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### **China: Gross human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region must stop**

Amnesty International has gathered evidence of gross and systematic human rights violations in the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang (XUAR) in western China, which until now have gone virtually unnoticed by the international community.

In a new 92-page report, the organization documents a pattern of arbitrary and summary executions, torture, arbitrary detention and unfair political trials – abuses committed mainly against the Uighurs, the majority ethnic group among the predominantly Muslim local population.

“The abuses documented by Amnesty International bear testimony to intense repression in the XUAR. What we have uncovered may only be the tip of the iceberg given the Chinese government’s restrictions on information and access,” the organization said.

“Against a backdrop of economic marginalisation, social disadvantage and curbs on political and religious freedoms, Uighur people are also the victims of state violence, from torture to arbitrary and summary execution.”

“The international community cannot stand by and remain silent in the face of these violations, particularly as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights meets in Geneva.”

The report is based on a wide variety of sources, including former prisoners, relatives and friends of prisoners, official Chinese documents and statements, reports in the local and national media, scholarly research and publications from academics and experts on the region, reports from Uighurs and foreign nationals of various professions.

The XUAR is the only region of China where political prisoners are known to have been executed in recent years. Since January 1997, Amnesty International has recorded 210 death sentences and 190 executions, mostly of Uighurs convicted of subversive or terrorist activities after unfair and often summary trials. The ratio of death sentences to the population is several times higher in the XUAR than elsewhere in China.

The report also documents the cases of about 200 political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, arrested during the 1990s and believed to be still detained or imprisoned. Thousands have been arbitrarily detained in recent years and many are believed to remain imprisoned. Arbitrary arrests continue.

Torture of political prisoners in the XUAR is reported to be systematic. Some have been tortured with particularly cruel methods which, to Amnesty International’s knowledge, are not being used elsewhere in China. This includes the insertion of horse hair into the penis, or a special wire with small spikes which fold flat when inserted but extend when it is pulled out. According to former political prisoners, such methods of sexual torture have been used in the region for many years.

In the XUAR, as elsewhere in China, political trials are a mere formality as the verdict is usually pre-determined by the political authorities. Few defendants have access to lawyers. Some political prisoners are taken to “public sentencing rallies” - show trials attended by hundreds or

thousands of people - during which their sentences are announced. In all cases documented by Amnesty International, the prisoners were reportedly tortured to force them to give incriminating information or to sign “confessions”.

Violence has increased in the XUAR in recent years in proportion to repression, curbs on fundamental freedoms and the erosion of the indigenous population’s economic, social and cultural rights. The Chinese government has responded with harsh repression to the growing unrest, blaming it on a “small number” of “separatists”, “terrorists” and “religious extremists” accused of having links with “foreign hostile forces” whose aim is to “split the motherland”.

An extensive campaign against “ethnic separatists” launched in 1996 imposed new restrictions on religious and cultural rights and resorted increasingly to executions, show trials and arbitrary detention to silence real and suspected opponents.

Official reports about “separatists and terrorists” obscure a more complex reality in which many who are not involved in violence have become victims of human rights violations. Over the years, Uighurs’ attempts to air their views or grievances and peacefully exercise their most fundamental human rights have been met with repression. The denial of legitimate channels for expressing grievances and discontent has led to outbursts of violence, including by people who are not involved in political opposition activities.

Amnesty International recognises the state’s duty to take the measures necessary to maintain law and order, but even in situations of internal strife, this must be exercised within the limits set by international human rights law. Killings by members of armed opposition groups can never provide justification for government forces to deliberately kill defenceless people or torture prisoners in police custody.

The organization is calling on the Chinese government to establish a special commission to investigate human rights violations and economic, social and cultural needs in the region, suggest remedial measures and provide a forum for individuals and groups to voice their grievances.

The Chinese authorities should immediately stop executions and take steps towards abolishing the death penalty. All reports of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners should be subject to independent and impartial investigations, victims and witnesses should be granted effective protection, and perpetrators of torture brought to justice. Those tried and sentenced on political grounds should have their cases reviewed and be granted new fair and open trial, or failing this, be released. All those arbitrarily detained or imprisoned should be released immediately and unconditionally.

“At the very time that the Chinese government is seeking praise for its signature of major human rights treaties, it is high time that it honoured these commitments by taking immediate action to remedy the appalling human rights situation in the XUAR,” Amnesty International said.

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**To receive a copy of the report, or to arrange an interview, please call Amnesty International’s press office in London, UK on +44 (0) 171 413 5566/5729 or mobile number +44 (0) 468 670 247. A B-roll (Beta) with footage highlighting the above concerns is available by calling +44 (0) 171 413 5977.**