



Can Anyone Hear Us?

Voices From The 2009 Unrest In Urumchi

A Report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project

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Executive Summary

“Many students were gathered in the university square shouting slogans. I was so excited to see them, especially when they called “Let Uyghurs live!” that I cried uncontrollably. I began to shout even louder through my tears. The gathered students marched towards the university main gate to go outside. We all knew what was happening outside so if they went outside there would be bloodshed.”

-from the statement of a Uyghur resident of Urumchi who witnessed students demonstrating on July 5.

On July 5, 2009, the city of Urumchi, the regional capital of East Turkestan (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), in northwest China) erupted into unprecedented unrest that resulted in the deaths of an unknown number of people. The unrest began with a peaceful demonstration of Uyghurs in the city who were protesting against a lack of government action in regard to a deadly attack on Uyghur factory workers in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. The unrest that occurred on July 5 and in subsequent days and weeks took place against a backdrop of decades of intense political, economic and social repression directed towards the Uyghur population of East Turkestan, and government efforts to criminalize the expression of Uyghurs’ religious and cultural identity.

The Chinese government has attempted to manage and control information about the unrest in Urumchi that took place on July 5 and the following days, and has also limited information about unrest that rocked the city in early September. Beginning the night after July 5, government authorities initiated the world’s longest-running Internet blackout throughout East Turkestan, which, together with the blockage of international phone calls and cell phone text messages, effectively prevented information from leaving the area. In particular, government authorities have actively sought to silence the voice of the Uyghur people since July 5. Many Uyghur journalists, bloggers and website staff have been detained since July 5, and at least one young website administrator has been sentenced to life in prison. Arbitrary detentions of Uyghur men throughout Urumchi after July 5 left entire Uyghur neighborhoods with only women and children. Family members who have sought to obtain information about their loved ones who have been detained have been turned away, and have even faced the threat of retaliation for their inquiries.

In interviews conducted by Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) staff, Uyghurs and foreigners who were in Urumchi in July and September 2009 have provided information that starkly contrasts with the government’s version of events. In particular, residents of Urumchi have described witnessing security forces’ use of deadly live fire against Uyghur demonstrators on July 5. Uyghurs interviewed by UHRP have also stated that the government rounded up witnesses to the killings of demonstrators. In December 2009, a Uyghur who reported witnessing the use of deadly force against protestors was among a group of 20 asylum seekers deported from Cambodia, where they had sought refuge, back to China.

Government officials and Chinese state media have widely reported the violence that was committed by Uyghurs against Han Chinese residents of Urumchi, but have reported little on the civilian attacks witnesses have said were committed against Uyghurs in July or September. Government accounts of the unrest in Urumchi in July and September have consistently demonized Uyghurs as violent criminals and terrorists, and Urumchi residents told UHRP that government propaganda fanned public hatred against Uyghurs and deepened ethnic discord in the city.

The Chinese government has ignored requests from international organizations for an independent, comprehensive investigation into the events of July and September 2009. Uyghur accounts of the events in Urumchi during this time have been provided to UHRP primarily from Uyghurs who have been able to leave China and seek relative safety in Western countries. However, a fear of persecution against Uyghurs for speaking out about Chinese government repression, even outside of China, has been a factor that has constrained the scope of UHRP's ability to collect primary data. Due to fear for the lives and safety of their friends and family members remaining in East Turkestan, identifying details of those brave enough to speak to UHRP have been removed.

Methodology

The information for this report was gathered in a number of interviews conducted in Uyghur, Mandarin and English. UHRP researchers spoke to Uyghur and non-Uyghur eyewitnesses to events in East Turkestan, as well as to renowned experts in the Uyghur studies and human rights fields. Interview subjects were selected at random through existing networks and through a willingness to speak.

Finding eyewitnesses prepared to relate accounts of the Urumchi unrest did not prove an easy task. The long reach of Chinese government repression in East Turkestan extends beyond the region to Uyghur exiles, even those in democratic nations. For this reason, UHRP offered complete anonymity to interviewees. In order to protect interview subjects, UHRP changed identifying details.

Most Uyghur interviewees were also asked questions about the future of the Uyghur people in East Turkestan. All of them strongly expressed a pessimistic view of Uyghur economic opportunities, even if they spoke fluent Mandarin, and a gloomy outlook for Han-Uyghur relations, with distrust and tension between the two communities at an all time high. Many of the Uyghur interviewees who expressed such opinions believed that the Chinese government was largely responsible for mismanaging inter-ethnic relations.

Background

Prior to the Urumchi unrest in July 2009, the Chinese government made many claims regarding the status of human rights in East Turkestan. In a number of white papers, articles in the Chinese state media and comments by Chinese officials, the Chinese government claimed unequivocal improvements in East Turkestan's economic, social, cultural and political conditions.¹ In making these assessments, the Chinese state noticeably omitted and sought to silence the voice of the Uyghur people. Without the participation of the Uyghur people in such assessments little value can be attached to the pronouncements of Chinese government officials. While the right to participation is a fundamental human right that the Chinese government concedes in its domestic and international obligations, it has been seldom granted to the Uyghur people.

In order to gauge more accurately the status of human rights in East Turkestan prior to July 2009, the following review of non-Chinese government sources uses the words of the Uyghur people themselves. These rare accounts, when the Uyghur voice has emerged from the repressive curbs on free speech in East Turkestan, are taken from interviews given to UHRP, the reports of concerned governments in democratic nations and from the reports of non-governmental human rights organizations.

International and domestic obligations

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is subject to the articles of a number of international human rights instruments. The PRC is a signatory to the United Nations (UN) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)², which was ratified by the National People's Congress on March 27, 2001. Furthermore, the PRC is one of only eight nations who have signed but not ratified the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).³

As a member of the UN General Assembly and a signatory to the UN Charter, the PRC also has an obligation to respect the articles of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).⁴ In Articles 19 and 21, the UDHR contains clear provisions that protect the right of individuals to freely participate in public decision-making processes. In

¹ See in general: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2009, September 21). White Paper on Development and Progress in Xinjiang. *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/ethnic/2009-09/21/content_8717461.htm and Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2003). *History and Development of Xinjiang*. Beijing. Retrieved from: <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20030526/index.htm>

² United Nations. *International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights*. Retrieved from http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-3&chapter=4&lang=en

³ United Nations. *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Retrieved from http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-4&chapter=4&lang=en

⁴ United Nations. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

addition, the PRC signed the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)⁵ on December 12, 1986.

Two key domestic instruments, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China⁶ and the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law (REAL)⁷, contain provisions that specifically protect the political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights of the Uyghur people in East Turkestan. Despite the PRC's acknowledgement of the rights contained in international human rights instruments and the promulgation of domestic legal instruments, Uyghur sources relate a clear deterioration in economic, social and cultural rights under the Chinese Communists. The following sections detail areas of concern prior to July 2009.

Language and religion

In a monograph titled *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*, Arienne Dwyer states "language and religion are valued by most ordinary Uyghurs as central aspects of their identity."⁸ Chinese officials often portray the Uyghur language and the Uyghur belief in Islam as impediments to the "development" of the Uyghur people.⁹ This attitude has guided the implementation of laws protecting Uyghur identity. While an official policy of tolerance has been the public face on the issues of Uyghur language and religion, the Chinese government has pursued policies aimed at undermining these tenets of Uyghur cultural identity.

Since 2002, the Chinese government has with rising intensity implemented a "bilingual" language policy in East Turkestan's schools and universities that has virtually succeeded in eliminating Uyghur as a language of instruction. The policy enforces a monolingual curriculum in Mandarin Chinese. In an interview conducted by UHRP a Uyghur teacher describes the actual practice and effects of "bilingual" education.

"In class the students must speak in Chinese, then when they go home, they must speak in Uyghur. This gives them a lot of stress. Also, their parents cannot help them with their homework. This gives the children more and more stress. In the end, this disturbs their mental development and their educational development.

⁵ United Nations. *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*. Retrieved from <http://untreaty.un.org/cod/avl/ha/catcidtp/catcidtp.html>

⁶ Government of the People's Republic of China. *Constitution*. Retrieved from http://www.gov.cn/english/2005-08/05/content_20813.htm

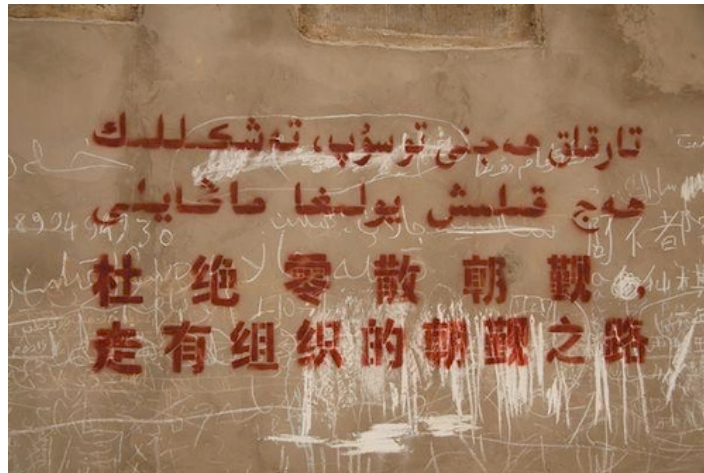
⁷ Congressional-Executive Commission on China. (2008, October 31). The People's Republic of China Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law (Chinese and English Text). Retrieved from <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingl=9507&PHPSESSID=a40d5ac79e7d99bf9ca666fa308019c8>

⁸ Dwyer, A.M. (2005). *The Xinjiang Conflict: Uyghur Identity, Language Policy, and Political Discourse*. *East-West Center Washington Policy Studies*, 15, 63. <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/PS015.pdf>

⁹ Bequelin, N. (2004). Criminalizing Ethnicity: Political Repression in Xinjiang. *China Rights Forum*, 1, 7.

After a while the stress of speaking Uyghur at home and then speaking Chinese at school means that the student loses interest in studying.”¹⁰

The practices of the “bilingual” policy contravene Article 37 of the REAL, “[s]chools (classes) and other educational institutions whose students are predominantly from ethnic minority families should, if possible, use textbooks printed in their own languages, and lessons should be taught in those languages.”



A sign warns Uyghurs not to undertake unauthorized religious pilgrimages.

A similar divergence between official policy and actual practice also exists in regard to the freedom of religion. While Article 11 of the REAL states that “agencies in ethnic autonomous areas guarantee the freedom of religious belief to citizens of the various nationalities”, Uyghurs relate that the law in practice in East Turkestan differs considerably.

“In my home village [in Aktush prefecture], the militia regularly comes to check villagers. They come during the night, searching house by house, and if they find religious material they take you for questioning. They say it’s ‘illegal religious publications.’ My father is a simple farmer, what does he know if his Koran is illegal or not?”¹¹

“...neither at home nor at work are you supposed to talk to the children about religion. You just talk about it and it is illegal. Even with my own son, I am not supposed to tell him about Islam. How can this be possible?”¹²

¹⁰ Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2007). *Uyghur Language Under Attack: The Myth of “Bilingual” Education in the People’s Republic of China*. Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://uhrp.org/docs/UyghurLanguageUnderAttack.pdf>

¹¹ Human Rights Watch. (2005). *Devastating Blows*. Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://hrichina.org/public/PDFs/Reports/HRIC-HRW-Xinjiang.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

Kashgar Old City Demolition

In early 2009, Chinese authorities announced the imminent demolition of the Old City of Kashgar, a cradle of Uyghur culture in the southwest of East Turkestan. The aim of the “resident’s resettlement project” is to bulldoze nearly five square kilometers of traditional Uyghur housing in the next five years. As Old City residents testify, Uyghurs were left out of the decision-making processes behind the demolition, and their comments convey a sense of helplessness and despair.

“They don’t tell us anything... We don’t understand why they do that. Whatever it is, I don’t believe a word of what they say.”¹³

“Everyone is unhappy about it, but government is government. We can’t do anything.”¹⁴



A demolition site in Kashgar's Old City. ©Anonymous

In justifying the demolition, the Chinese government claimed that the Uyghur homes in the Old City were not able to withstand earthquakes; nevertheless, residents report not only skepticism over this reasoning because their homes have withstood earthquakes for centuries, but also a loss in the standard of living, indebtedness to the Chinese government where none previously existed and regimented living arrangements.

“My family built the house 500 years ago...It has always been improved over the years, but the layout of the rooms has not changed.”¹⁵

¹³ The Times. (2009, June 18). Cited in Society for Threatened Peoples. (2009). *Save Kashgar's Old Town!* (Human Rights Report Nr. 60 of the Society for Threatened Peoples). Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://www.docs.uyghuramerican.org/KashgarEnglisch.pdf>

¹⁴ Washington Post (2009, March 24). Cited in Society for Threatened Peoples. (2009). *Save Kashgar's Old Town!* (Human Rights Report Nr. 60 of the Society for Threatened Peoples). Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://www.docs.uyghuramerican.org/KashgarEnglisch.pdf>

“The house belongs to us...In a house like this many generations can live one after the other. But if we move into a flat the building will be pulled down every 50 to 70 years... – that is the biggest problem in our lives. How can our children inherit a flat?”¹⁶

“If we live in flats built by the government we shall no longer have any gardens or sunlight. This is our land. We didn’t buy it from the government.”¹⁷

“The important thing is that they were born here and grew up here. In a block of flats there is no feeling of togetherness; people lose the contact with each other. The doors in the Old Town are always open and everyone knows everyone else. I just don’t want to leave.”¹⁸

Economic rights and forcible transfer

“I have clearly seen that development benefits only the Chinese. Development is to attract those people. Jobs are being created for them not for us. There are a very, very limited number of Uyghurs getting jobs. Uyghurs are forced to sell their land cheaply to immigrants. The difference between poor and rich is getting very high. Uyghurs are losing fast.”¹⁹

One of the problems facing Uyghurs in East Turkestan that is most illustrative of the difference between law on paper and in practice is that of ethnic and gender discrimination in hiring practices. REAL encourages the hiring of Uyghurs.²⁰ Despite this guarantee in Chinese law to forbid discrimination based on ethnicity and to promote the hiring of ethnic minorities, systematic discrimination against Uyghurs and women remains widespread in the recruitment process for state jobs in East Turkestan. Hiring notices posted on the Internet for civil service and university jobs in East Turkestan reveal blatant discrimination against Uyghurs and other non-Han ethnic groups, as well as against women of any ethnicity.²¹

¹⁵ The New York Times. (2009, May 28). Cited in Society for Threatened Peoples. (2009). *Save Kashgar’s Old Town!* (Human Rights Report Nr. 60 of the Society for Threatened Peoples). Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://www.docs.uyghuramerican.org/KashgarEnglisch.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Washington Post (2009, March 24). Cited in Society for Threatened Peoples. (2009). *Save Kashgar’s Old Town!* (Human Rights Report Nr. 60 of the Society for Threatened Peoples). Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://www.docs.uyghuramerican.org/KashgarEnglisch.pdf>

¹⁸ The National (2009, May 3). Cited in Society for Threatened Peoples. (2009). *Save Kashgar’s Old Town!* (Human Rights Report Nr. 60 of the Society for Threatened Peoples). Retrieved June 8, 2009, from <http://www.docs.uyghuramerican.org/KashgarEnglisch.pdf>

¹⁹ The quote is taken from an e-mail sent to the authors. The sender of the e-mail wishes to remain anonymous.

²⁰ See Article 22.

²¹ Uyghur Human Rights Project (2009, June 25). *Uyghurs, women need not apply for government jobs in East Turkestan*. Retrieved from <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/2339/1/Uyghurs-womenneednot-apply-for-government-jobs-in-East-Turkestan/index.html> and Congressional-Executive Commission on China. (2009,



“Help Wanted” sign outside the Postal Hotel (邮政宾馆) in Kashgar, photo taken in July 2009. The last line says, “This offer is for Han Chinese (汉族) only, ages 18-30.” ©The Atlantic

While the Chinese government encourages a mass in migration of Han Chinese settlers to East Turkestan on the premise that ample employment opportunities are available in the region, young Uyghur women are being forcibly transferred to eastern provinces of China to work in factories. In a 2008 report *Deception, Pressure, and Threats: The Transfer of Young Uyghur Women to Eastern China*²², UHRP gave voice to the distress experienced by the young women forced to leave their homes.

“I did not want to come. My parents also did not agree, but government officials forced my parents.”²³

“We call this place a prison. I think that there is no difference between here and a prison”.²⁴

July 2). *Recruitment for State Jobs in Xinjiang Discriminates Against Ethnic Minorities*. Retrieved from <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingl=122703>.

²² Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2008). *Deception, Pressure, and Threats: The Transfer of Young Uyghur Women to Eastern China*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/Transfer_uyghur_woman.pdf

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

“We worked over ten hours every day, and most days we had to work extra. Usually we got off work at 5:00, and then at 6:00 we went back to work again for another shift and worked until 2 or 3 in the morning.”²⁵

Torture

There are many specific examples of the use of torture in East Turkestan. For example, in mid-2006, Tudahun Hoshur, a 31-year old trader from Ghulja City, was suspended from a ceiling by his hands, beaten, and denied food for three days for failing to memorize all 45 articles of the detention center’s regulations in Chinese. Ismail Samed, who was executed on February 8, 2007 for allegedly attempting to “split the motherland,” was convicted on the basis of confessions that were likely extracted from two other Uyghur prisoners through torture. Samed told his wife just before his execution that his confession was coerced through torture.²⁶

Both Amnesty International and the UN have detailed the pervasive nature of torture in East Turkestan;²⁷ however, the account of Shirali, a Uyghur executed by Chinese authorities in 2003, gave a comprehensive first hand description of torture in East Turkestan to Radio Free Asia (RFA).²⁸

“One executioner [in his account, Shirali refers to his torturers as ‘executioners’] winked at the other, who then came over and pressed down the switch of the chair. As if someone was pouring me with boiling water and peeling off my skin, my entire body was in a harsh pain. I was tortured this way for about three minutes...After a short while, that executioner turned off the chair switch. He came to me and said to me using the interpreter, ‘Just like what we said, you will not get out of here alive. So you must confess.’”²⁹

“They tied my hands and hung me up high. Then they beat me for about half an hour with shackles. I screamed loudly because I could not stand the pain. During this time my body was covered with blood. [Then] they took me down and poured a bucket of water over me”.³⁰

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Uyghur Human Rights Project (2006, June 5). *Details Emerge of Uyghur Political Detainee Suffering Torture, Abuse*. Retrieved from <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/163/1/Details-emerge-of-Uyghur-political-detainee-suffering-torture-abuse/Details-emerge-of-Uyghur-political-detainee-suffering-torture-abuse.html> and Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2007, February 9). *Uyghur Prisoner Executed in Urumchi*. Retrieved from <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/360/1/Uyghur-political-prisoner-executed-in-Urumchi/index.html>

²⁷ Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2009). *The United Nations and Amnesty International on Torture in East Turkestan*. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from <http://uyghuramerican.org/docs/TURKESTAN.pdf>

²⁸ Radio Free Asia. (2003, October 23). *Executed Uyghur Refugee Left Torture Testimony Behind*. Retrieved from <https://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=5301&article=Executed+Uyghur+Refugee+Left+Torture+Testimony+Behind&t=1&c=1>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

“That heavy executioner said nothing and turned on the chair switch. As if someone was pulling out my heart and sticking a needle through my body, this time I was suffering from an unbearable burning pain. I screamed and bit my tongue... By this time I had already unconsciously had a bowel movement. My cellmates changed my clothes.”³¹

“They shouted at me and broke a couple of nails on my right foot--then they pushed nails into two of the toes on my left foot. I lost consciousness because I couldn’t stand this torture. When I opened my eyes, I saw my cellmates sitting around me. I had been unconscious for exactly seven hours.”³²

Freedom of speech and arbitrary detention

From the purges of East Turkestan nationalists in the Anti-Rightist Campaign of the late fifties to the present day detentions of Uyghur writers and intellectuals, Uyghur freedom of speech has long been suppressed by the Chinese Communists.

Chinese Public Security agents arrested Nurmemet Yasin for publishing an article in a local literary journal in Kashgar, East Turkestan. On January 15th, 2005, RFA Uyghur Service reported that a local police officer in Kashgar confirmed that Nurmemet Yasin had been arrested three and a half months earlier “for spreading separatist ideas.”³³ Nurmemet Yasin’s crime was to publish a story entitled “Wild Pigeon”, an allegory about a pigeon that commits suicide because it is unable to escape its cage.

“Freedom of the soul, I feel, was crucial for these pitiful pigeons. Without it, life is meaningless, and yet they seem never even to have heard of the word.”³⁴

Chinese authorities have been unequivocal in suppressing Uyghur voices that speak out against the rights abuses against the Uyghur people. Abdulghani Memetemin, a journalist, was imprisoned in 2003 for providing information about repression in East Turkestan, to an overseas Uyghur group; Mehbube Ablesh, a Xinjiang People’s Radio Station journalist was arrested in 2008 for writing critically about “bilingual” education (her current whereabouts are unknown); teacher, Abdulla Jamal, was arrested in 2005 after he submitted a manuscript for publication that Chinese authorities claimed was separatist in intent.³⁵

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2009). *16 Uyghur Political Prisoners of Special Concern*. Retrieved June 12, 2009, from <http://uyghuramerican.org/docs/16.pdf>

³⁴ Radio Free Asia. (2005, June 27). *Wild Pigeon-by Nurmuhemmet Yasin. Part 1*. Retrieved from http://www.rfa.org/english/uyghur/wild_pigeon-20050627.html?searchterm=None and Radio Free Asia. (2005, June 27). *Wild Pigeon-by Nurmuhemmet Yasin*. Retrieved from http://www.rfa.org/english/uyghur/wild_pigeon2-20050627.html?searchterm=None

³⁵ Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2009). *16 Uyghur Political Prisoners of Special Concern*. Retrieved June 12, 2009, from <http://uyghuramerican.org/docs/16.pdf>



Mehbube Ablesh. ©Radio Free Asia

According to an official Chinese newspaper report, nearly 1,300 people were arrested in East Turkestan on state security crimes in 2008, marking a steep increase over previous years.³⁶ The *Procuratorial Daily* reported on January 4, 2009 that the arrests were a result of “Strike Hard” campaigns to maintain social stability in 2008, the year that Beijing hosted the Olympic Games. Of the nearly 1,300 arrests made, 1,154 were formally charged and faced trials or administrative punishment.

According to the PRC’s national statistics bureau, only 742 people were arrested on state security crimes throughout the entire PRC in 2007, and 619 of these were indicted. Under Chinese law, individuals can be prosecuted for “endangering state security” if they are believed to have engaged in subversion, “splittism”, or “illegally providing state secrets to overseas entities”.³⁷

A 37-year-old Uyghur male quoted in the book, *Under the Heel of the Dragon*, summarizes the general suspicion with which Uyghurs in China are treated by Chinese society at large:

“I’m not angry [at the Han Chinese], but I am aware. I think the situation is regrettable. I think it’s difficult for Uighur to excel in Han society that is racist towards its non-Han members. I think it’s too bad that Han government policies, including hiring practices and education policies, hold Uighur back...they [the Han Chinese] should do what needs to be done to draw the Uighur into their society, instead of angering them by suppressing them and then targeting them with political campaigns...Do you know how hard it is for Uighur to rent an apartment, much less get a job?”³⁸

³⁶ Uyghur Human Rights Project. (2009, January 6). *Massive Rise in State Security Arrests in East Turkestan in 2008*. Retrieved from <http://www.uyghuramerican.org/articles/2403/1/Massive-rise-in-state-security-arrests-in-East-Turkestan-in-2008/index.html>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kaltman, B. (2007). *Under the heel of the dragon*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

The information blackout and the detention of Uyghur journalists and bloggers

Government authorities shut down Internet access and cell phone communications region-wide in East Turkestan late at night on July 5, 2009, commencing the longest-running and most widespread shutdown in the history of the Internet,³⁹ which was not fully lifted until May 2010. Overseas telephone calls and the transmission of cell phone text messages were also blocked after July 5.

The post-July 5 communications blackout enforced by the Chinese government, together with a pervasive climate of fear, made it tremendously difficult for exiled Uyghurs to learn information about their families and friends or even make contact with them. Uyghurs' fears were heightened due to harsh government criticism of those living in East Turkestan who maintained contacts with relatives overseas after July 5. These factors made it challenging for UHRP researchers to locate Uyghurs willing to be interviewed for this report, and also hampered UHRP's information-gathering process. Almost all Uyghurs who spoke with UHRP researchers expressed fear that they or their family members living in East Turkestan could be at great risk if Chinese authorities discovered that they had spoken with UHRP about July 5 and human rights abuses against Uyghurs.

Uyghurs detained for speaking out online

The government's treatment of Uyghurs who dared to speak out about human rights violations after July 5 may best be exemplified by the case of Haji Memet and Abdusalam Nasir, who told RFA that Memet's relative Shohret Tursun had been beaten to death in detention in September 2009.⁴⁰ Memet and Nasir were taken into detention on September 23, 2009 on charges of "leaking state secrets", and their current situation is unknown.

Prior to July 5, although Uyghur-run websites were subject to surveillance and targeted by censors, the Internet had, to a small degree, provided Uyghurs in East Turkestan with a forum that they lacked in other forms of public discourse- an online *meshrep*.⁴¹ However, the harsh post-July 5 crackdown on Uyghurs' online freedom of expression demonstrated that Uyghurs lack even a virtual space to express their beliefs, their

³⁹ 6 Months Without Internet in China Considered World's Largest, Longest Blackout. (2010, Jan. 19). *Associated Press*. Retrieved from <http://cnsnews.com/news/article/60068>.

⁴⁰ Amnesty International. (2009, Sept. 24). *China: Two Uighur men at risk of torture*. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA17/053/2009/en>.

⁴¹ *Meshrep* are traditional Uyghur social meetings for discussing and resolving community affairs. The Chinese government has tightly restricted *meshrep*, reportedly because of their success in mobilizing young people amid concerns of Uyghur nationalism and 'separatism'. Prior to the July 2009 unrest, Uyghurs were also at risk of detention for posting articles online deemed sensitive by Chinese authorities. The case of young Uyghur journalist Mehbube Ableshe exemplifies the pattern of egregious violations of Uyghurs' freedom of expression (see: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/radio-09082008141404.html>). The 29-year-old Ableshe, who worked for the Xinjiang People's Radio Station in Urumchi, was dismissed from her post in August 2008 and arrested after posting articles critical of the government online. No details regarding her whereabouts or any charges against her have been made public.

creativity and their unique identity. Thousands of Uyghurs were arbitrarily detained and “forcibly disappeared” in the days, weeks and months after July 5, and among these were the owners and staff of many Uyghur websites accused by the government of having promoted “separatism” or “splittism”.

One of the many Uyghurs punished by Chinese authorities for voicing opinions online after July 5 is Gulmire Imin, a 32-year-old woman who was invited to become an administrator for the website “Salkin” after having published a number of poems on various Uyghur websites.⁴² Gulmire was arrested on July 14, 2009, but her family did not receive any official documents regarding her detention. On April 1, 2010, she was sentenced to life in prison for the crimes of “revealing state secrets”, illegally organizing a demonstration, and “splittism”. Gulmire was sentenced on the same day as being tried in a closed trial.

Prior to her sentencing, Gulmire was forced to make false statements on state television about her actions and the actions of her husband, who was living in Norway. Her remarks were included in a CCTV 4 program regarding the July 5 unrest.



Screen shot of video showing Gulmire Imin speaking on CCTV prior to her sentencing.



Undated family photo of Gulmire Imin.

⁴² UHRP interview with Gulmire’s husband Bahtiyar, 2010.

The founder of the website Salkin, who goes by the name Nureli, was also detained after July 5 and remains in detention, as do the following website staff and bloggers: Memet Turghun Abdulla, a photographer who published an article online about attacks against Uyghurs that took place in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province, on June 26, 2009;⁴³ Gheyret Niyaz, a journalist and editor of the “Uighur Online” website who was detained after talking to foreign media about the July 5 unrest;⁴⁴ Dilshat Parhat, who co-founded the Uyghur-run website Diyarim;⁴⁵ Obulkasim, an employee of Diyarim; and website supervisor Muhemmet.⁴⁶ No reports have been made public regarding any charges filed against these individuals, and it is unclear where they are being held.

Three volunteer website supervisors – Muztagh, Lukchek, and Yanchukchi – were reportedly also detained after July 5, together with two women – Heyrinsa and Halnur – who were students at the Xinjiang Art Institute. It is unclear whether or not these individuals remain in detention.⁴⁷



Ilham Tohti in Beijing, December 2009. ©Associated Press

Uyghur Online editor Ilham Tohti, an economist and associate university professor well-known for voicing criticism of government policy in East Turkestan, was repeatedly detained and harassed throughout 2009 and the first half of 2010. In April 2010, Tohti was barred from traveling to Turkey to attend an academic conference.⁴⁸

⁴³ For more information about the Shaoguan attacks, please see “UAA expresses concern over Shaoguan indictments”, <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/2953/1/UAA-expresses-concern-over-Shaoguan-indictments-/index.html>.

⁴⁴ Radio Free Asia. (2010, March 25). *Uyghur's Release Sought*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/gheyret-niyaz-03252010154625.html>.

⁴⁵ Amnesty International. (2009, October 22). *Manchester student appeals for brother's release from detention in China*. Retrieved from http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18462 and Eis, A. (2009, Oct.). Arrested by Chinese police, never charged and not heard of again. *Student Direct: Mancunian*. Retrieved from <http://www.student-direct.co.uk/2009/10/arrested-by-chinese-police-never-charged-and-not-heard-of-again/>.

⁴⁶ Radio Free Asia. (2009, December 15). *Call for Uyghurs' Release*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/uyghurrelease-12152009110742.html?searchterm=None>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Uyghur PEN member barred from travel outside China. (2010, April 21). *IFEX*. Retrieved from http://www.ifex.org/china/2010/04/21/tohti_travel_ban/.

In a radio interview in March 2009 with RFA, cited by the New York Times, Tohti had expressed worry that he could be imprisoned for his writings. “Of course I worry, but what I have said doesn’t conflict with Chinese law,” he said. “If they put me in jail, I am ready.”⁴⁹

An Internet blockade

Nationwide, the social networking sites Facebook and Twitter, as well as video sharing websites, were blocked after July 5, with state media reports charging that “Xinjiang independence activists” were “harming China’s national interests” on these sites.⁵⁰ Pictures of the unrest, including both those of peaceful demonstrations and of casualties of violence, were quickly removed from websites based in China, and news about the unrest in Urumchi was blocked to Internet users in other parts of China. Even those netizens wishing to comment on the unrest on online bulletin boards in eastern China were censored; for instance, comments on the unrest by visitors to the Shanghai-based website pchome.com were removed within several hours, with their postings replaced by the line “This posting does not exist.”⁵¹

According to a Uyghur resident of Urumchi⁵², news about the unrest that took place on July 5 was initially not broadcast on television, and local authorities relied on propaganda posters displayed throughout the city proclaiming the existence of “ethnic unity”.



Billboards on an Urumchi street stress the importance of “ethnic unity”.

⁴⁹ Wong, E. (2009, July 14). Intellectuals Call for Release of Uighur Economist. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/15/world/asia/15china.html?_r=3&scp=1&sq=ilham%20tohti&st=cse.

⁵⁰ 80 pct of netizens agree China should punish Facebook. (2009, July 10). *People’s Daily Online*. Retrieved from <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6697993.html>.

⁵¹ China tightens Web screws after Xinjiang riot. (2009, July 6). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE56513820090706>.

⁵² Interviewee P interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

Slow restoration accompanied by tighter controls

In late 2009 and throughout the first half of 2010, government authorities slowly restored the information infrastructure in East Turkestan, with each small step toward more access accompanied by a great deal of media fanfare. However, the restoration occurred at an extremely slow pace, and was accompanied by tightened controls over free speech on the Internet, in text messages, and in phone calls. Even prior to any reopening of communications, in September 2009, XUAR lawmakers banned Internet users from discussing separatism online.⁵³ Legislation entitled the “Information Promotion Bill” targeted e-mails, web postings and other forms of communication, and broadened the scope with which government authorities could prevent or punish dissenting Uyghur views.

Cell phone text messaging was restored on January 20, 2010 after being blocked since the July 2009 unrest, and after state media had trumpeted the restoration of very limited Internet access to regional Internet users in December 2009.⁵⁴ The restoration of text messaging, which at the time of restoration in January was restricted to 20 messages per user per day, came at a time of intense regional government campaigns to combat the “three forces” of terrorism, separatism and extremism and preserve “national unity”.⁵⁵

After text messaging was re-enabled, state media reported that three cell phone users in East Turkestan had been punished by public security officials for sending text messages containing “harmful information” and affecting “ethnic unity”. One cell phone user was reportedly detained after sending messages seeking to “split the country”, and another was reported to have “disturbed social security” by sending text messages about the police situation on January 20. A third cell phone user, a university student, was reportedly punished for sending “terrorist” text messages. The latter two received unspecified legal punishments. In addition, government authorities called upon Internet and cell phone users at this time to promptly report any messages containing “harmful information” to the authorities by calling 110, a hotline for informants.⁵⁶

According to accounts received by UHRP, international phone calling capabilities in East Turkestan were slowly and erratically restored in late 2009 and the first few months of 2010. A resident of Urumchi⁵⁷ told UHRP that several international call centers were

⁵³ Xinjiang bans separatist discussions on internet. (2009, Sept. 28). *AFP*. Retrieved from <http://www.news.com.au/technology/xinjiang-bans-separatist-discussions-on-internet/story-e6frfro0-1225780354033>.

⁵⁴ Bristow, M. (2010, January 18). China allows texting in Xinjiang six months after riots. *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8464881.stm>.

⁵⁵ Xinjiang governor pledges persistent crackdown on separatists. (2010, Jan. 14). *CCTV.com*. Retrieved from <http://english.cctv.com/20100114/101644.shtml>.

⁵⁶ 新疆手机用户因发“分裂言论”短信被刑事拘留 (Xinjiang cell phone customers detained for sending “splittist texts”). (2010, Jan. 27). *Tianshan.net*. Retrieved from <http://news.enorth.com.cn/system/2010/01/27/004469865.shtml> and Alice Xin Liu. (2010, Jan. 27). [Web log comment]. Xinjiang text messaging: spreading rumors and criminal detention. Retrieved from http://www.danwei.org/crime/xinjiang_text_messaging_spread.php.

⁵⁷ Interviewee E interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

open in the city in early 2010, and that Chinese citizens were required to pay twice as much as foreigners to make overseas calls, but all customers had to wait for hours to place international calls.

Access to the Internet was restored incrementally in East Turkestan from December 2009 to May 2010, with local Internet users in the first few months of 2010 restricted from sending e-mails or participating in online forums.⁵⁸

In an official media announcement on May 14, 2010, the regional government of East Turkestan said that it had restored “full Internet access”.⁵⁹ On the same day, state media reported that the government had set up a phone and e-mail hotline for Internet users to report “harmful” Internet content. This announcement followed in the wake of new Xinjiang Party chief Zhang Chunxian’s remarks that the regional government would renew its crackdown on “separatist elements” and maintain stability above all else.⁶⁰

Despite government claims that Internet users in the region were granted “full Internet access” as of May 14, East Turkestan’s netizens remained subject to the same limitations as netizens throughout China because of the “Great Firewall” put in place nationwide by the Chinese regime. Behind the “Great Firewall”, Internet users are still unable to access such sites as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube without special software. In addition, Uyghurs living in Urumchi reported that many popular Uyghur websites remained closed after May 14.⁶¹

Regional and central authorities justified the post-July 5 communications blackout by saying they were implemented to “prevent further unrest”.⁶² Even amid official calls to re-open the Internet in March 2010, regional officials called for controls over the Internet to be tightened, in order not to be “used by criminals as a tool of communication”.⁶³

A number of interviewees expressed the belief that Urumchi residents had photographs of the unrest in the city that they were unable to transmit due to the communications blackout. “There are many pictures that haven’t yet surfaced,” said one resident.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Blogger describes Xinjiang as an ‘internet prison’. (2010, Feb. 3). *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8492224.stm>.

⁵⁹ China restores internet to Xinjiang. (2010, May 14). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/14/china-restores-internet-access-xinjiang>.

⁶⁰ China’s new Xinjiang boss vows crackdown. (2010, May 9). *AFP*. Retrieved from <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hPWTJNacvophyP5S3hG-WpsqU3Qw?index=0>.

⁶¹ Radio Free Asia. (2010, May 19). *Xinjiang Online, Controls Remain*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/internet-05192010113601.html>.

⁶² Cui, J. (2010, Feb. 8). More websites back online in Urumqi. *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-02/08/content_9440855.htm.

⁶³ Cui, J. (2010, March 8). Xinjiang soon to be back online. *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010npc/2010-03/08/content_9551146.htm.

⁶⁴ Interviewee M interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

Blame placed on “overseas hostile forces”

Government authorities both in East Turkestan and Beijing responded to the unrest of July 2009 with propaganda blaming “overseas hostile forces”, “terrorists” and “splittists” for allegedly instigating the unrest. By blaming social unrest on “East Turkestan terrorist forces” supported by “hostile foreign forces”, Chinese officials circumvent the need to investigate the failures of government policies, and also shore up their argument that brute force is needed to maintain order. This pattern of official behavior has repeated itself a number of times in recent history, including during the 2008 unrest in Lhasa, Tibet. In March 2008, official Chinese media stated that the “Dalai clique” had “organized, premeditated and masterminded” riots in Lhasa.⁶⁵ Following the July 5, 2009 unrest in Urumchi, regional government officials said that violence had been “instigated and directed from abroad, and carried out by outlaws in the country”.⁶⁶ Regional chairman Nur Bekri asserted in a televised speech on July 6, 2009 that the “three forces of terrorism, separatism and extremism” had sought to create chaos in the region.⁶⁷

视频：新疆自治区主席就打砸抢烧事件发表讲话



Regional chairman Nur Bekri delivers a speech on state television on July 6, 2009.

⁶⁵ Wounded Lhasa residents recall horror after riot instigated by Dalai clique. (2008, March 16). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-03/16/content_7801706.htm.

⁶⁶ Death toll in Xinjiang riot rises to 140. (2009, July 6). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/06/content_11661325.htm.

⁶⁷ See video of Bekri’s speech here (in Chinese): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mwufgjRdRs> and Yin, P. (2009, July 16). Unrest Mars Stability. *Beijing Review*. Retrieved from http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/2009-07/12/content_212805.htm.

An illusion of openness

The state's management of media reportage of the Urumchi unrest differed greatly from its handling of the 2008 unrest in Tibet. By providing the international reporters flocking to Urumchi in the days after July 5 with the right to use the only bank of computers equipped with Internet access in the entire region,⁶⁸ and simply by allowing them into the region in contrast with the complete ban on reporters that was put in place in Tibet in March 2008, Chinese authorities were able to create an illusion of openness and to fend off much of the criticism aimed their way in the previous year by the international community. However, far from being an indication of increased transparency, the Chinese government's careful management of reporters' movements (journalists were officially barred from conducting any interviews unless accompanied by official "minders"),⁶⁹ its detentions, harassment and beatings of both domestic and foreign journalists,⁷⁰ and its aggressive campaign to distribute materials demonizing the Uyghur population after July 5⁷¹ reveal authorities' willingness to take whatever action necessary to promote the official version of events and prevent independent voices from being heard.

International groups such as Reporters Without Borders⁷² and the U.S. State Department⁷³ expressed concern about the ongoing restrictions on the Internet in East Turkestan after July 5 and the persecution of Uyghurs for the peaceful expression of ideas or the transmission of information deemed "sensitive". As noted by Reporters Without Borders, China today boasts the largest number of people imprisoned for freely expressing their views online, and regions such as Tibet and East Turkestan bear the full brunt of Internet censorship in China. Groups such as the PEN American Center⁷⁴

⁶⁸ This information was provided to UHRP by multiple interviewees.

⁶⁹ Wines, M. (2009, July 7). In Latest Upheaval, China Applies New Strategies to Control Flow of Information. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/08/world/asia/08beijing.html?_r=3&hp.

⁷⁰ FCCC Condemns Beating Of Journalists In Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 5). Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. Retrieved from <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/09/05/fccc-condemns-beating-of-journalists-in-urumqi/> and Urumqi Police Seize Cameras During Protest. (2009, Sept. 4). Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. Retrieved from <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/09/04/urumqi-police-seize-cameras-during-protest/> and Photographer in Kashgar Detained, Deported. (2009, July 10). Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. Retrieved from <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/07/10/photographer-in-kashgar-detained-deported/> and China Must Stop Harassing Reporters In Xinjiang. (2009, July 7). Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. Retrieved from <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/07/07/china-must-stop-harassing-reporters-in-xinjiang/> and TV Crew Detained in Urumqi. (2009, July 6). Foreign Correspondents' Club of China. Retrieved from <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/07/06/tv-crew-detained-in-urumqi/>.

⁷¹ For instance, DVDs were distributed to foreign journalists and government representatives entitled "Xinjiang, Urumqi, July 5 Riots" (see <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/30/world/asia/30uighur.html>).

⁷² Enemies of the Internet: Countries Under Surveillance. (2010, March 12). Reporters Without Borders. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from http://www.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/Internet_enemies.pdf.

⁷³ 2009 Human Rights Report: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau). (2010, March 11). U.S. State Department. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eap/135989.htm>.

⁷⁴ Uighur PEN Member Ilham Tohti Barred From Travel Outside China. (2010, April 20). PEN American Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pen.org/viewmedia.php/prmID/4947/prmID/174>.

denounced the Chinese government's restrictions on Ilham Tohti's freedom of speech and freedom to travel outside of China.

Chinese authorities' tightly managed control over media coverage of events in the summer of 2009 originated with controls exerted over journalists' coverage of developments in and around Shaoguan, in Guangdong Province, following an attack on Uyghur factory workers there.⁷⁵ Reporters who traveled to the Xuri (Sunrise) factory in Shaoguan where the attacks occurred were met by security guards who prevented them from photographing the area.⁷⁶ Following the attacks, around 750 Uyghur workers who had originally been housed in factory dormitories were moved to new living quarters about 15 miles away. According to *Global Post* contributor Kathleen McLaughlin, requests to interview Uyghur men behind the tightly-guarded, locked gates were refused by guards without explanation, and guards said the workers were not allowed outside of the gates.⁷⁷ Both McLaughlin and *Guardian* reporter Jonathan Watts⁷⁸ reported that officials brought two Uyghur workers out from their sequestered quarters to answer questions about their current situation, and that their responses to reporters' inquiries closely followed the government's version of events. Surrounded by officials, the two workers from Kashgar insisted that everything was back to normal, and that the death toll had been exaggerated. Watts noted that all computer screens at the Internet café near the Xuri factory carried a warning not to "upload or spread information about the toy factory". However, as Watts further noted, these warnings were not enough to prevent images from the Shaoguan attacks from being circulated around the world.

One Chinese resident of Shaoguan interviewed by Watts for the *Guardian* disputed the official toll of two people killed in the Shaoguan attacks. The resident claimed he helped to kill seven or eight Uyghurs:

"When I see the news and they say only two people died, I am so angry. That must be wrong. How can they not be dead? I saw their heads bleeding."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ For more information about the Shaoguan attacks, please see "UAA expresses concern over Shaoguan indictments", <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/2953/1/UAA-expresses-concern-over-Shaoguan-indictments-index.html>.

⁷⁶ McLaughlin, K. (2009, July 10). Uyghur workers held behind locked gates. *Global Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/china/uyghurs/xinjiang/guangdong-factory>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Watts, J. (2009, July 10). Old suspicions magnified mistrust into ethnic riots in Urumqi. *Guardian (UK)*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/10/china-riots-uyghurs-han-urumqi>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Unrest in Urumchi during July 2009

The events of July 2009 in Urumchi are frequently referred to as the “Uyghur riots”⁸⁰ or the “Urumchi riots”⁸¹ in international media reports. The establishment of these terms for the unrest in Urumchi was predominantly based on Chinese government information that has not been sufficiently contested. According to information gathered by UHRP, the events of July 2009 cannot be solely understood as an outbreak of ethnic and civil unrest that was committed by the Uyghur community in Urumchi against Han Chinese. UHRP interviews with Uyghurs present in Urumchi on July 5 concur that indiscriminate deadly live fire was used against Uyghur demonstrators by Chinese government security forces.

Based on the evidence provided by interviewees, UHRP contests three claims included in the Chinese government account of the July 2009 unrest in Urumchi.

1. The Chinese government allegation that the unrest was a premeditated “terrorist” attack⁸² organized by the World Uyghur Congress⁸³, and that the World Uyghur Congress President, Ms. Rebiya Kadeer, masterminded a coordinated attack on the city of Urumchi.⁸⁴
2. The Chinese government assertions surrounding the use of live fire during the unrest. The Chinese government claims that security forces used live fire to disperse Uyghur “rioters” by firing into the air, or to shoot Uyghurs in targeted situations that resulted in only 12 deaths.⁸⁵
3. The Chinese official media’s understated account of Han Chinese reprisals on Uyghur residents of Urumchi that predominantly occurred on July 6 and 7.

UHRP does not dispute that Uyghurs were involved in violent incidents on July 5 and UHRP unequivocally opposes the use of violence by Uyghurs. Nonetheless, from the evidence collected in interviews, UHRP does dispute the three above claims of the Chinese government. The following accounts, independently of each other, are in agreement that the Chinese state used violence against Uyghur residents of Urumchi, that the official media in China did not faithfully report the severity of Han Chinese civilian

⁸⁰ See in general: Lloyd Parry, R. (2009, July 6). Uyghur riots sparked by fears that separatist dream is dying. *The Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6649318.ece> and Hennock, M. (2009, July 7). *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/07/06/bad-press.html>

⁸¹ Moore, M. (2009, July 8). Urumqi Riots signal dark days ahead. *Daily Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/malcolmmoore/100002509/urumqi-riots-signal-dark-days-ahead/> and 21 charged over Urumqi riots. (2009, September 26). *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/Asia/Story/STIStory_434687.html

⁸² Facts show July 5 riot “far beyond ordinary violent matter”. (2009, July 18). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-07/19/content_11730526.htm

⁸³ Secretary and city mayor answered questions on “July 5 Incident”. (2009, July 8). *Urumqi Evening Daily*.

⁸⁴ Li Hongmei. (2009, July 7). Unveiled Rebiya Kadeer: a Uighur Dalai Lama. *People’s Daily Online*. Retrieved from <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90002/96417/6695082.html>

⁸⁵ China says police killed 12 in Uyghur riots. (2009, July 19). *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/07/19/china.uyghur.threats/>

violence against Urumchi Uyghurs in the days following July 5, and that the Chinese government has failed to acknowledge the peaceful nature of the Uyghur demonstration that occurred on July 5. The evidence presented by UHRP casts sufficient doubt on the Chinese government version of the July unrest that should compel an independent investigation by the international community.



Urumchi city map.



A map showing locations of gunfire in Urumchi on July 5 and July 7 as reported by interviewees.

Peaceful demonstration

In the days leading up to July 5, 2009 an unknown person or persons posted on the forums of websites an appeal to Uyghurs in Urumchi to peacefully protest the Chinese government's mishandling of multiple killings of Uyghurs by Han Chinese during an attack at a toy factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong province.

On July 5, Uyghurs, many of them students, peacefully marched to and then assembled in People's Square in Urumchi. The demonstrators, some of them carrying the flag of the People's Republic of China, asked for justice for the victims of the attack on Uyghurs in Shaoguan. Demonstrators also expressed sympathy with the families of those killed and injured in the attack. The demonstration was an appeal to government officials for greater protection from the Chinese state against increasing discrimination and violence against the Uyghur community.

A Uyghur resident of Urumchi⁸⁶ saw an announcement for the July 5 demonstration on a popular social networking website. The same resident added that the announcement, along with photographs from Shaoguan, would be posted, deleted, reposted and re-deleted every few minutes.

A resident of Urumchi described how the demonstration began at 4 p.m. and how men, women and children were present.⁸⁷ The resident stated that the protest wasn't violent until the police arrived.

“Only traffic cops came at first, then more and more riot police, more and more gear and weapons. There were special police and the People's Armed Police. Dozens of police started to drag and hit people. There was yelling and chanting, even from windows, and traffic stopped. Buses were evacuated. More riot police came. The riot police started the riot.”

A visitor to Urumchi⁸⁸ confirmed the peaceful, but rapidly swelling, nature of the crowd gathered at People's Square through the testimony of a friend, Aynur, who had gone to join the demonstration against the wishes of her parents.

In the following statement, a second Uyghur resident of Urumchi corroborated an increasing police presence in People's Square and heavy-handed policing.

“In the afternoon that day at about 4:10 p.m. I went to People's Square to participate in the demonstration with one of my university friends. When we arrived, armed police had already surrounded the square. They didn't let us get out of the bus. At that time the first thing I saw very clearly was a young Uyghur man escorted by the police, and another Uyghur girl, wearing a headscarf like me, taking pictures with her mobile phone, who was also arrested by the police. I heard people screaming and shouting. After that the bus took us quite far away from the place where the protest happened, then let us out. The situation was getting worse so we decided to walk back to the university campus, but when we got to the 3rd Hospital my friend received a text message. It said police had arrested two of his friends during the demonstration.”⁸⁹

A Uyghur resident⁹⁰ present at People's Square also described heavy-handed policing.

“On July 5, demonstrators wore mourning clothes. Some demonstrators were encircled by police tape, and both People's Armed Police and special police came to detain them. I saw a 24- to 25-year-old girl beaten and taken away by police. A large number of people were there, mostly young students. People were shouting slogans such as ‘Give us freedom’ and ‘We are Uyghurs’. There were many, many special police there. They asked people to leave, and beat and detained

⁸⁶ Interviewee V interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁸⁷ Interviewee M interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁸⁸ Interviewee G interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁸⁹ Statement obtained by Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁹⁰ Interviewee V interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

them. Some were plainclothes police. Police also took video of the demonstrators.”

Use of deadly live fire

On July 5, Chinese security forces used deadly live fire against Uyghur civilians in Urumchi. According to the accounts of interviewees, the use of live fire against Uyghurs occurred in several locations throughout the city, and resulted in Uyghur deaths that indicate the Chinese government is understating the number of Uyghurs killed during the unrest. According to the interviewees, live fire was used as early as 6 p.m. and continued into the night in areas of the city that were under blackout.

A Uyghur Urumchi resident⁹¹ heard about the demonstration at 10 a.m. on July 5 and in the afternoon accompanied by his spouse, went to demonstrate in front of the Rebiya Kadeer Department Store. A number of demonstrators had fled to that location after the escalation of police action at People’s Square. The resident added that People’s Armed Police started to shoot into the crowd of protestors near the Rebiya Kadeer Department Store at approximately 6 p.m. The same resident believed a large number of Uyghurs were present, and that in the shooting many Uyghurs were killed. The shooting continued for 10 minutes, and none of the injured Uyghurs were offered any assistance by state parties.

On July 5, an interviewee’s friend, Abdul, saw Chinese troops sent in to reinforce Chinese police at an undisclosed location as he was walking home from dinner at around 8:30 to 8:45 p.m. The troops opened fire on the crowd of Uyghurs, and people standing close to him were shot and killed. A long term Urumchi resident⁹² also said that people who witnessed the shooting on July 5 saw dead and injured Uyghurs at an undisclosed location.

An Urumchi resident⁹³ heard explosions and gunfire on July 5, and saw people being pushed back toward Dawan Lu. A friend, Aliya, told the Urumchi resident she had personally stepped over two-dozen bodies in Uyghur areas.

A Uyghur resident in Urumchi⁹⁴ heard from his house gunshots coming from Yan’an Lu and from the Erdaoqiao Da Bazaar. The gunshot sounds varied in pattern from single shots to rapid fire. On the street, the resident saw young people who were asking, “Why do they have to keep harassing us? We were just protesting quietly on the street.” At 1:15 a.m., the resident saw 17 trucks heading toward the Erdaoqiao Da Bazaar, and saw people’s faces pressed against the tiny windows of the trucks. The resident also reported seeing a stiff-looking face and an arm slumped out of the back of one of the trucks.

⁹¹ Interviewee T interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁹² Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁹³ Interviewee M interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁹⁴ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

A second Uyghur resident in Urumchi⁹⁵ heard gunshots all night. The gunshots started at 8 p.m., and between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. the resident heard shooting and saw people falling. Near the No. 3 Hospital the resident saw trucks carrying civilians at night, and believes they were corpses. On July 6, a woman in her sixties from the resident's neighborhood told him she heard people getting shot nearby overnight.

In a June 21, 2010 article, Associated Press related the July 5 account of a Uyghur refugee, Vali, currently seeking asylum in the Netherlands. Vali's account describes the use of indiscriminate live fire.

“On July 5, Vali was driving home when he stopped to let around 2,000 Uighur protesters pass as they marched southward in the city of Urumqi.

Armed police officers swarming in front of him suddenly opened fire in the direction of the protesters, sending them fleeing, he says. He panicked and drove through the crowd to get out. In the midst of the commotion, he says, his car was videotaped by state security.

Vali sped to his aunt's house, where he spent the night huddled with her family on the living room floor, listening to the sounds of gunfire and explosions. ‘I was terrified,’ he said. ‘None of us slept at all that night.’”

UHRP has also learned that heavy-handed policing occurred in the areas surrounding Xinjiang University. On July 5, the Uyghur American Association received a phone call from Urumchi detailing a serious incident in the vicinity of the university campus. In the call the eyewitness reported that Chinese security forces were firing upon Uyghurs “right now”. The Uyghur American Association staff member taking the call heard screams in the background. The caller stated that they could see approximately 50 dead Uyghurs in an area around the number 1 city bus stop. Since this call, UHRP has been able to verify that live fire was used near Xinjiang University, and that the police conducted a sweep of the campus.

A visitor to Urumchi⁹⁶ saw news of the July 5 demonstration on the Internet, and hoped it would be peaceful. Around 6:30 p.m. to 7 p.m., the visitor saw smoke and heard gunshots and explosions, all of which appeared to be coming from about two to three miles from Xinjiang University, near Saimachang. Around 8:15 p.m., the same visitor began to hear Uyghur students marching on the Xinjiang University campus, chanting, “Let Uyghurs live”. The visitor added that he saw armed soldiers rounding up students.

The visitor also observed around 10 People's Armed Police pointing guns from the front and back door of the Xinjiang University police station. He said that gunshots and people's screams could later be heard from the back door of the police station.

Between 11 p.m. and midnight, the same visitor said that it sounded like war had broken out in Urumchi because he heard outbreaks of gunfire and explosions. The use of weapons went on until 2 a.m., and then it slowly moved eastward.

⁹⁵ Interviewee V interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁹⁶ Interviewee S interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

In a statement, a third Uyghur Urumchi resident described the scene at an undisclosed university campus.

“I began to hear shouting by university students outside. I started shouting out of the window of a room. Then, I saw a uniformed policeman and a plain-clothes policeman come towards the building I was in and one of them immediately took a photo of me. At that point, I began to shout even louder. Many students were gathered in the university square shouting slogans. I was so excited to see them, especially when they called “Let Uyghurs live!” that I cried uncontrollably. I began to shout even louder through my tears. The gathered students marched towards the university main gate to go outside. We all knew what was happening outside so if they went outside there would be bloodshed.”

A long term Uyghur Urumchi resident⁹⁷ reported that Chinese police informed a street cleaner in Urumchi on July 6 to not clean the streets in areas of heavy gunfire. The street cleaner added that the streets were washed already at 3 a.m.

Killings and beatings of Uyghurs in the days following July 5

In the days after July 5, a number of Han Chinese residents took to the streets of Urumchi to carry out so-called reprisal attacks on the Uyghur community. The attacks led to an unknown number of deaths and injuries to Urumchi’s Uyghurs that are described in the accounts of Uyghurs present in the city at the time. Han Chinese civilians, often using homemade weapons, predominantly sticks, beat Uyghur civilians on the streets of Urumchi. Eyewitnesses also reported hearing gunfire in the days after July 5.

In an article published on July 17, 2009, RFA quoted three Uyghurs visiting Urumchi from Kazakhstan on business. They had witnessed the severity of Han Chinese attacks on Uyghurs. The three were near the Rebiya Kadeer Department Store.

“There [were] about 3,000 to 4,000 Chinese people moving around as a mob, breaking in around the Hualin district and saying that they would kill all the Uyghurs in Urumqi...They were moving around with sticks and knives, but the police did not stop them.”⁹⁸

“We saw Han Chinese citizens carrying metal bars and axes, chasing, beating, and killing Uyghurs wherever they saw them.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

⁹⁸ Radio Free Asia. (2005, July 17). *Witnesses describe two-way violence*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/witnesses-07172009121028.html>

⁹⁹ Ibid.



An armed member of the Chinese security forces stands by as Han Chinese residents of Urumchi roam the streets on July 7, some with makeshift weapons. ©Boston Globe, highlighting by Uyghur American Association.

In an account given to UHRP, a long term Uyghur Urumchi resident¹⁰⁰ reported that three Han Chinese beat to death a Uyghur taking a bus to work on July 7.

A Uyghur resident in Urumchi¹⁰¹ reported the possible death in the interviewee's neighborhood of a 17 or 18-year-old Uyghur boy. The Uyghur boy was seen being beaten badly by Han Chinese on July 7 behind a medical school.

A long term Uyghur Urumchi resident¹⁰² also reported the possible death of seven Uyghurs on July 9, who were beaten by Han Chinese people on a bus near the Hospital of Chinese Medicine. The doctors at the hospital refused to treat them, because bus passengers threatened the doctors. The seven Uyghurs had wanted to go into the city and all of them were students at a medical institute.

UHRP also received reports of live gunfire in the days that followed July 5, with a Uyghur visitor to Urumchi¹⁰³ detailing machine gunfire and explosions coming from Changjiang Lu that went on for an hour on July 7. Later in the evening, the visitor heard more gunfire, coming from Saimachang.

On July 13, a visitor to Urumchi¹⁰⁴ was standing in front of a mosque near the Rebiya Kadeer Department Store. The military was present on 10 square blocks in south Urumchi. Two hundred people poured out of the mosque. Three Uyghur males with what appeared to be farm implements emerged. They turned around, crossed the street toward the soldiers and the soldiers ran away. One fired a shot and missed, and the three Uyghur males kept running. Then they were sprayed with bullets. People were running into the Rebiya Kadeer Department Store. According to the visitor, the police continued shooting

¹⁰⁰ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁰¹ Interviewee P interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁰² Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁰³ Interviewee S interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Interviewee C interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

for 20 minutes after the three Uyghurs advanced on them. The visitor also stated that the whole area where the shooting took place had been scrubbed clean when he visited it later. No one had any idea the shooting had occurred.

A Uyghur resident¹⁰⁵ reported the beating to death of many Uyghurs in the north part of Urumchi. Many of the reported victims were street vendors selling kebabs or fruit.

In response to the Chinese government's official figure of 197¹⁰⁶ for the number of people killed in July during the unrest in Urumchi, a Uyghur resident of the city simply stated:

“That’s the Han people’s number. We have our own number...Maybe many, many more Uighurs died. The police were scared and lost control”.¹⁰⁷



A truck washes the streets of Urumchi on the morning of July 6. @Anonymous

¹⁰⁵ Interviewee V interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Official: 12 mobsters in Urumqi riot shot dead. (2009, July 19). *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-07/19/content_8446059.htm

¹⁰⁷ China raises Xinjiang death toll, adds ethnic detail. (2009, July 11). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SP463729.htm>

September protests and attacks on Uyghurs

Unrest that occurred in Urumchi in the first week of September 2009 revealed continued inter-ethnic tension in the city, as well as tension between residents of the city and government authorities. Residents of Urumchi and visitors to the city at the time gave accounts to UHRP of an intense military presence and a tightly-controlled environment. State television and print media reports characterized a bizarre spate of alleged needle attacks as “pre-meditated terrorist attacks”, and emphasized the ethnicity of alleged attackers. However, these reports were not substantiated by evidence. Chinese government and international media accounts reported that a number of Urumchi residents were attacked by civilians in early September 2009, and individuals interviewed by UHRP gave accounts of numerous instances of Uyghurs who were beaten to death. Interviewees asserted that official government accounts of violent attacks in September were severely underreported, and that officials’ remarks fueled suspicion of Uyghurs and violence against them.

Authorities quickly prosecuted Uyghurs alleged to have committed crimes related to needle attacks or threats to commit such attacks. By mid-September, officials reported holding 75 people in custody, and imposing prison sentences on seven Uyghurs.¹⁰⁸ Interviewee subjects provided UHRP with first- and second-hand accounts of arbitrary detentions of Uyghurs at this time, including the death of at least one Uyghur in custody (for more on these accounts, please see the “Detentions” section of this report.)

Beginning on September 3, 2009, crowds of primarily Han Chinese demonstrators gathered in Urumchi’s People’s Square, as well as other areas of the city, to protest what they perceived to be a weak government response to allegations of needle stabbings throughout the city.¹⁰⁹ Protestors called for the resignation of Xinjiang Party Secretary



Chinese protestors march through Urumchi streets on September 3, 2009. ©Anonymous

¹⁰⁸ Four sentenced over syringe attack in Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 17). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/17/content_12070266.htm; Cui J. and Lei, X. (2009, Sept. 16) and Seven syringe attack groups arrested. *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009xinjiangriot/2009-09/16/content_8695890.htm.

¹⁰⁹ Protesters demand Xinjiang leader step down. (2009, Sept. 4). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/world-news/protesters-demand-xinjiang-leader-step-down-2967005>.

Wang Lequan, and also expressed anger that punishment against Uyghur detainees held in relation to the July unrest had, in their view, been too slow in coming.¹¹⁰

Needle attack rumors have spread throughout Chinese cities in the past, and have later turned out to be unfounded. Rumors filled the cities of Tianjin and Beijing in 2002 that people from Henan Province who were infected with the AIDS virus had come to Tianjin and Beijing and stabbed people with AIDS-infected needles. These reports were found to have been the product of mass hysteria.¹¹¹ In March 2008, according to a foreign blogger¹¹² living in China, the cell phone operator China Mobile sent text messages to its customers saying that there was a plot to spread AIDS through the meat sold at kebab stands throughout the country (kebab vendors are predominantly Uyghur).

Heavy security presence

Less than two months after special police from 31 municipalities throughout China¹¹³ were deployed to Urumchi in response to the July unrest, military and police forces increased patrols and blockaded the city.

An interviewee who flew into the Urumchi airport on September 3 reported having to spend the night in a hotel near the airport instead of checking into a hotel as originally planned. The



Military trucks and soldiers stationed outside a theater in Urumchi in fall 2009. ©Anonymous

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ 天津“艾滋患者持针扎人”事件调查 (Tianjin AIDS patients needle stabbing incident investigated). (2002, Jan. 24). *Southern Weekend*. Retrieved from <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2002-01-24/455257.html> and Black and White Cat. (2009, Sept. 14). [Web log comment]. Before Urumqi: the 2002 needle attacks in Tianjin and Beijing. Retrieved from <http://www.blackandwhitecat.org/2009/09/14/before-urumqi-the-2002-needle-attacks-in-tianjin-and-beijing/>.

¹¹² Liuzhou Laowai. (2008, March 15). [Web log comment]. AIDS Kebabs. Retrieved from http://liuzhou.blog-city.com/aids_kebabs.htm and Porfiriy. (2008, March 26). [Web log comment]. Kebabs will not give you AIDS. Maybe. Yargh!. Retrieved from <http://www.thenewdominion.net/104/kebabs-will-not-give-you-aids-maybe-yargh/> and 乌鲁木齐:“吃烧烤感染艾滋病”短信属谣言 (Urumchi: “Eating barbecue will give you AIDS” text is false) (2008, March 24). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://www.xj.xinhuanet.com/2008-03/24/content_12774454.htm.

¹¹³ 7·5事件后全国31个城市特警乘专机援疆维稳 (Special police from 31 municipalities throughout the nation take flights to aid Xinjiang in post-July 5 stabilization work) (2009, Aug. 17). *Huanqiu.com*. Retrieved from <http://china.huanqiu.com/roll/2009-08/548260.html>.

interviewee observed tanks, troop carriers, armed personnel and security forces wearing masks stationed outside Urumchi, preventing people from entering the city, and also reported seeing a number of soldiers stationed at the airport itself.¹¹⁴

A resident of Urumchi reported that there was a very heavy armed police presence in Uyghur areas of the city during the September unrest. The resident told UHRP that Uyghurs were tremendously fearful at this time, and many who originated from the southern part of East Turkestan left Urumchi to return to their hometowns. The resident also stated that individuals who left the city were not allowed to re-enter unless they possessed the required residency permits.¹¹⁵

Another resident of Urumchi reported that college campuses were “locked down” in early September, and government minders instructed students not to leave campus. The resident reported that the atmosphere in the city at the time was “extremely tense”.¹¹⁶

Three Hong Kong journalists who had traveled to Urumchi to report on the protests taking place were beaten and detained by paramilitary police.¹¹⁷ Although all three reported having the required credentials and permits, they were beaten, detained for three hours with their hands behind their backs, and reportedly had a gun pointed at them.¹¹⁸ A representative of Beijing’s central government Liaison Office in Hong Kong subsequently told Hong Kong media that while the actions of officials in East Turkestan were “necessary”, “something undesirable” had happened to the three reporters.¹¹⁹

An Urumchi resident told UHRP that after the September unrest, there were not many Uyghur taxi drivers in the city, and Chinese taxi drivers would not stop for Uyghur passengers. The resident was a passenger in a taxi driven by one of the few remaining Uyghur taxi drivers, and police stopped the driver of the taxi and forced him out of the car and onto the ground, where they stepped on him. According to the resident, the driver was detained because he was found to be carrying a small knife, which is common among taxi drivers of all ethnicities in Urumchi and which is also an expression of Uyghur male culture. Police told the resident and another passenger in the taxi to leave the scene, and they were forced to walk the rest of the way to their destination.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Interviewee J interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹¹⁵ Interviewee P interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Interviewee E interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹¹⁷ FCCC Condemns Beating Of Journalists In Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 5). Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China. Retrieved from <http://www.fccchina.org/2009/09/05/fccc-condemns-beating-of-journalists-in-urumqi/>.

¹¹⁸ Statement about beating of Hong Kong reporters in Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 4) Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Hong Kong. Retrieved from <http://www.fcchk.org/fccweb/news.html?id=1F29C6B97E92975892C1AB70348375A6> and Hong Kong Politicians Line Up on Reporter Beatings in Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 11). *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=21072065&tkr=511:HK&sid=aCNp9i5MnSMI>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

State propaganda

Official reports consistently gave accounts portraying Uyghurs as the perpetrators of widespread needle attacks that were terrorist in nature and targeted at innocent Chinese civilians. Deputy mayor of Urumchi Zhang Hong said at a news conference on September 4 that the attacks were “premeditated and organized to create terror in society”, and that the “three forces” [terrorism, separatism and extremism] were using “soft violence” to “disrupt social order and instigate ethnic hatred”.¹²¹

According to an Urumchi resident interviewed by UHRP¹²², Urumchi Communist Party Secretary Li Zhi, when speaking on television, placed a clear emphasis on the Uyghur ethnicity of four suspects who were alleged to have attacked Chinese people with needles. “He should have just said that they were ‘criminals’... he was inciting people,” said the resident. “This led to more inter-ethnic hatred and caused the Chinese people to demonstrate. During the demonstrations that took place in early September, Chinese demonstrators shouted slogans such as “Uyghurs should get out of Xinjiang” and “Uyghurs are animals”.¹²³

Another resident of Urumchi also told UHRP that officials accused only Uyghurs of carrying out needle attacks, and that new needle attack figures were given every day on television. “There had been needle attack reports before September 2009, but at those times, there was no emphasis placed on ethnicity”, said the resident.¹²⁴

According to the Associated Press, propaganda trucks driven throughout Urumchi on September 6 repeated the message that the needle stabbings were instigated by separatist forces plotting “to undermine ethnic unity”.¹²⁵

Government officials also stated that syringe attackers could be subject to the death penalty,¹²⁶ although it is unclear whether or not the death penalty was applied in any cases related to alleged syringe attacks. In addition, the deputy director of Urumchi’s municipal public security bureau said that those who offered tip-offs for needle attackers would receive rewards.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Situation basically under control in Urumqi: deputy mayor. (2009, Sept. 4). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/04/content_11998382.htm.

¹²² Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

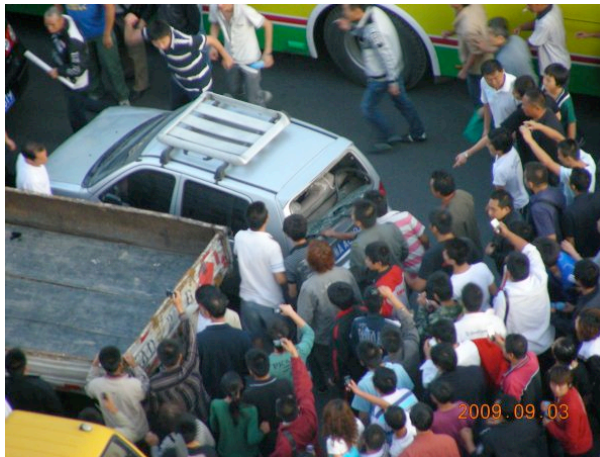
¹²³ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹²⁴ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹²⁵ Drug users accused of syringe attacks in China. (2009, Sept. 6). *Guardian (UK)*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/06/drug-users-syringe-attacks-china>.

¹²⁶ Urumqi syringe attackers may face death penalty. (2009, Sept. 6). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/06/content_12006032.htm.

¹²⁷ Tests find no infections in Xinjiang needle attack victims. (2009, Sept. 13). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/13/content_12046231.htm.



China's official media widely published images of Uyghurs committing violence during unrest in July 2009, but failed to publish images such as these three photos of Han Chinese people committing violent acts on September 3, 2009.
©Anonymous

By September 13, Xinhua quoted official reports saying that 531 people in Urumchi had been victims of needle attacks, but that only 171 of these individuals showed obvious syringe marks.¹²⁸ A military official from China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences said on September 13 that tests conducted by the Academy's Beijing laboratory had found no dangerous viruses or chemicals in samples taken from victims of needle attacks.¹²⁹ The Xinhua report also noted that experts had checked about 250 people who said they had been stabbed by needles and found them to have "no clearly worsening wounds or serious illnesses".¹³⁰

On September 16, the China Daily reported that a group of eight needle attack suspects, led by a Uyghur man, had "organized several secret meetings since August plotting needle attacks aiming to stir up hatred between people from different ethnic groups."¹³¹ The report stated that regional officials were calling the needle attacks "terror attacks".¹³² It also stated that the first group of needle attack suspects had already been put on trial, with two men and a woman given sentences ranging from seven to 15 years in jail.¹³³

A resident of Urumchi told UHRP that Urumchi residents believe the needle attacks were exaggerated by the authorities to incite hatred, particularly in light of the reports by health officials that no dangerous chemicals had been found in the samples taken from alleged needle stabbing victims.¹³⁴

Another resident of Urumchi provided an account of a female Chinese resident of the city who sought treatment from a Uyghur doctor for a scratch on her hand. The doctor told the woman that she had not been attacked by a needle, and that it appeared her hand had been scratched by a handbag.¹³⁵

Human Rights Watch China researcher Nicholas Bequelin told the Guardian newspaper that the government's account of the needle attacks was "unconvincing", and had contributed to the mismanagement of the crisis.¹³⁶ "I think so far the authorities have failed to substantiate their initial alarmist communiqués that gave credence to these rumours," he stated.¹³⁷

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Seven syringe attack groups arrested. (2009, Sept. 16). *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009xinjiangriot/2009-09/16/content_8695890.htm.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹³⁵ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹³⁶ Drug users accused of syringe attacks in China. (2009, Sept. 6). *Guardian (UK)*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/06/drug-users-syringe-attacks-china>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Attacks on Uyghurs by civilians- Uyghur accounts

Official reports regarding deaths and attacks on Uyghurs in early September were marked by a lack of clarity. Chinese authorities reported that five people died in the September unrest.¹³⁸ Deputy mayor Zhang Hong stated that two of those killed were “innocent civilians,” while police were still investigating the other deaths,¹³⁹ and Zhang did not elaborate on the ethnicity of the victims or how they had died.

Eyewitness accounts provided to UHRP and outlined in international media reports describe attacks on Uyghurs and Uyghur businesses during the September unrest. RFA reported that Ilham Tohti and Tibetan blogger Woesser had published online accounts detailing the severe beating of Uyghur journalist Kaynam Jappar on September 3, and Woesser had reported that Uyghur singer Mirzat Alim was beaten to death on September 2.¹⁴⁰ Tohti and Woesser described both attacks as having been carried out by Han Chinese mobs.¹⁴¹ Neither account was reported in the official Chinese media.

A resident of Urumchi told UHRP that two young Uyghur men were beaten to death on September 3 in a market area in the vicinity of Hualin.¹⁴²

Another Urumchi resident provided the account of a Uyghur man in his mid-thirties who was killed by a Chinese mob on the afternoon of September 3 near Friendship Street. The resident reported that police did not inform the man’s family of the cause of his death, but family members reported that he appeared to have been beaten to death.¹⁴³

The resident also told UHRP of the beating to death of a Uyghur man in his late twenties on September 3 near Friendship Street after being dragged out of his car by a Chinese mob.¹⁴⁴

A third resident of Urumchi who spoke with UHRP said that Chinese passengers appeared very scared of Uyghur bus passengers in early September. The resident reported that a Uyghur individual was beaten to death on a bus, although the resident is unsure where in the city this took place. The resident also told UHRP that television news broadcasts in early September consistently reported news of Chinese victims of needle attacks, but reported nothing about Uyghur beating victims.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Five dead in latest unrest in far-west China. (2009, Sept. 4). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5821PT20090904>.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Radio Free Asia. (2009, Sept. 9). Bloggers Report Beatings, Death. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/online-09082009133813.html>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Interviewee P interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁴³ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁴⁴ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Interviewee V interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

Another resident of Urumchi told UHRP that Chinese protestors were attacking any Uyghurs who were on the street on September 3 and September 4. The resident reported that two Uyghurs were dragged out of a small Honda and beaten, not far from Xibei Lu.¹⁴⁶

A Reuters report¹⁴⁷ also related eyewitness accounts that described the beating of Uyghurs by Han Chinese during the protests. A Uyghur who was suspected of carrying out one of the alleged needle stabbings was beaten so severely that he was taken to the hospital, an Urumchi resident told Reuters.

Government response to the September unrest

The government response to the protests and other unrest that took place in Urumchi in September 2009 contrasts starkly with the way in which government officials responded to the July unrest in the city. Following protestors' calls for the resignation of Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan, Wang addressed the crowds from the balcony of a nearby building and spoke to them through a microphone. The assembled protestors were upset that government officials had done little, in their view, to protect Chinese residents from attacks in July and September. Wang was seen to address the protestors and to reassure them that action was being taken, and protestors were reported to have thrown objects, such as bottles, at Mr. Wang as he spoke.¹⁴⁸

According to a witness interviewed by Reuters¹⁴⁹, Wang stated that 30 arrests had occurred in relation to the alleged stabbings, a figure which contradicts numbers¹⁵⁰ from the official Chinese media. In addition, while tear gas was reportedly¹⁵¹ used at times to quell the protests of Chinese demonstrators, there were no reports of deadly force used against protestors as during the July unrest. There were also no reports from the official media of any arrests or detentions of Chinese individuals during the September unrest.

Wang, a long time protégé of president Hu Jintao whose 15-year stint in the top XUAR post exceeded the usual 10-year tenure of provincial party secretaries, ruled the region with an iron fist, and presided over a period of extreme repression for Uyghurs. Protestors' calls for his resignation in September 2009 reflected not only a perception that

¹⁴⁶ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Protesters demand Xinjiang leader step down. (2009, Sept. 4). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/world-news/protesters-demand-xinjiang-leader-step-down-2967005>.

¹⁴⁸ Misinformation age in Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 8). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://blogs.reuters.com/china/2009/09/08/misinformation-age-in-urumqi/>.

¹⁴⁹ Protesters demand China's Xinjiang leader resign. (2009, Sept. 3). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/PEK64821.htm>.

¹⁵⁰ Tens of thousands of protesters demand security guarantees in Urumqi after hypodermic syringe attacks. (2009, Sept. 3). *Xinhua*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-09/03/content_11991116.htm.

¹⁵¹ Branigan, T. (2009, Sept. 4). Chinese police use teargas to break up deadly protests in Urumqi. *Guardian (UK)*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/04/xinjiang-urumqi-deadly-protests>.

he was unable to provide regional security, but also growing Han displeasure over Wang's nepotistic business and political practices. Wang was known both for using his leadership post to ensure the business success of his friends in the "Shandong clique", and also for appointing cadres from his home province of Shandong to top government positions throughout East Turkestan.

In an attempt to allay demonstrators' fears regarding the government's ability to protect them, regional government officials stated on September 3 that "196 suspects have been charged over the July riot. Fifty-one were indicted and will face prosecution."¹⁵²

On September 5, Xinhua announced the firing of both Urumchi Communist Party Secretary Li Zhi and Liu Yaohua, Urumchi's police chief.¹⁵³ No reason was given for their dismissal. Li was replaced immediately by Zhu Hailun, who previously commanded all law enforcement forces in East Turkestan.¹⁵⁴ Liu was replaced by Zhu Changjie, formerly the Party chief of Aksu Prefecture.¹⁵⁵

On April 24, 2010, Chinese state media announced that 57-year-old Zhang Chunxian, formerly the Communist Party Secretary of Hunan Province, had been appointed to replace Wang Lequan as Xinjiang Party Secretary.

The next section of this report will provide detailed information on detentions of Uyghurs during the July and September unrest. Individuals interviewed by UHRP detailed arbitrary detentions of Uyghurs, as well as the beatings and deaths of Uyghurs in custody, during the September unrest. Interviewees also told UHRP of lengthy prison sentences given to Uyghurs detained arbitrarily during the September unrest.

¹⁵² Five dead in latest unrest in far-west China. (2009, Sept. 4). *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5821PT20090904>.

¹⁵³ China Sacks Two Amid Violence in Urumqi. (2009, Sept. 5). *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125205146562586021.html>.

¹⁵⁴ Wu, Z. (2009, Sept. 9). Beijing scrambles to find scapegoats. *Asia Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/KI09Ad01.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Detentions of Uyghurs following the July 5 unrest

Government authorities in East Turkestan implemented a harsh crackdown on the Uyghur population after July 5 in response to the unrest. Beginning in the early hours of July 6, 2009, and continuing in subsequent weeks and months, Uyghurs living in Urumchi and other locations in East Turkestan were subjected to widespread arbitrary detention and “forcible disappearances”. A report issued by Human Rights Watch¹⁵⁶ in October 2009 documented large-scale sweep operations conducted by security forces in two predominantly Uyghur areas of Urumchi beginning July 6, during which young Uyghur men were packed into trucks and jeeps by the dozens. According to Urumchi residents interviewed by UHRP, Uyghur neighborhoods were almost completely devoid of men after July 5. In addition, Uyghurs provided first- and second-hand accounts to UHRP of young children being among those taken away by security forces. Interviewees also provided UHRP with accounts of the torture and deaths of Uyghurs in custody. These accounts are consistent with remarks made by UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak, who has said that Uyghurs in government custody frequently suffer from physical and mental torture.¹⁵⁷



An Urumchi newspaper reports on arrests carried out as of July 9, 2009.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch. (2009) China: 'We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them': Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang's Protests. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/10/22/we-are-afraid-even-look-them.

¹⁵⁷ Special Rapporteur on Torture Highlights Challenges at End of Visit to China. (2005, Dec. 2). United Nations. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from <http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/677C1943FAA14D67C12570CB0034966D?opendocument>; Radio Free Asia. (2010, June 21). 'Mental Torture' Alleged. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/mental-06212010140114.html>.

Widespread arrests and detentions of Uyghurs in connection with the July 5 unrest continued under a “100-day campaign” launched in September 2009,¹⁵⁸ as well as under a “Strike Hard” campaign launched in November 2009.¹⁵⁹ Official media reported the arrests of individuals in connection with July 5 as late as December 2009.¹⁶⁰

An interviewee who spoke to UHRP reported seeing, while walking through Urumchi on July 6, 2009, soldiers with machine guns who were blocking the gates of residential complexes inhabited by Uyghurs.¹⁶¹ The interviewee reported walking past approximately 50 such complexes, and observing only women inside.



Uyghur women protest the detentions of their male relatives on July 7, 2009. ©Reuters

Another interviewee stated that around 3 or 4 a.m. on July 6, 2009, the lights were turned off in the primarily Uyghur area of Saimachang, and the military and police came to search Uyghurs' homes in the area.¹⁶² The interviewee stated that the military and police detained Uyghur men and boys aged 10 and above, and especially targeted those who appeared wounded.

The same interviewee reported that more than 40 Uyghurs were “forcibly disappeared” from an area near Urumchi’s main train station within two days after July 5. The area was

¹⁵⁸ Congressional-Executive Commission on China. (2009, November 30). Authorities Execute 9 After Trials in Xinjiang Marked by Due Process Violations. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=131859>.

¹⁵⁹ 新疆公安机关即日起开展“严打整治”集中行动 (Xinjiang Public Security Office to launch crackdown work to concentrate actions). (2009, Nov. 3). *People's Daily*. Retrieved from <http://society.people.com.cn/GB/10304981.html>.

¹⁶⁰ Xinjiang police arrest 94 fugitives. (2009, Dec. 9). *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-12/09/content_9150426.htm.

¹⁶¹ Interviewee S interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁶² Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

known to be home to impoverished Uyghurs who predominantly come from the southern part of East Turkestan.

A third interviewee reported witnessing security forces rounding up everyone on the street in front of his house, not far from the Erdaoqiao Da Bazaar, on July 5, including minors.¹⁶³

A 33-year-old Uyghur named Hasiya told the *Washington Post* that every family living on her block was missing someone.¹⁶⁴ Hasiya reported that her younger brother had been sentenced to prison for 20 years for stealing a carton of cigarettes during the July unrest. She and other Uyghurs who spoke to the *Washington Post* expressed great fear with regard to simply talking about what had happened to them and their family members on and after July 5.



A poster displaying the names and faces of individuals wanted in connection with July 5 crimes is displayed in Urumchi. ©Anonymous

In late July 2009, wanted posters displaying the names and faces of dozens of individuals allegedly wanted for crimes committed on July 5 were displayed throughout Urumchi and other cities throughout East Turkestan. The vast majority of these individuals were Uyghur. State television also broadcast the names and images of individuals wanted for alleged July 5 crimes.

UHRP has received information that at least one of the individuals listed as wanted in connection with the July 5 unrest was already in detention at the time the information was published.

¹⁶³ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Keane, L. (2010, June 15). One year later, China's crackdown after Uighur riots haunts a homeland. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/14/AR2010061405055.html>.

A Uyghur interviewed by UHRP who fled the country after going into hiding after July 5 stated that his name was broadcast every day on television, with announcers describing him as a “wanted terrorist”.¹⁶⁵ The Uyghur man described protesting peacefully on July 5 and witnessing protestors being shot by armed police. While in hiding, the interviewee received information that his work unit was also searching for him. He also learned that police have been harassing his relatives since July 5.

The persecution of relatives of another individual who was wanted by police after July 5 was reported by RFA. In an article published on June 11, 2010, RFA reported the continued detention of 33-year-old Enver Israil, together with 20 other men, on October 1, 2009.¹⁶⁶ Authorities had been unable to locate Enver’s older brother, Ershidin, who was wanted for allegedly releasing information on the beating death of Shohret Tursun (together with Haji Memet and Abdusalam Nasir, mentioned above). Authorities have provided Enver’s wife, a native of Kazakhstan, with very little information about her husband’s case.

Urumchi residents interviewed by UHRP also gave accounts of frequent searches of Uyghurs, especially men, on the streets of Urumchi in the days and weeks after July 5. The brother-in-law of one interviewee, a Uyghur policeman, was stopped and searched while driving through the city in civilian clothes.¹⁶⁷

Detention totals unknown

Figures released regarding detentions and formal arrests after July 5 have been unclear and contradictory. Officials in East Turkestan have not publicized a figure for the total number of those detained in the wake of July 5. As of early August 2009, if numbers publicized by official media up to that point were added up, the total number of individuals detained since July 5 exceeded 2,000.¹⁶⁸ However, based on independent eyewitness accounts and international media reports, UHRP believes that the actual number of people arrested is much higher than the official figures. A *Financial Times* report published on July 19, 2009 stated that more than 4,000 Uyghurs had been arrested up to that point, and that Urumchi’s prisons were so full that detainees were being held in People’s Liberation Army warehouses.¹⁶⁹ It is unclear how many Uyghurs were detained in total in the weeks and months after July 5, but UHRP believes the number has been vastly underreported by the Chinese media.

¹⁶⁵ Interviewee T interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Radio Free Asia. (2010, June 11). *Uyghur Held in Leak Case*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/leak-06112010121250.html?searchterm=None>.

¹⁶⁷ Interviewee P interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Jacobs, A. (2009, August 2). China Arrests 319 People in Unrest in Xinjiang. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/03/world/asia/03china.html?_r=1&hpw.

¹⁶⁹ Hille, K. (2009, July 19). Xinjiang widens crackdown on Uighurs. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/2530/1/Xinjiang-widens-crackdown-on-Uighurs-/index.html>.

The case of 20 Uyghurs who fled East Turkestan during the post-July 5 crackdown and sought asylum at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees office in Phnom Penh, Cambodia is emblematic of Chinese officials' disregard of China's constitutional and international obligations in their legal processes. Without providing evidence, Chinese officials charged that the 20 asylum-seekers, including a toddler and an infant, were "criminals".¹⁷⁰ Two of those seeking asylum reported having witnessed security forces killing and beating Uyghur demonstrators on July 5 in Urumchi.¹⁷¹ In early 2010, Chinese officials indicated that the 20 Uyghurs were being put on trial or had been on trial for alleged criminal activities.¹⁷² Although Chinese officials had assured the international community that they would deal with the 20 Uyghurs in a transparent manner after their return to China, they have thus far failed to provide any information about their whereabouts or condition.

As stated by Human Rights Watch in its 2009 report, accounts given by witnesses to the arrests of Uyghurs suggest that the arrests were carried out in violation of Chinese and international law.¹⁷³ Witnesses said security forces did not introduce themselves or explain the reasons for arrest, and they did not tell families of those arrested where they were being taken. When family members later sought information from the police and military, they were given no information regarding the location, condition or legal status of their loved ones.

Government officials in East Turkestan described holding in custody people who had protested peacefully on July 5.¹⁷⁴ According to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), official statements from the Chinese government and state media reports have suggested that some acts of peaceful protest on July 5 would be formally subjected to criminal prosecution, and regional chairman Nur Bekri acknowledged that the authorities had held in custody people who had protested peacefully on July 5.¹⁷⁵ As outlined above, a number of bloggers, journalists and website staff were also detained after July 5.

¹⁷⁰ Mydans, S. (2009, Dec. 19). 20 Uighurs Are Deported to China. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/world/asia/20uighur.html> and Human Rights Watch. (2010, Jan. 28). *China: Account for Uighur Refugees Forcibly Repatriated to China*. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2010/01/28/china-account-uighur-refugees-forcibly-repatriated-china>.

¹⁷¹ Radio Free Asia. (2009, Dec. 3). *Uyghur Asylum Bid in Cambodia*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/cambodia-12032009115438.html>.

¹⁷² Wong, E. (2010, Feb. 13). China Hints at Trials for 20 Seeking Asylum. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/world/asia/14uighur.html>.

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch. (2009) China: *'We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them': Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang's Protests*. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/10/22/we-are-afraid-even-look-them.

¹⁷⁴ Congressional-Executive Commission on China. (2009, November 6). Xinjiang Authorities Continue Detentions, Announce Arrests Connected to July 5 Incident. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingel=128326>.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Interviewee accounts of arbitrary detentions in July

An Urumchi resident interviewed by UHRP reported that two young Uyghur brothers living in the Dawan neighborhood of Urumchi were arrested after July 5.¹⁷⁶ One of the young men, Semet, who was arrested on July 7 or July 8, is still missing. Semet had witnessed the shooting to death of peaceful protestors on July 5 from the window of the art institute where he was studying. Together with 20 or 30 other students, Semet was taken away by security forces who had witnessed the killings. Authorities at the art institute later delayed the start of the school year to October 2009 instead of the usual September.



Chinese security forces push back Uyghur women protesting detentions. ©Getty Images

Semet's brother Ablet was sentenced to four years in jail after telling someone he had seen the military open fire on peaceful protestors on July 5. It is unclear what charge Ablet was convicted of.

Interviewee R told UHRP that the family home of Semet and Ablet is now being closely watched by police.

Another Urumchi resident interviewed by UHRP gave an account of the detention of 15-year-old Almas, who was detained while outside on or around July 10.¹⁷⁷ Police officers came, covered Almas' head with a black bag, and took him away. Almas reported being tortured for 72 hours in police custody, particularly with an electric rod that was used on his genitals.

Almas was released from detention after four days, after a number of his teachers spoke with police and stated that he had been at home on July 5. Almas believes he was

¹⁷⁶ Interviewee R interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

detained because someone previously detained had provided his name to the police while being tortured.

Interviewee U also told UHRP of the detention of Turghun, another friend in Urumchi, not long after July 5. Turghun was visiting his friend Alim when police rushed in, covered their heads with bags, and took Turghun and Alim, both 20 years old, away in a police car. They were taken to an undisclosed location and beaten with the bags still covering their heads. No reason was given regarding why they were being beaten. Before being released, they were taken to a separate location, where police informed them how fortunate they were to be released. Subsequently, bags were again placed over their heads, and they were taken to People's Square and released there, although this was not where their homes were located.

Another interviewee reported that a colleague in his work unit was beaten to death while in police custody after July 5.¹⁷⁸ The interviewee, an Urumchi resident, told UHRP that some of his other colleagues were also detained, as well as some of his neighbors. It is unclear whether or not any of these individuals have been released from detention.

Three Uyghur families living near the city of Ghulja, on the border with Kazakhstan, told RFA of family members detained shortly after July 5, 2009 who remain in detention on charges of separatism and religious extremism nearly a year after being detained.¹⁷⁹ Officials have not allowed family members to visit their loved ones, and have given very little information regarding criminal procedures surrounding the 12 individuals still detained. The father of three adult children detained on July 7, 2009 told RFA that authorities claimed his daughter had been detained for teaching religious classes to other women, and his two adult sons and daughter-in-law were also detained for religious reasons. He stated that officials have not informed him where his daughter is being held or information about her trial, and have also failed to inform him when his sons and daughter-in-law will be tried or on what charges.

Witness accounts of arbitrary detentions in September

An interviewee reported that Abdul, a young Uyghur man, was detained by police on the same day as several young male friends, including a young man named Enver, during the unrest in Urumchi in early September 2009.¹⁸⁰ The young men were taken to a police station, where Abdul was detained for 24 hours, and his friends were detained for about an additional day.

Abdul witnessed the fatal beating of Enver in custody. Officials have not provided Enver's family with any information about his death.

None of the young men were charged with a crime, and no arrest warrants or other documents were issued regarding their detention. Their families were not informed of the

¹⁷⁸ Interviewee T interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁷⁹ Radio Free Asia. (2010, May 26). *New Details on Arrests*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/arrests-05262010150327.html?searchterm=None>.

¹⁸⁰ Interviewee O interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

reason for their arrest, and police instructed the young men to “come quietly and leave quietly”.

The arrests of the young men were believed to have been carried out after Yusuf, a friend of the group who had been arrested recently and questioned about needle attack claims, provided the names of those subsequently arrested under intense interrogation. Yusuf was later convicted of a drug-related charge and sent to prison.

Another Urumchi resident described to UHRP the detention of his friend Muzeppar, a young Uyghur man sentenced to 15 years in prison after being accused of attacking a Chinese woman in early September.¹⁸¹ The resident was unsure what crime Muzeppar was convicted of.

“Most Uyghur parents wouldn’t let their children out during the unrest in September,” stated the resident. “However, Muzeppar asked his mother if he could go out for half an hour, as he was really bored.”

Muzeppar’s mother relented, and Muzeppar went to a nearby market area. A Chinese woman there accused him of attacking her with a needle, and he was subsequently detained. Interviewee U reported that Muzeppar did not confess to any crimes on the first day of being interrogated but gave a confession that appeared to have been extracted through torture on the second day.

Interviewee U told UHRP that Muzeppar was shown on television after being sentenced.

“It felt very strange to see him on TV”, he said. “I had just seen him around, and he had just finished taking his university entrance exams.”

A lack of due process in July 5 trials

UHRP condemns all acts of violence that were committed by civilians and security forces on July 5 and subsequent days and weeks, but objects strongly to the lack of due process in the prosecution of alleged crimes related to the unrest in Urumchi. The trials of July 5 suspects have been marred by a demonstrated lack of due process and transparency. Chinese state media reported in late August 2009 that more than 170 Uyghur and 20 Han lawyers had been assigned to unrest suspects, and that their trials would be carried out “in their native languages”.¹⁸² However, both prosecutors and judges in East Turkestan had received instructions from Communist Party authorities regarding the handling of cases related to July 5.¹⁸³ In addition, political criteria were used to select judicial personnel

¹⁸¹ Interviewee U interview with Uyghur Human Rights Project, 2010.

¹⁸² 200 to face trial for day of carnage. (2009, August 24). *People’s Daily Online*. Retrieved from <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6736663.html>.

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch. (2009) China: ‘We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them’: Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang’s Protests. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/10/22/we-are-afraid-even-look-them.

assigned to handle the trials. As noted by Human Rights Watch and CECC¹⁸⁴, lawyers in both Beijing and East Turkestan were warned against independently taking on cases related to the July 5 unrest.

In all of the cases that have been reported in the official media, the defendants were sentenced on the same day that their trials commenced or the day after.¹⁸⁵ At least several of the trials were not publicly announced beforehand.¹⁸⁶ The Xinjiang People's Procuratorate has acted on instructions from the Chinese Communist Party leadership and has streamlined the review process of protest-related cases, adhering to the "three fast" principle (*san kuai yuanze*): "fast review, fast arrest and fast prosecution."¹⁸⁷



Noor-Ul-Islam
Sherbaz.

In a case reported by Amnesty International¹⁸⁸ and Radio Free Asia¹⁸⁹, Noor-Ul-Islam Sherbaz, who was 17 years old when detained on July 27, 2009, was sentenced to life in prison because his image appeared on security cameras on July 5. Sherbaz was given the life sentence for murder and "provoking an incident" immediately following a trial that lasted just 30 minutes on April 13, 2010. As stated by Amnesty International, in video footage shown in court, Sherbaz was not seen beating anyone, although he was on the same street where a beating occurred. Noor-Ul-Islam's father, Sherbaz Khan, who is a Pakistani national, said his son left the house on July 5 to attend the entrance examination for the third year of high school.

Death sentences and executions

Death sentences for those convicted of crimes related to July 5 were handed down amidst a climate of intense repression and following highly politicized trials. China's state media has reported that 26 individuals have been sentenced to death and nine individuals have

¹⁸⁴ Congressional-Executive Commission on China. (2009, September 14). Authorities Impose Restrictions on Lawyers Defending Xinjiang Suspects Amid Official Announcement on Arranging Legal Defense. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/2977/1/Authorities-Impose-Restrictions-on-Lawyers-Defending-Xinjiang-Suspects-Amid-Official-Announcement-on-Arranging-Legal-Defense-/index.html>.

¹⁸⁵ See chart following this section for more details.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch. (2010, January). "China: Events of 2009" chapter (www.hrw.org/en/node/87491) in *World Report 2010*. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from www.hrw.org/world-report-2010) and Human Rights Watch. (2009, Oct. 15) *China: Xinjiang Trials Deny Justice: Proceedings Fail Minimum Fair Trial Standards*. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/10/15/china-xinjiang-trials-deny-justice.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch. (2009) China: *'We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them': Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang's Protests*. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/10/22/we-are-afraid-even-look-them.

¹⁸⁸ Amnesty International. (2010, April 21). *AI Urgent Action: Life Sentence for 18-Year-Old, Unfair Trial*. Retrieved from http://blogs.amnesty.org.uk/blogs_entry.asp?eid=6400.

¹⁸⁹ Radio Free Asia. (2010, April 23). *Uyghur Teenager Gets Life*. Retrieved from <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/uyghur-youth-04232010111100.html>.

been sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve for murder and other crimes allegedly committed during the July unrest. According to their names, 24 of the 26 individuals sentenced to death have been Uyghur and two have been Han Chinese. At least eight of the nine individuals sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve have been Uyghur, according to their names.¹⁹⁰

In November 2009, eight of the Uyghur men and one Han Chinese man sentenced to death were executed without due process.¹⁹¹ For these nine men, all of the following happened within the span of less than one month. They were tried, convicted, and sentenced, their sentences were upheld by the XUAR Higher People's Court and the Supreme People's Court, and they were executed.¹⁹²

Remarks made by Chinese government officials prior to the trials of July 5 defendants indicate the existence of political pressure to issue death sentences to Uyghurs involved in the July 5 unrest. Urumchi Communist Party secretary Li Zhi, at a press conference on July 8, 2009, stated that executions would be used to deal with those involved in the unrest. According to a report published by CECC, in a July 11 article in the *Legal Daily*, the president of the Supreme People's Court, Wang Shengjun, called on courts of all levels to be united in their thinking with central authorities' judgments and policies. Wang also called for "striking hard in accordance with law" against "plotters, organizers, and key members" of the "serious violent criminal incident of beating, smashing, looting, and burning" that took place on July 5.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ See chart following this section for more details.

¹⁹¹ 2009 Human Rights Report: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau). (2010, March 11). U.S. State Department. Retrieved June 1, 2010 from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/eap/135989.htm> and Uyghur Human Rights Project (2009, Nov. 9). *Uyghur American Association strongly condemns execution of nine men in East Turkestan*. Retrieved from <http://www.uhrp.org/articles/3170/1/Uyghur-American-Association-strongly-condemns-execution-of-nine-men-in-East-Turkestan-/index.html>.

¹⁹² See chart following this section for more details.

¹⁹³ Congressional-Executive Commission on China. (2009, July 14). CECC Analysis: Authorities Pledge Crackdown Following Xinjiang Demonstration and Clashes. Retrieved June 1, 2009 from http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/XinjiangDemonstrations_07142009.html and 最高人民法院党组：发挥审判职能全力维护稳定 (Supreme People's Court Leading Group: the Function of Legal Trials is to Safeguard Stability). (2009, July 11). *Legal Daily Online*. Retrieved from http://www.legaldaily.com.cn/0801/2009-07/11/content_1121455.htm.

Trials and executions related to July 5, according to information publicized by the Chinese government¹⁹⁴

Date of trial commencement and name of trial court Note: Intermediate People's Court of Urumchi is abbreviated as "IPCU."	Sentencing date(s)	Total number sentenced to death or to death with a two-year reprieve	Apparent ethnic/gender breakdown of individuals (according to their names)	Sentences upheld by XUAR Higher People's Court?	Sentences upheld by XUAR Supreme People's Court?	Whether individuals have been executed
Oct. 12, 2009, IPCU.	Oct. 12, 2009	6 sentenced to death.	All 6 sentenced to death were Uyghur men.	Yes, Court upheld all sentences.	Yes, Court upheld all sentences.	All 6 were executed in early Nov. 2009.
Oct. 14, 2009, IPCU.	Oct. 15, 2009	3 sentenced to death, 3 sentenced to death w/ reprieve.	2 Uyghur men, 1 Han Chinese man sentenced to death; 3 Uyghur men sentenced to death w/ a two-year reprieve.	Yes, Court upheld all sentences.	Yes, Court upheld all sentences.	The 3 sentenced to death (w/o a two-year reprieve) were executed in early Nov. 2009.
Dec. 3, 2009, IPCU.	Dec. 3, 2009	5 sentenced to death.	All 5 sentenced to death were Uyghur men.	Court upheld all sentences that were appealed.	Unknown	Unknown
Dec. 4, 2009, IPCU.	Dec. 4, 2009	3 sentenced to death.	1 Uyghur woman, 1 Uyghur man, 1 Han Chinese man sentenced to death.	Court upheld all sentences that were appealed.	Unknown	Unknown
Dec. 22 & 23, 2009; IPCU.	Dec. 22 & 23, 2009	5 sentenced to death, 5 sentenced to death w/ a two-year reprieve.	All 10 were Uyghurs.	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
January 25, 2010; IPCU.	Jan. 25, 2010	4 sentenced to death, 1 sentenced to death w/ a two-year reprieve.	The 4 sentenced to death were Uyghurs. The ethnicity of the person sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve is unclear.	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Total number of individuals sentenced to death: 26 (According to their names, 24 have been Uyghur and 2 have been Han Chinese.) Total number of individuals sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve: 9 (At least 8 of the 9 have been Uyghur according to their names.) Total number of individuals who were sentenced to death who have been executed: 9 (According to their names, 8 were Uyghur men and 1 was a Han Chinese man).						

¹⁹⁴ Polias, K. (2010). *The Gross Human Rights Violations Committed by the Chinese Government Against the Uyghur People During and in the Aftermath of the July 2009 Protest and Unrest in Urumchi, the Regional Capital of East Turkestan (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China)*. Unpublished manuscript.

Recommendations

To the Chinese government

- Support an independent and international investigation by an impartial multilateral organization into the unrest of July 5 that considers the claims made by Uyghur Urumchi residents that live deadly fire was used on Uyghur demonstrators on July 5.
- End unsubstantiated allegations that the World Uyghur Congress was responsible for the unrest on July 5.
- Put into practice international norms of press freedom that would ensure the Chinese media report on events in East Turkestan faithfully and in an even-handed manner.
- Acknowledge the deep economic, social, cultural and political issues that underpin the unrest in East Turkestan and seek a genuine, meaningful and participatory process to mitigate those conditions with East Turkestan residents.
- Release information on all detainees to families and release all detainees who have not been charged; release information on all individuals executed in relation to the unrest in Urumchi.
- Abide by domestic and international obligations as set out in Chinese and international law.
- Ratify the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.
- Sign and ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and enact national legislation that gives force to its provisions.
- End the use of “Strike Hard” campaigns that target peaceful expressions of Uyghur identity.
- End the practice of pressuring neighboring countries and countries receiving a substantial amount of Chinese aid to extradite Uyghur asylum seekers.
- End the persecution of family members of individuals wanted for crimes related to July 5.
- Work toward the creation of an independent judiciary and implement mechanisms ensuring due process of law, including legal representation, in trials and other criminal processes.

To the U.S. government

- Establish a Consulate in the East Turkestan regional capital of Urumchi that will serve to monitor human rights conditions in the region.
- Send a senior delegation to East Turkestan to investigate claims made by Uyghur residents of Urumchi regarding unrest in July 2009 and in September 2009.
- Seek a public clarification from Chinese government officials regarding the claims made by Uyghur Urumchi residents that live deadly fire was deployed indiscriminately on July 5.

To the International Community

- Conduct an independent and international investigation into July 5 that includes the unfettered testimony of all communities in East Turkestan.

- Tighten monitoring mechanisms of international human rights instruments to reflect an accurate assessment of human rights conditions.
- Provide refugee assistance to Uyghur asylum seekers fleeing Chinese government repression.
- Refrain from deporting Uyghurs back to China; educate immigration authorities about the situation facing Uyghurs in East Turkestan.

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The Uyghur American Association (UAA) works to promote the preservation and flourishing of a rich, humanistic and diverse Uyghur culture, and to support the right of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, democratic means to determine their own political future in East Turkestan.



The UAA launched the UHRP in 2004 to promote improved human rights conditions for Uyghurs and other indigenous groups in East Turkestan, on the premise that the assurance of basic human rights will facilitate the realization of the community's democratic aspirations.

UHRP also works to raise the profile of the Uyghur people and the plight of all “minority” peoples in East Turkestan by:

Researching, writing and publishing news stories and longer reports covering a broad range human rights issues involving civil and political rights, through to social cultural and economic rights;

Preparing briefings – either written or in person – for journalists, academics, diplomats and politicians on the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people and others in East Turkestan.

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