

China denies violating Uighur minority rights amid detention claims

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UN panel says 1m ethnic Uighur Muslims being held in internment camps in Xinjiang

[China](#) has denied claims made during a UN panel last week that authorities are suppressing the rights of Muslim minorities in the west of the country in the name of fighting terrorism.

A Chinese delegation told a UN human rights panel on Monday that China has launched a “special campaign” to crack down on “extremist and terrorist crimes”, but no specific ethnic or religious groups were being targeted.

On Friday, a UN human rights panel said it had received credible reports that as many as 1 million ethnic Uighurs in [Xinjiang](#) were being held in indoctrination or “re-education” camps, where they can be kept indefinitely, without due process.

Hu Lianhe from China’s united front work department – an agency under the Communist party that focuses on China’s influence abroad – told the panel: “There is no such thing as re-education centres in Xinjiang.

“For those who are convicted of minor offences, we help and teach them in vocational skills in education and training centres, according to relevant laws. There is no arbitrary detention and torture.”

Ethnic violence and attacks have prompted a crackdown and an [intense militarisation of the western territory](#), home to 12 million Muslims, mostly ethnic Uighurs. Last year, [21% of all arrests in China](#) were in Xinjiang, a territory that accounts for about 1.5% of the country’s population, according to the advocacy group Chinese Human Rights Defenders.

[Human rights](#) advocates claim they are routinely detained in internment camps, prevented from travelling freely and arrested. Authorities have banned long beards, veils and Islamic robes.

The Chinese delegation said “wearing masked robes is also prohibited in many other countries in the world”, rejecting allegations that Xinjiang is the site of a “de-Islamisation” campaign.

“The Chinese government never links terrorism with any ethnic group or religion,” it claimed, adding that “those deceived by religious extremism ... shall be assisted by resettlement and re-education”.

The panel is the first time the issue of the camps in Xinjiang has been raised at the UN. Experts say such remarks from the organisation, seen as a neutral observer, will enable countries to raise the issue of Xinjiang with China, issue public statements, or discuss the possibility of sanctions.

On Monday, Chinese state media also defended the country’s “intense controls” in Xinjiang. The

state-run Global Times published [dual English and Chinese-language editorials](#) on Monday criticising western interference and defending its policies in the region.

In an editorial with the headline “Safeguarding Xinjiang’s peace and stability is the most important human right”, the Global Times said: “There is no doubt that intense control contributes to Xinjiang’s peace today. It’s a necessary stage guiding [Xinjiang] to peace and prosperity, and it will not last long.”

China’s statements mark a shift, from blanket denial of the camps’ existence and any use of discriminatory practices in Xinjiang, to justification.

“It is because of [the] party’s leadership, a powerful China, and local officials’ courage that Xinjiang has been pulled back from the brink of chaos. It has avoided becoming ‘China’s Syria’ or ‘China’s Libya’,” the paper wrote.

On Friday, Gay McDougall, a vice-chairwoman of the UN committee on the elimination of racial discrimination, told the panel: “We are deeply concerned at the many numerous and credible reports that we have received that, in the name of combating religious extremism and maintaining social stability, [China] has changed the Uighur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internship camp that is shrouded in secrecy, a sort of ‘no rights zone’.”

On Monday, in response to China’s rejection of those reports, McDougall said: “To say that they don’t violate rights of minorities does not prove anything. We have to [have] more than a denial of allegations.”

Lily Kuo

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