

URGENT ACTION

FIVE UYGHURS STILL AT RISK OF FORCED RETURN

After Thai authorities forcibly returned 40 Uyghur refugees to China on 27 February, five other Uyghur refugees are at risk of being forcibly returned to China where they would be at real risk of serious human rights violations. The men had travelled to Thailand in 2014 fleeing persecution, and the Thai government must uphold its obligations and ensure their rights, including to international protection.

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

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra
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Dear Prime Minister,

It is unconscionable that your government forcibly returned 40 ethnic Uyghur refugees to China on 27 February, in violation of Thailand's international human rights obligations and of the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the transfer of persons to any country or jurisdiction where they would face a real risk of serious human rights violations. I am concerned for the situation of an additional five Uyghur men imprisoned in Klong Prem Central Prison, Bangkok, who are themselves at risk of forcible return to China.

I am disturbed to learn that prior to deporting them, your government denied the 40 refugees their requests to have access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and have their protection needs assessed. The deported refugees had been held in prolonged arbitrary detention in conditions which amounted to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in immigration detention facilities designated for short-term stays, without access to adequate medical care, family, and lawyers.

I am saddened that the Thai government failed to protect these men, despite the recent enactment of domestic law prohibiting refoulement and the adoption of a newly created mechanism to screen individuals in need of international protection. I therefore urge you to show your commitment to upholding your international human rights obligations and take the following actions:

- *Ensure the five Uyghur men have access to a full, effective and fair procedure to assess their asylum claims; to adequate and appropriate medical care and lawyer of their choice; and commit to not forcibly returning them to China or to a third country from where they could be returned to China;*
- *Investigate the refoulement of 40 Uyghur men forcibly returned to China and ensure those found responsible are held to account in fair trials;*
- *End arbitrary detention of refugees and migrants and amend legislation and regulations in line with international standards accordingly.*

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The five men travelled to Thailand in March 2014, after fleeing persecution, discrimination, and other grave human rights violations in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Two of the men were children, aged 16 at the time. They were among more than 300 men, women, children, and elderly people who officials detained in two operations targeting presumed human smuggling camps in mid-March 2014. Officials transferred individuals to immigration detention centres under Thailand's Immigration Act, which allows for the indefinite detention of people who are in Thailand without official authorisation.

In June 2015, authorities had allowed 172 women and children from the group to travel to Turkey. In July 2015, Thailand breached its domestic and international human rights obligations, including the principle of non-refoulement, by facilitating the forcible return of 109 other Uyghur men, women and children to China, after their transfer by Thai officials to the custody of Chinese officials in July of that year. The individuals were forced onto a chartered flight to China by armed Chinese security personnel on 9 July 2015. At the time, Amnesty [decried the deportations](#) as "a despicable act, and illegal under international law". In 2020 the five men escaped from Mukdahan Immigration Office in North-eastern Thailand. They described oppressive conditions of detention, including crowding and damp as a reason for their escape. Authorities have sentenced them to terms of imprisonment until 2029 for escaping from detention. In light of the deportation of 40 Uyghurs in late February (see more below), there are concerns that authorities may grant them a pardon for the purposes of accelerating their deportation back to China.

Prior to their imprisonment, they, along with dozens of other Uyghurs detained with them, were unlawfully held for years without charge or trial under the Immigration Act, which does not define a maximum period for detention. They were held without an opportunity to have their protection needs assessed and without a judicial review mechanism or channel to review the necessity or proportionality of their detention. Their indefinite detention while in Immigration Detention Centres amounts to arbitrary detention, prohibited under international law. In addition, Amnesty has confirmed poor conditions of detention in the centres, including inconsistent and insufficient access to healthcare, which could amount to cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment. Five detained Uyghurs, including a three-year-old child and a newborn baby, have died while in custody.

In January 2025, Thai government officials had visited Uyghur refugees in Suan Phlu Immigration Centre and had reportedly pressured them to complete paperwork agreeing to deportation to China. Authorities subsequently denied the men access to officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency), who they had requested to meet to have their request for asylum processed. UN human rights experts, governments and members of civil society called on the Thai government to uphold its obligations not to engage in refoulement. Refoulement is also prohibited under Section 13 of Thailand's 2022 Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act, which states "No government organizations or public officials shall expel, deport, or extradite a person to another country where there are substantial grounds for believing that the person would be in danger of torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, or enforced disappearance." Regrettably, in the early hours of 27 February 2025, Thai authorities transported a group of 40 Uyghur men from Suan Phlu Immigration Detention Centre to Don Mueang Airport, where they apparently boarded a flight direct to Urumqi, China.

Amnesty International has raised concerns that new regulations in force in Thailand since 22 September 2023, which establish a National Screening Mechanism (NSM) to grant protected status to asylum seekers seeking protection from persecution, are discriminatory. As well as exempting migrant workers from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet, Nam, they further allow authorities to deny protection on "national security" grounds without being required to explain why the decision was made, which could further result in the exclusion of specific groups of refugees and asylum seekers, including Uyghur, Rohingya and North Koreans.

Amnesty International has documented massive and systematic abuses by the government of China against Uyghurs and other predominantly Muslims living in Xinjiang Autonomous Region, including in internment camps, where over a million people have been arbitrarily detained. Uyghurs have been subjected to severe restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly and religion, arbitrary detention, torture and other ill-treatment, unfair trials, executions, extrajudicial killings, and violations of economic, cultural, and social rights. Amnesty International has concluded that the Chinese government has committed at least the crimes against humanity of imprisonment, torture and persecution against Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups.

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

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 13 September 2025

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

NAME AND PRONOUN: Five Uyghur refugees at risk of forced return [him]

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/2065/2015/en/>