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China: Harassment and detention of Rebiya Kadeer's family and associates

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about reports of repeated harassment and detention of Rebiya Kadeer's family and associates in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), northwest China, since her release from prison on 17 March 2005.

Prior to her release Rebiya, mother of eleven, says she was warned that if she engaged with Uighurs or spoke publicly about "sensitive issues" after her release her "businesses and children [five of whom remain in the XUAR] will be finished".

According to reliable reports, on 5 September 2005, Chinese State Security officials asked Alim Abdiriyim, one of Rebiya Kadeer's sons and the managing director of her company, the Akida Trading Co. in Urumqi, the capital of XUAR, to sign a document that would confirm that Rebiya Kadeer has evaded taxes, committed fraud and accumulated huge debts. They reportedly told him that if he did not agree to sign it immediately he would "sign it in prison after we've broken each one of your ribs". The Akida Trading Co. office has also reportedly been surrounded by armed police.

These allegations of coercion and threats of torture fit with broader patterns of abuse that Amnesty International continues to monitor in the XUAR and elsewhere in China. They cast serious doubt on the credibility of any police investigation into the business activities of Rebiya Kadeer's family.

Last week, two of Rebiya Kadeer's relatives were reportedly briefly detained and asked to hand in their passports. In May this year, two of her former employees, whose current status and whereabouts remain unknown, were detained. At the same time two other associates were also detained but are now believed to be released.

On 30 August 2005, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported the establishment of a special police unit that will be solely devoted to investigating and policing the relatives and businesses of Rebiya Kadeer. According to the report, the unit is known as "the number 305 office, [or] Rebiya Kadeer investigation office". The establishment of the unit was reportedly confirmed by a police officer who wanted to remain unnamed. Alim Abdiriyim reportedly said that the police from the special unit require members of Rebiya Kadeer's family to give them advance notice if they wish to leave Urumqi. "This is the most devastating pressure. They will not harass us openly. We have not done anything wrong or illegal for them to openly harass us" he continued.

In a Beijing press conference last month, the Communist Party Secretary of the XUAR, Wang Lequan accused Rebiya Kadeer of engaging in "terrorist and secessionist" activities since her release. These

serious accusations have not been backed up with any evidence and appear a further attempt to discredit Rebiya Kadeer and those connected with her, as part of a broader political crackdown in the region.

Background

Rebiya Kadeer was released on medical parole after having spent close to six years in prison in the XUAR on charges of “providing state secrets outside the country”. She was sent directly to the United States. The verdict of her trial described the “state secrets” as copies of publicly available regional newspapers that she sent to her husband in the US. Amnesty International considered her to be a prisoner of conscience and campaigned for her release for many years.

Since her release, Rebiya Kadeer has made a number of public appearances and talked openly about her imprisonment and views about long-standing human rights abuses against the Uighur community in the XUAR.

Following the 11 September 2001 attacks in the USA, the Chinese authorities have used the international “war on terror” as a pretext to justify their political crackdown in the region. Over the last four years, Uighur nationalists who would formerly have been branded as “separatists” have increasingly been labelled “terrorists”.

Other exiled Uighur nationalists have also been branded publicly as ‘terrorists’ by the Chinese authorities who have not provided any credible evidence to substantiate these allegations. They include Dolkun Isa and Abdujelil Karakash, both working with Uighur non-governmental organizations in Germany, who were named on an list of eleven ‘terrorists’ issued by the Chinese Ministry of Public Security in December 2003.

In May 2005, the Chinese authorities publicly renewed their “Strike Hard” campaign in the region which continues to be aimed at the so-called “three evil forces” of “separatists, terrorists and religious extremists”. Amnesty International remains deeply concerned that the broad and vague wording of ‘crimes of endangering state security’ in the Criminal Law enable the authorities to detain, charge and imprison those engaged in the peaceful exercise of their human rights.