

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED UIGHUR HAS NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

Hankezi Zikeli, who is detained in a “transformation-through-education” centre in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), is believed to have suffered a nervous breakdown in the camp. An aunt of Gulchehra Hoja, a Washington based journalist, Hankezi Zikeli is one of 25 relatives who have been detained since January 2018. Without any access to a lawyer, there are grave fears that they are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

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

Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Chen Quanguo
479 Zhongshan Lu
Wulumuqi Shi, Xinjiang
People's Republic of China

Dear Secretary Chen,

Hankezi Zikeli, 64, has suffered a nervous breakdown after having been detained in a “transformation-through-education” centre in Urumqi since February 2018. She is an aunt of Gulchehra Hoja, a Washington-based Radio Free Asia Uyghur Service journalist, and one of her 25 relatives who have been detained now for more than one year.

According to a relative in the XUAR, who was told by a local police officer, Hankezi Zikeli has not spoken for several months and spends her day staring at the ceiling.

Gulchehra Hoja learned in early 2018 that her relatives had all been detained in “transformation-through-education” centres in Urumqi and Yili in the XUAR after being linked to a WeChat group with her. Other than this distressing news about her aunt, Hankezi Zikeli, Gulchehra Hoja has had no updates about the situation of her brother Kaiser Keyum and other relatives.

We are extremely worried about Hankezi Zikeli and Gulchehra Hoja's other relatives' safety in the facilities as they do not have access to a lawyer of their own choice or their family members, and thus they are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

Therefore, we call on you Secretary Chen to:

- immediately and unconditionally release Hankezi Zikeli, along with all Gulchehra Hoja's other relatives, unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that they have committed an internationally recognized offence and are granted a fair trial in line with international standards;*
- ensure that Hankezi Zikeli and Gulchehra Hoja's other relatives are not subjected to any torture or other ill-treatment and have regular and unrestricted access to a lawyer of their choice and are able to communicate with family members and others, including with family members living in other countries, without interference unless justified in line with international human rights law.*

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Gulchehra Hoja is one of the most well-known Uighur journalists, having been a star of a children's program in the 1990's and then later working for Xinjiang TV. Since moving to the USA about 18 years ago, she has worked at Radio Free Asia's Uyghur Service, which is one of the only outlets providing independent news about the situation in the XUAR. Independent reporting in the XUAR is extremely difficult, and foreign reporters face numerous restrictions and harassment by the authorities. According to the Foreign Correspondents' Club of China's annual report for working conditions in China from 2017, 73% of foreign correspondents who took the FCCC's survey who travelled to the XUAR in 2017 were told by officials and security agents that reporting was prohibited or restricted, compared with 42% in 2016.

Following the news of Gulchehra Hoja's family, it was reported by the Washington Post on 28 February 2018 that three other journalists at Radio Free Asia's Uighur service faced the same situation, with their family members in the XUAR detained in apparent retaliation for their relatives' overseas journalism. Gulchehra Hoja's parents were also among her detained relatives. They were released shortly afterwards in March 2018 but remain under surveillance.

While Uighurs and other predominately Muslim ethnic minorities in the XUAR have long suffered violations of their rights to freedom of religion and association and other human rights, over the past year or more, authorities have engaged in an unprecedented crackdown targeting them. Techniques of repression include the widespread use of arbitrary detention, technological surveillance, heavily armed street patrols, security checkpoints and an array of intrusive policies violating human rights.

There have been numerous reports that Chinese authorities in the XUAR have effectively sidestepped the procedural protections afforded to criminal defendants under Chinese law. Many Uighur detainees have been denied legal counsel, and in addition to the widespread use of administrative detention, there are reports that in some places police have been given the authority to directly sentence individuals to prison terms, bypassing the courts.

Testimonies collected by Amnesty International, media reports as well as information gathered by Amnesty International, indicate that in the spring of 2017, authorities throughout the region began detaining Uighurs en masse, and started sending them to administrative detention facilities or sentencing them to long prison terms. This crackdown has not only been applied to Uighurs, but to other predominantly Muslim ethnicities, such as Kazakhs, and Kyrgyzs.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Chinese, English.
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 May 2019
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Hankezi Zikeli (she/her)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/7964/2018/en/>