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Web Feature

Remember the Gulja massacre? China's crackdown on peaceful protesters

Another Tiananmen-style crackdown on peaceful protesters happened 10 years ago. But this time, the Chinese authorities were able to keep the events hidden from the world.

Rebiya Kadeer, Nobel Peace Prize nominee, exposes the tragedy

I have never seen such viciousness in my life...military dogs were attacking peaceful demonstrators. Chinese soldiers were bludgeoning the demonstratorsbodies, some alive, others dead, were being dragged across the ground and dumped all together into dozens of army trucks.

Rebiya Kadeer describes scenes of footage taken at the bloody Gulja massacre on 5 February 1997 and subsequent days. She believes she was shown the footage by the prefectural police chief to intimidate her into stopping her investigation.

Watching the police footage, Rebiya Kadeer realized that this massacre had been another Tiananmen-style crackdown on peaceful protesters. But this time, the Chinese authorities were able to keep the events hidden from the world.

I am speaking out so that we do not forget those who lost their lives in Gulja and to call for accountability on the part of the Chinese authorities.

- Rebiya Kadeer

Ten years later, Rebiya continues to tell the story of the massacre in Gulja; and she continues to fight for the rights of China's mainly Muslim Uighur community who have been systematically persecuted since the 1980s.

Read Rebiya's vivid testimony on the immediate aftermath of the Gulja massacre [\[Link to ASA 17/001/2007\]](#)

Rebiya Kadeer, nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, is a Uighur human rights activist and former prisoner of conscience. In November 2006, she was also elected president of the World Uighur Congress (WUC) in Munich. She lives in exile in the US.

In 1999, before her sentencing to eight years in prison on charges of "'leaking state secrets'", Rebiya was a prominent businesswoman and member of the Chinese National People's Congress. After nearly six years, she was released from prison on medical parole in March 2005 and allowed to leave China.

While still in custody, Rebiya was warned that if she engaged with members of the Uighur ethnic community or spoke publicly about "sensitive issues" after her release, her "businesses and children will be finished". Despite numerous threats, she continued her human rights work.

Consequently, Rebiya's family members who stayed in China were targeted by the Chinese authorities. In November 2006, three of her sons were made to pay heavy fines on politically motivated charges. One of them received a prison sentence of seven years after he was reported to have been severely beaten, with risk of further torture or ill-treatment.

Take action! [\[http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170602006\]](http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170602006)

Uighur community

Uighur's are a mainly Muslim ethnic minority who are concentrated primarily in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Since the 1980s, the Uighurs have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations. This includes arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights. Uighur political prisoners have been executed after unfair trials.

In recent years, China has exploited the international "'war on terror'" to suppress the Uighurs, labelling them

“terrorists”, “separatists”, or “religious extremists”.

Gulja massacre

On 5 February 1997, peaceful demonstrations took place in the city of Gulja (Yining) in XUAR.

Hundreds, possibly thousands, lost their lives or were seriously injured. Large numbers of people were arrested during the demonstrations and their aftermath. Many detainees were beaten or otherwise tortured. An unknown number remain unaccounted for.

During the crackdown, the Uighur community living in the XUAR was targeted. [Read more \[http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170052005\]](http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170052005)

According to local sources, the demonstration was sparked by growing levels of repression of Uighur culture and religion in and around Gulja. This included the banning of traditional Uighur social gatherings, called *meshreps*, which were organised from 1994 in an attempt to revive cultural and Islamic traditions. Uighur community leaders in and around Gulja also organised local Uighur football teams in an unofficial league, but these were also closed down by the authorities and sports facilities were destroyed.

Take action now!

- 1) **Join the global vigil**
Commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Gulja massacre, join the vigil in front of Chinese Embassies/Consulates on 5 February 2007. [Contact your nearest Amnesty International office for more information \[http://web.amnesty.org/contacts/engindex\]](http://web.amnesty.org/contacts/engindex)
- 2) **Free Uighur writer Muhammed Tohti Metrozi** [\[LINK to page in Feb issue of Wire\]](#)
- 3) **Family members of Rebiya Kadeer are still being targeted by the Chinese authorities - [Join the Urgent Action network \[http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170602006\]](http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170602006)**

Uighur demonstrators face the police, Gulja, 5 February 1997.

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Rebiya Kadeer is greeted with flowers as she is reunited with her family in the USA after her release from prison in China.

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