [Research from 2023](#) indicates that a large number of internment camps have been repurposed or closed, whilst simultaneously labour transfer programmes both inside and outside the Uyghur Region have intensified and now function as the primary mechanism of forced labour. Labour transfers continue to reach record levels, reaching [3.05 million](#) by the third quarter of 2023, measured in “person-times,” exceeding the total of 3.03 million in 2022 and surpassing the government’s annual target by 10%. According to testimony published in April 2026, transfers increased again to a record [3.4 million](#) by 2025.
- China’s own [15th Five-Year Plan](#) (2026-2030) for the Uyghur Region commits to continuing and expanding the state’s system of coercive labour allocation for Uyghurs, alongside a data-driven system that tracks and classifies the workforce to enforce continued participation. As these systems change and become harder to detect and verify, they continue to serve the same broader objective of systemic persecution.
- China’s State Council Decrees [No. 834](#) and [No. 835](#), issued in March and April 2026, took effect without a transition period. The decrees restrict supply-chain investigations conducted inside China without prior state approval and authorise countermeasures against foreign actors implementing measures the government of China considers discriminatory, including forced-labour import bans. Decree No. 835 has already been invoked against a European Commission investigation under the EU Foreign Subsidies Regulation.
- In April 2026, former police officer [Zhang Yabo](#), who served in the Uyghur Region from 2014 to 2023, gave testimony describing labour transfers to cotton fields under armed escort, workers’ identity documents confiscated to prevent escape, and a 2023 campaign of arbitrary detention used to compel continued participation.
- In November 2025, the Uyghur Region’s legislature passed a regional [state-secrets law](#), which took effect in March 2026. This law imposed sweeping powers, including movement restrictions on former government officials who had access to classified information, in an effort to prevent information leaving the Uyghur Region that could implicate the government in the repressive policies.
- The labour transfer system’s shift from periodic mobilisation campaigns toward an [institutionalised](#) model of monitoring and retention, uses an “Unemployment Monitoring and Early Warning System” to track hundreds of thousands of households and prevent those already transferred into work from leaving it, reducing the public evidence trail as coercion continues.

Indeed, state-imposed forced labour in the Uyghur Region must be understood as a means to control and assimilate Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples. The practice of forced labour enables the government to carry out its persecution and discriminatory policies against the Uyghur people, including through mass imprisonment, forced separation of families, and invasive surveillance — patterns also documented in the 2022 assessment report’s findings.

UN human rights mechanisms examining the government of China since 2022 have consistently reinforced such findings on forced labour and other abuses. In July 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery [reported](#) that “some instances of forced labour against Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim majority peoples may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity.” In March 2023, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights [urged](#) China to implement the ILO’s forced labour conventions and to give independent auditors the legal grounds and resources to investigate violations. In May 2023, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women [called on](#) China to prohibit coercive employment measures including forced labour of Uyghur women.

In January 2026, a group of UN experts [stated](#) they remained alarmed by continuing reports of forced labour affecting Uyghur, Tibetan, and other minorities across China, and that “the coercive elements of forced labour schemes are so severe that they may amount to forcible transfer and/or enslavement as a crime against humanity,” and urged investors and businesses to conduct human rights due diligence in line with the UN Guiding Principles. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has raised concerns regarding forced labour in the Uyghur Region since 2021 — most recently in [February 2026](#), finding that “the imposition of compulsory labour appears to specifically target ethnic and religious minorities” in the Region.

We note that in his [February 2026 update](#) to the Human Rights Council, the High Commissioner expressed “regret at the lack of follow-up by the authorities on previous recommendations and on accountability to protect the rights of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, and of Tibetans in their regions,” explicitly including labour issues. Given this acknowledged gap between recommendation and implementation, we consider it essential that the OHCHR takes concrete steps to track and publicise progress going forward.

We call on the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to publish a detailed public assessment of the extent to which the 2022 OHCHR recommendations have been implemented. Additionally, we urge UN member states to press the government of China to swiftly bring about the end of state-imposed and systematic forced labour in line with its obligations under international law, including ILO Conventions No. 29 and 105, which it ratified in 2022, and end state-imposed forced labour and other egregious human rights abuses.

Further, all companies must urgently trace their entire supply chains, eliminate any exposure to Uyghur forced labour, and end all business relationships with suppliers operating in the Uyghur Region or participating in state-imposed labour transfer programmes elsewhere in China, in line with the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region’s [Call to Action](#).

Signed:

Anti-Slavery International
Campaign for Uyghurs
Center for Uyghur Studies

Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region
Corporate Accountability Lab
Free Uyghur Now
Global Labor Justice
Global Rights Compliance
Human Rights Foundation
Justice For All
Network for Uyghur Rights
Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders
Stop Uyghur Genocide
The Human Trafficking Legal Center
Uyghur Academy
Uyghur Rights Monitor
Uyghur Youth Initiative
Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation
World Uyghur Congress