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China must show Xinjiang trials were fair

Amnesty International today called on the Chinese authorities to show that none of those tried in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region for “endangering state security” were punished for simply exercising their freedom of expression.

The Chinese authorities today announced 376 cases were tried in 2010 for “endangering state security”, including some connected with the protests and violence in the region’s capital, Urumqi, in July 2009.

Catherine Baber, Asia-Pacific Deputy Director at Amnesty International, said:

"The Chinese authorities need to demonstrate that the individuals tried in the 376 cases in 2010 for “endangering state security” in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region received fair trials and were not punished for simply exercising their freedom of expression."

"According to information obtained by Amnesty International, many Uighurs have been punished with harsh sentences for "endangering state security", when they did nothing more than grant interviews to the media or post articles to the internet."

Background

The figures announced by the Chinese today do not include break-downs for the number of individuals executed, sentenced to death, or sentenced to life imprisonment or long prison terms. The government has provided little information regarding the identity of the individuals tried, or the charges and sentences against them.

It is difficult to come by information regarding the trials through public sources. In many cases even family members of defendants are neither informed in a timely fashion nor able to attend the trials.

Individuals, such as Hairat Niyaz, a Uighur journalist, who was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, have been charged and sentenced for "endangering state security" for nothing more than exercising their freedom of expression, including giving interviews to the media and posting articles on the internet regarding the unrest of July 2009 in Urumqi.

Amnesty International calls on the Chinese authorities to conduct trials according to international fair trial standards, including allowing defendants to hire lawyers of their own choosing, allowing them access to their family and lawyers, and informing family members in a timely fashion of detentions, charges and trials.

Since the events of July 2009 the Chinese authorities have not allowed for an independent investigation into the violence, including the possible excessive use of force by the security forces against peaceful protesters.