

RANDY HULTGREN, Illinois
Co-Chair



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Co-Chair

One Hundred and Fifteenth Congress
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

April 6, 2018

Ambassador Terry Branstad
Embassy of the United States of America
55 Anjialou Road, Chaoyang District
Beijing, China, 100600

Dear Ambassador Branstad,

As Co-Chairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission (TLHRC), an official bipartisan human rights body in the United States House of Representatives, we write to request your assistance in countering the Chinese government's practice of persecuting the family members of U.S.-based human rights advocates from China. We have long followed the Chinese government's efforts to silence human rights advocates living abroad by harassing and imprisoning their family members who still live within China.

A region in which these repressive strategies are currently very prevalent is Xinjiang Province, where the basic rights of the Uyghur population, such as freedom of expression, religion, and assembly, are at increasing risk. As you are likely aware, Uyghurs are living under a surveillance state that monitors their communications and interferes with how they observe religious traditions such as Ramadan, and even their personal appearance, including their choice to grow a beard.

We recognize that your Embassy's ability to visit and operate in the region may be limited, but we believe you can make a difference by intervening in the specific cases listed below with the central authorities in Beijing, and where possible with the provincial authorities in Xinjiang, particularly with the Ministry of Public Security.

Rebiya Kadeer is an internationally known human rights defender, and widely recognized leader of the Uyghur community. She is a former businesswoman who was incarcerated in China from 1999-2005 for her advocacy on behalf of Uyghur rights. After an international campaign and intervention by the U.S. government she was released. She has continued her advocacy in the United States since then and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. In two separate crackdowns in August, and October 2017, over 30 members altogether of her immediate family were reportedly arrested in China in apparent retaliation for her raising her voice to denounce the human rights situation in China. It is our understanding that these family members have not committed any crimes. Those reported as detained include five of her children, three sons- or daughters-in-law, seven grandchildren, and 18 of her siblings, nieces and nephews. We have attached a document detailing the names and details for each person.

The second case is the family of Gulchehra Hoja, a U.S. journalist at Radio Free Asia for the past 17 years. Radio Free Asia is one of the few sources of credible information on human rights in Xinjiang Province. Over the last several months, the Chinese government reportedly arrested or possibly disappeared over 20 of Gulchehra's relatives living in China. We are deeply concerned that Gulchehra's family members are being viciously targeted because of her journalism, in a way designed to have a chilling effect on the functioning of a broadcasting service supported by U.S. government funds and to dissuade others who seek to report accurately on what is happening to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province. We have also attached a document with the details of each person concerned.

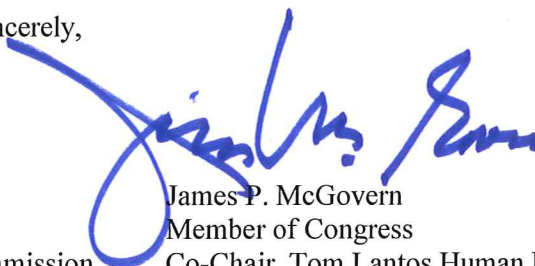
We ask that you use your good offices to bring these cases to the attention of the Chinese government. We believe that if you and your Embassy officers were to make clear to China that the United States Government is paying close attention to these cases, it would improve the chances of securing their release and could also deter the Chinese government from targeting the families of other Uyghur advocates in the future. According to reports, these family members have not even been imprisoned for expressing themselves, but only for being related to those who are peacefully doing so.

Please let us know if we can provide you with any further information. Thank you for your work and service. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission