

### Item 3 – The World Uyghur Congress – Peter Irwin (speaker)

Mr. President,

I am speaking on behalf of the World Uyghur Congress to bring to the Forum's attention to the legal environment in which the Uyghur people in China currently find themselves as well as the response that police have had to the Uyghur community in general. Consistent denial of access to legal representation, family visits, medical care and adequately maintained detention facilities are all deep-rooted features of the criminal justice system from the perspective of the Uyghur community in particular.

Such broad differences in treatment between minority communities in China and the rest of the population signals a purposeful discriminatory policy that has effectively criminalized Uyghur life. Increasingly restrictive policies over the last decade (and increasing in intensity over the last two years) have seen Uyghurs detained and sentenced for crimes amounting to little more than quotidian religious practice and cultural expression.

The case of imprisoned Uyghur academic Ilham Tohti clearly illustrates many of the strict limitations on legal rights for Uyghurs. Tohti was imprisoned initially back in January 2014, on clearly exaggerated charges of separatism. Tohti was deprived of a lawyer for nearly six months while he waited in prison. He was also denied family visits as well as food for extended periods of time.

The Chinese criminal justice system generally is stacked against Uyghurs from the start. Arrests by police and security forces in 2014 doubled from the previous year to over 27,000 as a direct result of China's Strike Hard campaign aimed at rooting out terrorism. The campaign has had a paltry effect on stability.

New draft legislation on counter-terrorism has allowed police and security forces even wider berth to kill those *suspected* of committing crimes. Over the last two months, 28 people including women and children were killed by security forces, merely for their suspected role in violence that took place back in September.

Since 9/11, Chinese authorities have been steadfast in linking the Uyghur population in general to terrorism and violence. In the recent aftermath of the tragic events in Paris this month, state media published a rare article on the following day touting its success in rooting out terrorists. Such transparent exploitation of a tragedy sets a poor standard for its response and does little to ease tensions.

Discrimination has not been limited to China however as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan both consist of minority Uyghur populations as well. Uyghur community and political leaders have been targeted for surveillance and Uyghur television and newspapers have also been heavily restricted if not banned in some cases. The New Life newspaper was closed and a once active Uyghur research centre has been drastically reduced in size.

Eleven Uyghurs were killed on the Kyrgyz-China border in early 2014, but were later labelled militants despite no independent information being released. Kyrgyzstan has deported a number of Uyghur refugees fleeing China over the last decade along with Kazakhstan, who deported a Uyghur refugee back to China in 2011 against international law.

Persistent discrimination engrained in the Chinese criminal justice system only exacerbates tensions between Uyghurs and others. Stability *can* be achieved through respect and equal treatment, which will be beneficial for all parties.

Only through constructive dialogue can genuine progress be made, and that's something we urge China and all other UN member states and organizations to enter into as a first step.

Thank you.