

Forced Labour & the Mandate for Response from the Australian Government

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Campaign For Uyghurs
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Background: About Campaign For Uyghurs

Campaign for Uyghurs is a Washington D.C.-based non-governmental organization that works to promote and advocate for the human rights and democratic freedoms for the Uyghurs and other Turkic people in East Turkistan (referred to in China as “Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region”). It mobilizes individuals and the international community and builds bridges to take action on behalf of and to raise public awareness of the Uyghur issue with a special focus on Uyghur women and youth, and to activate persons and entities to work together to stop the systematic human rights abuses against the Uyghur people.

Submission:

The Chinese regime is currently carrying out genocide of the Uyghurs, as has been confirmed by the U.S. State Department and the Subcommittee on International Human Rights in Canadian Parliament. Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party continues to carry out its oppressive brutal actions against Tibetans, Mongolians, and the brave citizens of Hong Kong. Since the first construction of the concentration camps in 2014, the international community has watched and waited, sifting through the Chinese Communist Party’s rapidly changing narratives concerning the use of these facilities. First, the Chinese authorities denied the existence of the camps. Later, they acknowledged the facilities, but labeled them as vocational training centres. When purchase orders showed mass quantities of pepper spray, handcuffs, and materials not associated with a school environment, the Chinese regime continued to deny human rights abuses. The Chinese regime has continued to lash out at all criticism while neglecting to address the proof of their crimes against humanity. This also in spite of the leaked documents which attest to Xi Jinping’s vision for “absolutely no mercy” for the Uyghurs.

Xi Jinping’s ability to conceal and mislead the international community about the nature of the camps has been reiterated in how the Chinese Communist Party misled the international community about the deadly virus, which has resulted in enormous financial loss and a catastrophic number of deaths. Additionally, the Chinese authorities have consistently sought to bully and bribe as the primary means of diplomacy, as is apparent in the case of recent diplomatic relations with Australia. As such, further compliance with China without acknowledging its crimes is not only morally reprehensible, but foolish, for the nations that choose to continue to believe that China at present can be a reliable international partner.

As has been shown via continually mounting evidence, these human rights atrocities are not simply confined to the sphere of China's domestic affairs, rather, many international corporations are complicit in using Uyghur slave labor from China's concentration camps. Addressing the attempts to export slavery worldwide as an acceptable form of profit is not an issue of interfering in China's domestic affairs, as Chinese leaders often assert.

Most particularly jarring is the normalization of literal slavery in connection with genocide that is occurring. As a recent report by Dr. Adrian Zenz revealed, in 2018 alone, 3 Uyghur regions moved at least 570,000 individuals to pick cotton as part of coerced labor schemes. With the additional reality that 1 in 5 cotton garments worldwide can be traced back to the Uyghur region, this leaves the implications of the cotton industry alone to be enormous. Additionally, many other corporations and industries are likewise complicit.

As early as 2018, reputable auditing firms have begun to refuse to inspect in the region. The political environment also ensures that there can be no transparency in interviewing workers. Another point which bears reminding is that forced labor is not confined to the Uyghur region alone. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic in China, Uyghur youth were moved en masse into factories across China proper. As such, addressing forced labor connections in the Uyghur homeland is a strong start, but not the end all in terms of necessary action.

The repeat of the most jarring aspects of history cannot be ignored. Ignoring the human cost of these atrocities is not an option for any country which desires to cultivate a civilized democratic society. It is overwhelmingly clear that Australia must swiftly address its own complicity in such horrific genocidal crimes, and act to protect the moral authority and sovereignty of the Australian government.

As millions of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic peoples began to disappear in 2017, Australia and the international community have been slow to respond. History is not kind to those who choose complicity in crimes against humanity, and consumers do not want their purchases to come at the expense of Uyghur blood, sweat, and tears.

It is our recommendation, therefore, that the Australian Parliament pass the proposed customs amendment bill as is. We also wish to place this action in context by providing a list of other actions that the government should seek to swiftly implement as far more is needed:

- a) Immediate review of current trade agreements with China to ban commodities and products produced with forced labour, including those outside of the Uyghur region.
- b) Identify additional means of strengthening customs mechanisms to more efficiently identify and seize products entering Australia which are produced with forced labour.
- c) Legislation should be enacted to require that Australian companies develop corporate policies to ensure no Uyghur slave labor in their supply chains. The Australian government should also require that corporations conduct corporate education sessions in partnership with governmental or non-governmental organizations in order to develop responsible corporate environments that are equipped to recognize and address potential complicity in genocidal crimes.
- d) Australia should enact legislation similar to that of the U.S. Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, and should implement Magnitsky sanctions against Chinese government officials who are connected with these labour schemes, including members of the XPCC
- e) Identify additional strategic means of pressuring China into accepting conventions on forced labour.
- f) Concurrent with other actions, implement means of incentivizing Australian companies to end contracts with Chinese suppliers and move their operations/exports to target democratic countries, such as Taiwan.
- g) Australian officials should decline to participate in the 2022 Olympics to be held in Beijing, and should enact regulations to prevent Australian corporations from sponsoring the games while concentration camps are

being used to funnel coerced labour into factories across China, many of which supply global brands.

- h) Parliament should enact legislation requiring the immediate closure of Confucius Institutes, rebranded as “Ministry of Education Centres for Language Education and Cooperation”, which are funded by the Chinese Communist Party and served as their soft power to spread ideologies and false narratives that normalizes the use of forced labour as “poverty alleviation”.
- i) The Australian government should adjust verbiage to accurately reflect the nature of the situation, i.e. using terminology to label these crimes as in connection with genocide.
- j) The Australian government should also exert pressure on the U.N. to immediately strip China of its participatory status on the U.N. Human Rights Council Panel and require immediate, unfiltered access to the entire XUAR in order to perform independent, unescorted investigations of the camps and factories suspected of using Uyghur forced labor.

In conclusion, the customs amendment is an important step that is overdue and may be considered scratching the surface of a larger problem which is the Chinese regime’s expansionist, imperialist agenda which crushes all forms of dissent, including here in Australia.

We encourage the swift passage of the amendment as the vital start to taking action to defend human decency and freedom in Australia and beyond.

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