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ORAL STATEMENT

Item 4 General Debate: Situations that require the attention of the Human Rights Council

UN Human Rights Council
Fortieth session
25 February – 22 March 2019

Mr. President,

Amnesty International is deeply concerned by serious human rights violations ongoing in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (“Xinjiang”) in China, and the refusal of the Chinese authorities to allow unrestricted access to independent human rights monitors.

In September, we called on the Chinese authorities to provide credible answers to questions about the recent crackdown, which has seen the mass internment of up to one million Uighurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities, as well as intrusive surveillance, political indoctrination and forced cultural assimilation.

Amnesty International’s research found that individuals sent to these camps are not put on trial and have no access to lawyers. We have received reports of torture and other ill-treatment in these detention facilities, including verbal abuse, food deprivation, solitary confinement, beatings and use of restraints and stress positions, as well as a number of deaths.

In the face of mounting evidence of a campaign of mass internment, arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment in Xinjiang, the Chinese government finally acknowledged the camps’ existence in late 2018, but continue to claim they are merely “vocational training centres.”

If the situation is as positive as the Chinese government claims, why do they continue to block access to the UN and independent human rights monitors?

We urge States at this Council to mandate a UN Fact Finding Mission to investigate the situation and separate facts from fiction.

Mr. President,

While we collectively celebrated International Women's Day last week, we note that Syrian women have been largely excluded at the national, regional and international levels from discussions that would allow them to speak publicly about their experiences and take positions of influence in decision-making and negotiations processes. In some rounds of negotiations, such as in Astana, there have been no female delegates at all among the negotiating teams meeting to discuss local agreements such as ceasefires and release of detainees and abductees. Most recently, in the Geneva-led peace process, women only formed 15% of the negotiating team, mainly serving as advisors who were excluded from the formal negotiation meetings. We urge all actors genuinely interested in working in forging a sustainable end to the conflict in Syria to ensure that Syrian women have a meaningful and proportionate seat at the very tables where the future of their country is being negotiated.

Mr. President,

We urge all states to renew and support the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran and, urge the Iranian authorities to cooperate with the mandate. Moreover, we urge all states, including through the Human Rights Council, to address an issue that, while current, has been overlooked for far too long: the ongoing mass enforced disappearances and secret extrajudicial executions in 1988 of thousands of political dissidents. These enforced disappearances continue to cause untold suffering and anguish to the victims' families, and families also face ongoing intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other ill-treatment for gathering at mass grave sites, holding commemorations, and seeking truth and justice. These unresolved crimes of systematic and widespread nature amount to ongoing crimes against humanity. Ironically, many of the perpetrators involved continue to hold positions of power, including in key judicial, prosecutorial and government bodies responsible for ensuring that victims receive justice for these ongoing crimes against humanity. Iran is facing a crisis of impunity; action by the international community is urgently needed to: disclose the truth; protect the survivors, including families of victims and others seeking justice; immediately stop the destruction of evidence, including through the destruction of graves of victims; and document and investigate the crimes and preserve evidence.

Thank you, Mr. President.