

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **China: Amnesty International calls for release of businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer and other Uighur prisoners of conscience**

On Sunday 11 August, ethnic Uighur businesswoman, Rebiya Kadeer will have been detained for exactly three years simply for sending newspapers to her husband in the USA. She is believed to be in poor health and Amnesty International is once again calling for her to be freed together with all other prisoners of conscience in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Following her detention on 11 August 1999, Rebiya Kadeer was charged with 'providing secret information to foreigners'. She was convicted and sentenced to eight years in prison in March 2000. Her only 'crime' was to send publicly available newspapers to her husband in the United States.

"Rebiya Kadeer is a prisoner of conscience and should be released immediately and unconditionally," Amnesty International said.

This month Amnesty International also issued an international appeal for the release of Uighur historian, Tohti Tunyaz (who writes as Tohti Muzart). Like Rebiya Kadeer, he was detained on 'state secrets' charges after carrying out academic research into Uighur history in the XUAR. He was arrested in February 1998 and sentenced to 11 years in prison in March 1999 for "inciting separatism" and "illegally acquiring state secrets".

Prisons in the XUAR are notoriously harsh, with poor food, inadequate sanitation, and poor standards of medical treatment. Rebiya Kadeer's health has reportedly deteriorated over the last few months.

"If the Chinese authorities are not prepared to free Rebiya Kadeer unconditionally, they could at least consider releasing her on medical grounds for humanitarian reasons," Amnesty International added.

Political repression has increased over the last year in the context of the "strike hard" campaign against crime launched in April 2001, which in the XUAR has been targeted at so-called "religious extremists" and "ethnic separatists".

The crackdown in the region has intensified further since the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, with pro-independence supporters being branded as 'separatists' or 'terrorists'. Uighurs, who are predominantly Muslim, have been the main target:- mosques have been closed down, Islamic clergy have

been detained, and Uighur books have been burnt. Freedom of expression and association have been severely restricted and thousands of people remain imprisoned across the region as political prisoners or prisoners of conscience.

"Jailing community leaders and intellectuals on trumped up 'state secrets' charges and repressing Uighur culture has nothing to do with combatting 'terrorism'," Amnesty International said. "It is a systematic denial of basic human rights."

For further information, on the case of Rebiya Kadeer, please see :  
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/action/special/kadeer.html>

For further information on the case of Tohti Tunyaz, please see:  
"China: Uighur historian behind bars" at: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For further information on repression in XUAR, please see:  
<http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/asa170102002>

#### Public Document

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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