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UN report on the Uighurs, a piece on the geopolitical chessboard?



Sources: By Wereld Morgen [Photo: Uyghurs at a Sunday market in Kashgar, Xinjiang City (Wikimedia Commons)]

Translated from Dutch for Rebellion by Sven Magnus

The long-awaited report on the Uighurs has come to light. It is blunt with China, but contradicts the massive reproaches that have circulated in the West. The report has been the subject of much dispute and threatens to become a weapon in the great geopolitical game between the West and China.

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Context

It has been long overdue, but [the report of the](#) Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the Uighurs has finally been published. The Uighurs are a Muslim population group from Xinjiang, a province in western China.

There is a lot of controversy about this population group. In particular, Western countries accuse China of "cultural genocide", while countries of the South [\[1\]](#), among which are several major Muslim countries, have a completely different opinion. For example, at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit held in Pakistan in March 2022, China was [invited in honor](#).

A lot of [fake news](#) about the Uighurs has also spread around the world. We shouldn't be surprised. China is increasingly being criticized from the West. The [use of human rights](#) on demand is a proven means of cornering countries and winning over their own public opinion.

The report itself has been the subject of much debate. It took three years to get permission to publish it. There was a lot of pressure from both Western governments and Beijing over the content and date of publication. In this context of disputes and struggle for influence neutrality is a relative concept.

The report starts from the fact that the Chinese view towards the Uighurs that has been criticized comes against a backdrop of "violent riots and incidents that the Chinese government regards as terrorist acts." In 2009 [racist riots](#) led to 197 deaths, mostly Han Chinese.

This was followed by some [300 terrorist attacks](#) that caused dozens of deaths. During the civil war in Syria [thousands of Uighur Muslim extremists](#) acted there and sooner or later they would return to their homeland. According to the well-known US magazine *Foreign Policy*, it was becoming increasingly clear that China had become a new target of jihad.

In response to these serious terrorist attacks, Beijing has adopted a strong counter-terrorism policy.

The OHCHR published simultaneously with this report another 121-page [report on China](#) in which it is stated that the state's fight against terrorism in the region is "necessary and just", takes place within the "rule of law" and "guarantees human rights". However, the OHCHR considers that the Chinese anti-terrorist approach is "very problematic" in terms of respect for human rights.

The report

The UN report is based, on the one hand, on 40 in-depth interviews with witnesses and, on the other, on a series of official Chinese documents^[2] which, according to the report, are "most likely authentic". In both cases, however, it is unclear whether these are individual cases or a pattern of Chinese government behavior. In any case, every individual has the right to have his or her human rights respected.

OHCHR often fails to provide reliable evidence of the numerous allegations in its report. In addition to individual testimonies, the UN body draws conclusions or estimates based on certain indicators. That is why the report often speaks in conditional mode.

For example, it says that "The extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention ... *may* constitute international crimes, in particular crimes against humanity" (emphasis added).

We summarize the main conclusions of the report:

The main accusation concerns the so-called 'Vocational Education and Training Centres'. A large group of Uighurs were temporarily deprived of their liberty and forced to attend classes in these centers. That was the case, at least, between 2017 and 2019.

Although done in accordance with Chinese law, the deprivation of liberty was, according to the OHCHR, "arbitrary" because the criteria were too vague or too strict. Thus, many people ended up in the centers for "extremism", an arbitrary accusation according to the OHCHR.

According to the OHCHR, there is credible evidence that several Uighurs were subjected to "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" as well as "sexual and gender-based violence" in these centres.

It is estimated that there are between "tens of thousands and more than a million" of people affected. The report cannot give more precise figures because the calculation was made, among other things, from a report by a local party secretary and satellite images of "walled buildings" which, however, are not necessarily such centres [\[3\]](#).

In addition, according to the UN Commission, Uighurs were subjected to mandatory family planning. The report also mentions the destruction of religious buildings, especially in the years 2017 and 2018. The Chinese government contradicts this and says that these are renovations.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights is blunt with China, but contradicts the massive accusations that have circulated in the West. The report does not mention any "cultural genocide" or "concentration camps" or "large-scale forced labour".

China, for its part, strongly opposes the conclusions of the UN report, which it says "ignores the human rights gains made in Xinjiang," such as the complete eradication of poverty by the end of 2020.

It also ignores, according to Beijing, "the damage caused by terrorism and extremism to the human rights of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang." There have been no terrorist attacks since the end of 2016. Beijing also admits to convicting 13,000 people [of terrorism](#) and 30,000 of illegal activities during that period.

Reactions and comments

Readers critical of the report primarily question the dimensions of the allegations and their possible consequences. If human rights violations were so serious and on such a large scale, why didn't this problem cause a wave of Uighur refugees?

Although OHCHR recommendations are moderate, this report will be used to intensify the economic war against China and to tighten [military pressure](#) on the country.

In addition, there is a lot of buzz in the West over the Uighur issue, which contrasts sharply with the attitude toward neighboring India. Since the end of 2019, [camps have been set up](#) in the north of the country to deport hundreds of thousands of so-called "illegal immigrants".

Muslims are increasingly the [target of persecution](#). An attack in March 2020 killed 45 people. In 2021 a rally was held in the northern state of Uttarakhand in which speakers called for [genocide](#) against Muslims and other minorities in the name of protecting Hinduism.

The [Muslim-majority province of Kashmir](#) is occupied by more than half a million Indian soldiers. In 2020, all telephone and internet connections were cut off for months. 7,000 prominent politicians, businessmen and other prominent citizens have been arrested without charge. All gatherings were prohibited.

Why is there such a deafening silence about all this on the part of our politicians or in the mainstream media? Why is one allowed to do anything, while the other is judged and treated very harshly? Apparently, human rights are used as a weapon in the great geopolitical game.

In a speech delivered in 2018, a former chief of staff of the US State Department already indicated how the Uyghur question was opposed [to destabilize China](#) from within. A human rights campaign is an important part of such a strategy.

Notes:

[1] At the [UN Commission on Human Rights](#) held in October 2021, 43 UN member states called on China to immediately allow independent observers to enter, while 62 other UN member states, mainly countries from the South, said there was "disinformation".

[2] These are the China Cables, the Xinjiang Documents, the Karakax List, the Urumqi Police database, and the Xinjiang Police Archives.

[3] This is a report by a local party secretary who states that in a certain town 30% of the population had to be re-educated. Based on this, the report estimates that there are

anywhere from tens of thousands to more than a million. "On the basis of the information currently available to OHCHR, it cannot confirm estimates of the total number of people affected by the CEPV system." (CEPV stands for Vocational and Vocational Education Centres).

Source: <https://www.dewereldmorgen.be/artikel/2022/09/04/vn-commissariaat-veroordeelt-china-voor-schending-van-de-rechten-van-de-oeigoeren/>

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