

# End Uyghur Forced Labour

This statement is delivered by Zumretay Arkin for the global Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region, comprising over 60 CSOs, investor organisations, and trade unions. Uyghur-led organisations comprise 35% of our Steering Committee.

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I will focus on the Government of China's compliance with its international human rights obligations regarding its extensive and systematic perpetration of forced labour against Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples.

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All information is based on an extensive body of evidence, gathered in part by members and allies of the Coalition and including findings by the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery and the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, that aspects of this treatment may constitute crimes against humanity.<sup>1</sup> I personally have heard countless stories from family members, friends, and survivors who have been impacted by these human rights abuses.

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## **State sponsored programmes of forced labour**

The Government of China has continued to perpetrate forced labour on a widespread and systematic scale in the Uyghur Region and other regions of China targeting the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples on the basis of their religion and ethnicity, and subjecting them to widespread restrictions and repression of fundamental freedoms.<sup>2</sup> Uyghur and other Turkic workers are often subject to invasive surveillance, monitoring, restrictions on freedom of movement, and other measures on the basis of their ethnicity in the workplace.<sup>3</sup>

There is substantive evidence<sup>4</sup> that the Government of China is subjecting or has subjected the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples to

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<sup>1</sup> Additional reports can be found here: <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/home/reports/>

<sup>2</sup> Committee on the Application of Standards, 9 June 2022. Conclusions on individual cases 12 to 22 - 10 June 2022, CAN/PV.CCL, p.14, [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_norm/--relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_848055.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/--relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_848055.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

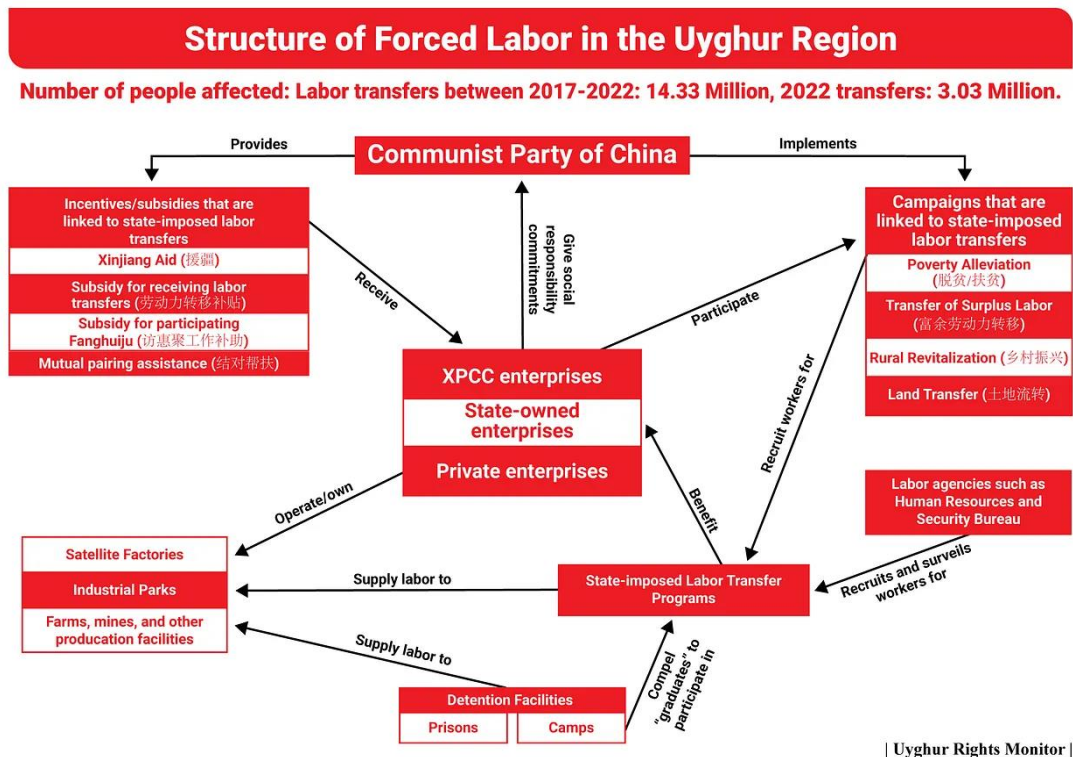
<sup>4</sup> The arbitrary mass detention of an estimated range of 1 million to 1.8 million people and a program to "cleanse" ethnic minorities of their "extremist" thoughts through re-education and forced labour. This involves both detainee labour inside internment camps and multiple forms of involuntary labour at workplaces across the region and even in other parts of China.

state-imposed forced labour through various state-sponsored programmes including so-called “poverty alleviation”, “vocational training”, “re-education through labour” and “deextremification” focused on eliminating Uyghur culture and religious practices.<sup>5</sup> Resistance to participation in these programmes is seen as a sign of extremism and may be punishable with imprisonment.

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## Government sponsored labour transfers

The government of the Uyghur Region claimed to have conducted millions of transfers into state-sponsored programmes between 2020 and 2023. Estimates of the number of Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples forcibly transferred through these programmes range from 2.6 million in 2020 to over 3 million in 2022.<sup>6</sup>



This is part of a state-sponsored ‘transfer-of-labour’ scheme in which participating companies open satellite factories inside the Uyghur Region or hire Uyghur workers for their factories outside the Region. Implicated sectors include, but are not limited to,

<sup>5</sup> Research organisations, including the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the Worker Rights Consortium, the Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice at Sheffield Hallam University, and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and investigative journalists from The Wall Street Journal, the BBC Associated Press, The New York Times, The Globe and Mail, ABC Australia, Radio Free Asia, Reuters and other outlets have documented specific cases of forced labour in the apparel and textile industry, including in gloves and shoe manufacturing, in PPE production, in the solar industries, in the automotive industry, in electronics, in hair products and in tomato processing in the Uyghur Region and wider China.

<sup>6</sup> Some people may have been transferred more than once.

cotton and garments, electronics, automobile, and seafood. A recent investigation into the seafood industry found evidence of labour transfers as recent as April 2023.<sup>7</sup>

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### **Forced labour and internment**

The Government's so-called public re-education policy has placed many Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples in internment centres. Internees were later released to factories in nearby industrial parks or camp factories. The exact number of former detainees who have been coerced into working in a factory is not known; estimates from interviews and government statements indicate **hundreds of thousands** of people forced to work in garment and textile factories alone.

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### **Forced Labour in the UPR**

During its 3rd cycle Review, China received and supported labour-related recommendations that were not region-specific,<sup>8</sup> and recommendations to fully respect the rights of ethnic minorities, including in the Uyghur Region.

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20 recommendations on the situation in the Uyghur Region were only noted, along with those on access to the Region by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN special procedures.

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### **At the ILO**

The Government of China has ratified two ILO Conventions on forced labour as recommended during the last UPR cycle, though not the Protocol to the Forced Labour Convention.

Yet last year the ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards selected China for special review under Convention 111 on Discrimination, and in conclusion "deplored the use of all repressive measures against the Uyghur people..."

This included grave concern at the Government's efforts to impose "deradicalization" responsibilities on employers' and workers' organisations.

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<sup>7</sup> The Outlaw Ocean Project, "The Uyghurs Forced to Process the World's Fish", October 9, 2023: <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/china-the-superpower-of-seafood/the-uyghurs-forced-to-process-the-worlds-fish/>

<sup>8</sup> 3 28.246, Angola; 28.247, Mozambique.

## Arbitrary detention

A 2022 Opinion by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention found a "systemic problem with arbitrary detention in China" amounting "to a serious violation of international law."<sup>9</sup> It has found arbitrary detention in the cases of various Uyghur people.

For example, the quasi-governmental Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), administers its own prison system and factories and reportedly forces detainees to harvest and produce cotton, among other activities.<sup>10</sup> Evidence from the Citizen Power Initiative suggests that imprisoned people are responsible for the manufacture of textiles, apparel and footwear.<sup>11</sup>

Yet in the third cycle, the Government *supported* one recommendation on the rights of all detainees and only *noted* those on the detention of Turkic/Muslim-majority peoples.

No steps have been seen to address this since the third cycle.

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## Business and Human Rights

The Government supported several 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle recommendations on business and human rights, yet has continued to intensively develop industries in the Uyghur Region.

Government policies incentivise business participation, including via subsidies for those that make use of forced labour from the Uyghur Region.<sup>12</sup>

The breadth of the forced labour policy creates the risk of forced labour at virtually any workplace, industrial or agricultural, in the Uyghur Region.

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<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Council Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, 'Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention at its ninety-fourth session, 29 August–2 September 2022 – Opinion No. 41/2022 concerning Qin Yongpei (China)' A/HRC/WGAD/2022/41 (28 September 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Zenz (June 5, 2022). "Unemployment Monitoring and Early Warning: New Trends in Xinjiang's Coercive Labor Placement Systems," Jamestown Foundation China Brief Volume: 22 Issue: 11. Online: <https://jamestown.org/program/unemployment-monitoring-and-early-warning-new-trends-in-xinjiangs-coercive-labor-placement-systems/>. See also Amy Lehr and Mariefaye Bechrakis (October 16, 2019). "Connecting the Dots in Xinjiang: Forced Labor, Forced Assimilation, and Western Supply Chains," Center for Strategic & International Studies.

<sup>11</sup> Lianchao Han, Cotton: The Fabric Full of Lies: A report on forced and prison labor in Xinjiang, China, and the nexus to global supply chains (CPIFC Monograph Series Book 2) (p. 4). Citizen Press.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Lehr and Mariefaye Bechrakis (October 16, 2019). "Connecting the Dots in Xinjiang: Forced Labor, Forced Assimilation, and Western Supply Chains," Center for Strategic & International Studies.

26 Sheffield Hallam University, Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, 'Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region: The Evidence', Issue Brief 1 (April 2023) <https://www.shu.ac.uk/-/media/home/research/helena-kennedy-centre/projects/evidence-briefs/1-forced-labor-in-the-uyghur-region-the-evidence.pdf>.

## Recommendations

We urge States to consider making the following recommendations to the Government of China:

- Swiftly bring about the end of the systematic forced labour of Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim-majority workers.
- Implement the 2023 recommendations made by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including to immediately dismantle all systems of forced labour.
- Invite and ensure unhindered access for all special procedures who have requested a visit, including the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, the UN Working Group on business and human rights, and the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues.

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- Provide all victims of forced labour and wider human rights violations, including Uyghurs and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples, with adequate and effective remedies and reparation.<sup>13</sup>
- Immediately cease intimidation and reprisals against Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples who speak out about forced labour, both domestically and abroad, in line with the call of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Decision 1(108) of 2022.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law (2005), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation>

<sup>14</sup> UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Prevention of Racial Discrimination, Including Early Warning and Urgent Action Procedure, Decision 1(108)(23 November 2022), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cerd/decisions-statements-and-letters>.