

## China: Families of Xinjiang detainees speak out as they await long-overdue UN report

- *Almost 50 new detainees added to Amnesty International campaign on arbitrary detention, bringing total to 120*
- *Family members describe injustice and horror of prolonged separation*
- *UN High Commissioner yet to release report on situation despite recent Xinjiang visit*

Amnesty International today published heartbreaking new testimony from relatives of 48 ethnic Uyghur and Kazakh people detained in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, as it reiterated its call for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to take action.

The outgoing High Commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, has yet to release a long-awaited report on serious human rights violations in Xinjiang, and has repeatedly failed to recognize the gravity of violations by Chinese authorities in the region. It is deeply disappointing that due to this delay, yet another UN Human Rights Council session will close this week without having been able to discuss the UN's findings on Xinjiang.

The new testimony gathered by Amnesty International is part of its [Free Xinjiang Detainees](#) campaign, which now tells the stories of 120 individuals who have been swept up in China's vast system of prisons and internment camps in Xinjiang.

"The accounts of these families offer a window into the horrors taking place in Xinjiang, which amount to crimes against humanity. Many people said they have several family members in detention, illustrating the industrial scale of the abuses – one man said 40 of his relatives had been detained," said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.

"The foot-dragging which has characterized the UN response to the dystopian nightmare in Xinjiang adds insult to injury for victims and survivors of China's campaign of mass imprisonment, torture and persecution against predominantly Muslim minorities in Xinjiang since 2017. We continue to call on the Chinese government to dismantle its vast system of internment camps; end all arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances and ill-treatment whether in prisons or other locations; and end its horrific persecution of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other minorities in Xinjiang.

"Chinese authorities must be held accountable, and a crucial step is for High Commissioner Bachelet to publish her long-delayed report that should be presented urgently at the UN Human Rights Council. Her ongoing failure to call out crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations in Xinjiang is an obstacle to justice. It also puts the UN system to shame."

### Families torn apart

Amnesty International recently carried out in-person interviews in Turkey with exiled relatives of 48 detainees. They described how their loved ones had been arrested for "terrorism"-related or other spurious charges, apparently for things as mundane as traveling or paying for their children's education abroad. Others appear to have been arrested solely on the basis of their religion or ethnicity.

Gulaisha Oralbay, a Kazakh woman, described what happened to her brother, Dilshat Oralbay, a retired Uyghur journalist and translator, after the Chinese authorities coaxed him into returning to Xinjiang from Kazakhstan in 2017. His passport was confiscated

immediately upon his return, and he was arrested several months later.

“There is no court, they just put him in jail, [and told him it would be] for 25 years,” Gulaisha said.

“I don’t even think [he] himself knows the reason. Somebody said [it was] because he travelled to Kazakhstan, and different excuses; there is no clear justification and reason.”

Gulaisha and Dilshat’s two sisters, Bakytgul and Bagila Oralbay, are also in detention.

Abdullah Rasul told Amnesty International how his brother Parhat Rasul, a Uyghur farmer and part-time butcher, was detained and taken to an internment camp in May 2017. The family have not heard from him directly since then, but in 2018 a reliable source told them Parhat had been sentenced to nine years in prison.

Parhat’s family believes that he was arrested simply because he is an observant Muslim and was doing charity work. Family members said Parhat’s wife Kalbinur and his mother-in-law Parizat Abdugul were also imprisoned. Parhat and Kalbinur have two daughters, aged 14 and 16, and a son aged 11.

“They [the Chinese government] want to erase our identity, erase our culture, erase our religion,” Abdullah Rasul said. “I hope everyone can see clearly what is happening in our homeland.”

Medine Nazimi described how she last heard the voice of her sister, Mevlüde Hilal, at the end of 2016. Mevlüde had been studying in Turkey but, after she returned to Xinjiang to help her ailing mother, she was sent to an internment camp in 2017 and later allegedly sentenced to 10 years in prison on a charge of “separatism”. She is married and has a young daughter.

“When they took my sister, my niece, Aisha, was only one year old,” Medine told Amnesty International. “We were just going about our daily lives, and we were a happy family. My sister was taken for only one reason: it’s because she’s a Uyghur.”

People who speak out about the situation do so at great risk; several family members of detainees described being threatened by the authorities for going public.

Abudurehman Tothi, a Uyghur businessman and activist living in Turkey was interviewed by international media about his wife and mother’s imprisonment and father’s arbitrary detention. He told Amnesty International that afterwards the Chinese consulate in Turkey contacted him and threatened him with detention or death in a “car crash”.

## **Mountain of evidence**

Since 2017, there has been extensive documentation of China’s crackdown against Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, carried out under the guise of fighting “terrorism”. In 2021, a comprehensive [report](#) by Amnesty International demonstrated that the systematic state-organized mass imprisonment, torture and persecution perpetrated by Chinese authorities were crimes against humanity.

Chinese authorities have used their repressive surveillance state to try to sweep these violations under the carpet, but information continues to seep out of Xinjiang. In May 2022, several international media outlets published a joint investigation, [the Xinjiang Police Files](#), which included a cache of leaked speeches, images, documents and spreadsheets obtained from Chinese internal police networks.

“Despite a growing body of evidence, Chinese authorities are still lying to the world about arbitrary detention on a massive scale in Xinjiang,” said Agnès Callamard.

“Amnesty International supports [the joint call by dozens of UN experts](#) to establish an independent, impartial and international mechanism. Such a mechanism must investigate crimes against humanity and other serious human rights violations committed by the Chinese government in Xinjiang. The many thousands of people still arbitrarily detained, and their families, deserve truth, justice and accountability.”

Bachelet should as a matter of urgency address the demands of the detainees’ families and indicate whether her office has been able to take any steps towards facilitating information on those detained.

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

The UN Human Rights Council’s 50<sup>th</sup> session is ongoing and will end on 8 July. It will be the last with Michelle Bachelet as High Commissioner; her mandate ends on 31 August 2022 and she has [announced she will not seek a second term](#).

At the end of May, in a press conference following her long-awaited trip to China – including a brief visit to Xinjiang, Bachelet failed to acknowledge serious human rights violations in China. [Her statement at the end of her visit](#) undermined efforts to advance accountability in the region, instead giving the impression she had walked straight into a highly predictable propaganda exercise for the Chinese government. She admitted afterwards that she could not speak to any detained Uyghurs or their families while in Xinjiang, and was accompanied by state officials at all times in the region.