

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 18, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C St NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to urge you to seek the immediate release of the Uyghur family members of our constituents, including Ziba Murat, Adalet Sabit, and Subi Yuksel, whose family members are detained forcibly or otherwise targeted by the CCP in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang), and who may be targets of harassment themselves. We also ask that the Department of State raise each of these cases at the highest levels of the Chinese government.

For years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has forcibly detained more than 1 million ethnic Uyghurs and minorities in internment camps in Xinjiang – a devastating assault on individual freedoms and basic human rights. The U.S. government and countless human rights organizations have documented the tools of oppression the Chinese government has deployed against Uyghur Muslims, including: abduction from third countries and forced disappearances within China, mass detentions, secret trials, forced labor, forced sterilization, separating families, banning the use of Uyghur language in schools, banning many religious practices, and political indoctrination.

The United States has rightly labeled the Chinese government's attempts to essentially erase the Uyghur identity as genocide and has sanctioned various Chinese officials who have perpetrated these crimes. Even so, the CCP's desire to punish those who speak against the crimes being committed in Xinjiang goes beyond the country's borders. As a 2021 Freedom House report notes, "China conducts the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world." For our constituents here in Virginia, the CCP's campaign of repression against Uyghur Muslims is personal and has often come as direct retaliation for their advocacy in support of the Uyghur community.

In September 2018, Ziba Murat's mother, Dr. Gulshan Abbas, a medical doctor who had spent her career caring for patients in Xinjiang, was detained, secretly tried, and then sentenced to 20 years in prison on phony charges. Dr. Abbas' detention occurred after Ms. Murat's aunt, Rushan Abbas – a former Radio Free Asia journalist – publicly denounced China's use of detention camps in Xinjiang. For more than three years after Dr. Abbas' imprisonment, the Chinese government refused to answer any questions about her whereabouts. To this day, the CCP refuses to disclose details about her physical well-being. Dr. Abbas is unjustly suffering the consequences of her family's public advocacy against the Chinese government's brutal treatment of Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang.

On April 29, 2017, Ms. Subi Yuksel's father, Mamat Abdullah, was arbitrarily detained on the day of his expected departure to the U.S. to visit his newborn grandchild. Mr. Abdullah, who is nearly 80 years old and was the Chief of the Xinjiang Forestry Department, had retired in 2008. During his trial in 2019, Mr. Abdullah was convicted – without evidence – of “bribery, two-facedness, and separatism,” and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Ms. Yuksel notes that Chinese officials told her family that they are at fault for Mr. Abdullah's detention because they live in the U.S. near “politically active communities.” Ms. Yuksel contends that in reality, in the eyes of the Chinese government, prominent and well-educated Uyghurs like her father are considered a threat to the regime.

The Chinese government has also targeted Ms. Adalet Sabit's husband, Abulimiti Abuliz, who is a Uyghur living in Xinjiang. Although Mr. Abuliz is not in an internment camp, the CCP has effectively banned him from travel. Following their marriage in 2017, Ms. Sabit left for the United States, and Mr. Abuliz expected to follow soon after. However, Chinese authorities seized his passport before his departure and never returned it, essentially barring him from leaving China for the last four years. CCP officials have also threatened Mr. Abduliz and told him that he would never see his wife again and never meet his now four-year-old daughter. The Chinese government has even threatened Ms. Sabit's family here in the U.S., signaling the CCP's desire to once again reach beyond China's borders to silence dissent.

The heartbreak these detentions and harassment have caused is immeasurable. We applaud the State Department's efforts to raise the plight of Uyghurs both publicly and with Chinese government officials directly. Similarly, we recognize that the agency continues to engage with our constituents on their respective cases. Still, it is vital that the U.S. maintain strong pressure on China to ensure that our constituents' family members are free and that their basic human rights are respected.

Virginia is home to one of the largest Uyghur American diasporas in the United States, and we will continue to advocate on behalf of these named cases, as well as those of other constituents. These are citizens and residents who are our neighbors and friends. While China attempts to whitewash its horrific crimes against Uyghur Muslims, including presently during the Olympics in Beijing, we must ensure that the world does not forget that one of worst atrocities of our era remains ongoing.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator