



**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Co-Chairs' Video Remarks
to the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights
Exchange of Views on Human Rights in China
with a special focus on the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**

May 15, 2018

Co-Chair Randy Hultgren

Hello, I'm Randy Hultgren, Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission of the United States Congress. The Commission is a bipartisan body chartered by Congress to promote, defend and advocate internationally recognized human rights norms, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights instruments. On behalf of myself and Co-Chair Jim McGovern, I'd like to thank you for inviting us to contribute to this exchange of views on the human rights situation in China.

As Ms. Richardson and Mr. Isa will attest, over the past decades, and with increasing intensity, Chinese authorities have pursued a policy of strict religious and cultural control over Uyghur populations residing in China, and they have sought to extend that control abroad. Government repression of Uyghurs' basic human rights has extended to banning the use of the Uyghur language and imposing restrictions on the training of Muslim clerics, the celebration of Ramadan, the issuing of passports, the use of veils and the growing of beards, as well as the forced repatriation of Uyghurs living outside of China.

According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Uyghur Muslim parents are forbidden from including their children in religious activities, and citizens are encouraged to inform the authorities of neighbors involved in unauthorized religious worship. In 2016, reports indicate

that the Chinese government destroyed thousands of mosques in Xinjiang, citing that the old buildings were a threat to public safety.

There have been numerous press reports of the massive deployment of surveillance technology against Uyghurs in China, including the use of Artificial Intelligence software and facial recognition software. The Chinese government's use of Xinjiang as a laboratory for cutting edge surveillance technology is Orwellian – and the repercussions of that misuse of technology could extend far beyond China.

Another disturbing trend we have noticed is the Chinese government's efforts to silence human rights advocates living abroad by harassing and imprisoning their family members who still live within China. Rebiya Kadeer is an internationally known, U.S.-based human rights defender. In two separate crackdowns in 2017, more than 30 members 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. Similarly, the families of several U.S.-based Radio Free Asia journalists have been viciously targeted because of the journalistic activities of their relatives, inflicting misery on dozens of innocent people in order to dissuade others who seek to report accurately on what is happening to the Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province.

In my role as Co-Chair of the Human Rights Commission, as well as Commissioner on the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, I am very concerned by China's increased policies of repression against the Uyghurs. Uyghurs peacefully seeking to promote their political or religious views are often arbitrarily detained and given long prison sentences. No people should be told how to worship or how to express their cultural traditions. These are basic human rights enshrined in international documents that the Chinese government has signed onto and has agreed to respect.

I hope your exchange helps shine a light on how these universal freedoms are withheld from the Uyghurs, and I look forward to hearing the recommendations offered.

Co-Chair James P. McGovern

First, let me thank Chair Pier Antonio Panzeri, the vice-chairs, and all the members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights for inviting us to participate in this exchange of views. In a world where human rights challenges are growing on a daily basis, we welcome the opportunity to engage with you and hope that this will be the first of many shared endeavors.

Let me also take a moment to recognize Sophie Richardson of Human Rights Watch and Dolkun Isa of the World Uyghur Congress, both of whom have appeared before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission in the past. We could not do the work we do without the invaluable contributions of human rights and civil society organizations. We very much appreciate all they do.

My colleague and Co-Chair, Randy Hultgren, has provided an excellent overview of our shared concerns about the worsening repression of the Uyghur people in Xinjiang province.

Like the Tibetans, the Uyghurs are the victims of restrictions imposed by the Chinese authorities on their religious, cultural and linguistic practices. Rather than respect the ways of life of minority populations, the Chinese government is trying to crush their identities and force assimilation.

In the long run, these tactics will not increase China's security. They will backfire by producing increasing unrest. They risk, and may even prompt, a turn to violent extremism. It is up to all of us to do what we can to press China not to continue down this road.

One approach we use in the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission is our Defending Freedoms Project, a collaborative effort that encourages Members of Congress to become advocates on behalf of prisoners of conscience. By telling the stories of brave individuals who have done nothing more than seek to exercise their fundamental human rights – by showing the human consequences of repressive policies – we believe we can improve the lives of the prisoners and help change those policies.

Two such individuals are Ilham Tohti and Gulmira Imin.

Ilham Tohti is an economics professor known for his research on Uyghur-Han relations and his advocacy for freedom of expression and the implementation of regional autonomy laws in China. In 2014, after police raided his apartment and confiscated his laptops, books and papers, he was arrested and accused of “separatism.” After a two-day trial, he was sentenced to life in prison. Recently there were reports that his wife and children will not be allowed to visit him in prison during 2018.

Gulmira Imin was a government employee and the moderator of Salkin, a Uyghur-language culture and news website. On July 5, 2009, Gulmira participated in a demonstration to protest the deaths of Uighur migrant workers in Guangdong Province. A few days later, she was arrested and taken to an unknown location. In April 2010 she was sentenced to life in prison on charges of “splittism, leaking state secrets, and organizing an illegal demonstration.”

Gulmira and Ilham are serving life sentences because they believe in freedom of expression. Colleagues, I hope one outcome of your debate today will be to join us in calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Ilham and Gulmira.

Thank you again for this invitation. We look forward to working together to promote respect for the human rights and human dignity of each and every member of the Uyghur community, and each and every person in the People’s Republic of China.