

URGENT ACTION

HEALTH CONCERNS FOR JAILED UYGHUR MUSICIAN

Yashar, a Uyghur songwriter and musician, is currently serving a three-year prison sentence for creating music and possessing books in Uyghur language. There are serious concerns about his health in detention, as he suffers from bronchitis and requires regular medication. Convicted of “promoting extremism” and “illegally possessing extremist materials” on 20 June 2024, Yashar endures unjust imprisonment for expressing his cultural identity.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Party Secretary of Xinjiang
Ma Xingrui
479 Zhongshan Lu, Tianshan Qu, Urumqi,
830041, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region,
People's Republic of China

Copy to: Chinese Embassy in Your Country

Dear Secretary Ma,

I am writing to express alarm over the conviction on 20 June 2024 of **Yashar (Yaxia'er Xiaohelaiti 亚夏尔·肖合拉提)**, a Uyghur songwriter and musician. The court determined that, for creating music and reading literature in his native Uyghur language, he was guilty of “promoting extremism” and “illegally possessing extremist materials”. He is currently serving a three-year sentence in Wusu Prison, Xinjiang.

My distress is heightened by concerns that this ongoing imprisonment places Yashar’s health at real risk of deterioration. Already suffering from bronchitis, and requiring regular medication, it is unknown whether he is receiving the medical attention he requires.

I fear that Yashar’s case reflects the ongoing targeting of Uyghur cultural expression with vague “extremism” charges. Yashar’s music and his possession of Uyghur-language books are reported as the sole basis for his conviction. Many Uyghurs view these books as essential to understanding their history and identity, making their classification as problematic or even “extremist” highly concerning.

This is not Yashar’s first time being unjustly detained; he was held in custody for three weeks following his peaceful participation in White Paper Movement (白纸运动) demonstrations in Chengdu in November 2022. But it is clear that now, Yashar is being punished solely for exercising his right to enjoy his own culture and to freely express his views.

I urge you to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Yaxia'er Xiaohelaiti, also known as Yashar;
- Provide him with regular and adequate medical care, and ensure he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment;
- Ensure that Uyghur artists can express their identity without fear of persecution or arbitrary detention.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Yashar, whose full name in Mandarin is Yaxia'er Xiaohelaiti, is a 26-year-old Uyghur songwriter. He was residing in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, before his detention on 11 August 2023 by municipal authorities. Authorities charged him with “promoting extremism” and “illegally possessing extremist materials reportedly for his music, published on the Internet, and his possession of Uyghur-language books. Many of these books are regarded by Uyghurs as classic literature essential to understanding their history and culture. His sentencing on 20 June 2024 highlights the ongoing repression of Uyghurs for engaging in cultural expression.

On 27 November 2022, he was detained in Chengdu on charges of “gathering a crowd to disrupt the social order” because of his participation in the White Paper Movement and was released on bail after 21 days of detention.

About the White Paper Movement

On 24 November 2022, at least 10 people died in an apartment fire in the city of Urumqi, northwest China. They were reportedly prevented from escaping due to strict covid-19 controls.

The tragedy sparked an outpouring of anger and emotion. Across China, people took to the streets in numbers not seen for decades – many holding up blank sheets of paper to symbolize systematic censorship by the Chinese government – and the White Paper (sometimes also referred to as the “A4”) protest movement quickly spread overseas.

About Xinjiang/the Uyghur Region

Xinjiang is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in China. More than half of the region’s population of 22 million people belong to mostly Turkic and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, including Uyghurs (around 11.3 million), Kazakhs (around 1.6 million) and other populations whose languages, cultures and ways of life vary distinctly from those of the Han ethnic group, who comprise the vast majority in China.

Since 2017, under the guise of a campaign against “terrorism” and “religious extremism”, the government of China has carried out massive and systematic abuses against Muslims living in Xinjiang. It is estimated that over a million people have been arbitrarily detained in internment camps throughout Xinjiang since 2017.

China’s vague definitions of extremism have allowed for widespread targeting of Uyghur individuals who peacefully express their cultural identity, often without transparent legal processes. Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have documented systematic abuses against Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), including arbitrary detentions, torture, and undue restrictions on cultural practices under counter-terrorism laws.

In August 2022, the OHCHR released a [long-awaited report](#) reinforcing previous findings by Amnesty International and others that the extent of arbitrary and discriminatory detention and treatment of Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslims in Xinjiang may constitute crimes under international law, in particular crimes against humanity and recommending concrete steps to address the situation. In August 2024, marking two years since their report was published, the OHCHR issued a statement emphasising that “many problematic laws and policies remain in place” in China, despite these recommendations.

The government of China continues to classify books on Uyghur history, culture and identity as “extremist,” and restrictions on Uyghurs, including artists and cultural figures, are enforced with little to no transparency, redress or accountability. The chilling effect on Uyghur artists, writers and scholars is severe, and the fear of persecution leads to widespread self-censorship within the community.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Chinese, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 March 2025

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Yaxia'er Xiaohelaiti / 亚夏尔·肖合拉提 or “Yashar” (he/him/his)