



November 10, 2020

Mr. Guy Ryder  
Director-General  
International Labour Organisation  
4 Route des Morillons  
CH-1211 Genève 22  
Switzerland

**Re: China's widespread and systematic program of forced and prison labour of Uyghur workers**

Dear Director General,

On behalf of the Uyghur Human Rights Project, Uyghur American Association and World Uyghur Congress, we urge you to speak out forcefully against the government of China's widespread and systematic program of human rights abuses in the Uyghur Region, including forced and prison labour targeting Uyghur and other Turkic and/or Muslim peoples solely on the basis of their ethnic identity.

It is estimated that between 1 and 1.8 million<sup>1</sup> Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples have been arbitrarily detained and subjected to programs to "cleanse" them of their "extremist" thoughts through re-education and forced labour. Scholar Adrian Zenz notes that the regional government work plan for 2019 mandated that everyone who is capable of working must be trained and employed, and that "the entire region has become a site of involuntary labor assignments." The Chinese government denies the use of forced labour, relying on references to "poverty alleviation" programs, despite abundant and detailed evidence from international organisations, national governments, and direct testimony from Uyghur victims.<sup>2</sup> The breadth of this policy creates significant risk of forced labour at virtually any workplace, industrial or agricultural, in the Uyghur Region. In addition, Chinese factories outside of the Uyghur Region have been shown to be benefitting from the forced transfer of Uyghur labourers where they are working under conditions that strongly indicate forced labour.

The Chinese government has ratified ILO Convention 111, which prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of race (inclusive of ethnicity) and on the basis of religion. China has also ratified Convention 122, which requires states to "pursue, as a major goal, an active policy designed to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment" and also to ensure "there is freedom of choice of employment and the fullest possible opportunity for each worker ...

irrespective of ... race... [or] religion.” The ILO Committee of Experts has interpreted Convention 122 such that the prevention and prohibition of compulsory labour is a “condition *sine qua non* of freedom of choice of employment.” While China has failed to ratify Conventions 29 and 105 prohibiting forced labour, it is still bound to respect, promote and realise the prohibition of forced or compulsory labour pursuant to the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

As the global body charged with promoting the rights of working people worldwide, the ILO cannot remain silent in the face of clear and explicit crimes against humanity. We urge you to speak out in your personal capacity at the earliest possible opportunity to denounce the exaction of forced labour of millions of Uyghur workers. We urge you to use your position as Director General to encourage the ILO Governing Body, at its next session in March 2021, to issue a resolution condemning the government of China’s brazen violation of its obligations under the 1998 Declaration and under the conventions which it has ratified.

The ILO must live up to its obligation to promote internationally recognised human and labour rights, including taking a stand against forced labour—wherever it occurs. Likewise, the ILO must not remain silent in the face of this pattern of egregious human and labour rights violations in the Uyghur Region today.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Omer Kanat  
Executive Director  
Uyghur Human Rights Project



Dolkun Isa  
President  
World Uyghur Congress



Kuzzat Altay  
President  
Uyghur American Association

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Zenz, “‘Wash Brains, Cleanse Hearts’: Evidence from Chinese Government Documents about the Nature and Extent of Xinjiang’s Extrajudicial Internment Campaign,” *Journal of Political Risk*, 7 (11), November 2019, <http://www.jpolorisk.com/wash-brains-cleansehearts/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, Danielle Cave, James Leibold, Kelsey Munro, and Nathan Ruser, “Uyghurs for Sale: ‘Re-education’, Forced Labour and Surveillance beyond Xinjiang,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 1 March 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/uyghurs-sale>; Chris Buckley and Austin Ramzy, “Inside China’s Push to Turn Muslim Minorities into an Army of Workers,” *The New York Times*, 17 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/30/world/asia/china-xinjiang-muslims-labor.html>; Zenz, Adrian, “Beyond the Camps: Beijing’s Long-Term Scheme of Coercive Labor, Poverty Alleviation and Social Control in Xinjiang,” *Journal of Political Risk*, Vol. 7, No. 12, December 2019 <https://www.jpolorisk.com/beyond-the-camps-beijings-long-term-scheme-of-coercive-labor-poverty-alleviation-and-social-control-in-xinjiang/>.