



Amnesty International

Group 524

August 2019



Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 20 – 7:00 p.m. – Providence Heights

Focus on China: Mass Crackdown on Uighur Muslims



Exactly 20 years ago this month, **Rebiya Kadeer** was arrested by Chinese authorities. At the time of her arrest, she was on her way to a meeting with a delegation from the U.S. Congress.

In the years before her arrest in 1999, Kadeer had carved out a remarkable series of accomplishments as an entrepreneur and as a politician. From humble beginnings, sewing clothes and doing laundry, she established a series of businesses that earned her great wealth. That enabled her to establish a foundation aimed at helping other women from the Uighur community establish businesses.

Because of Kadeer's prominence in the Uighur community, she was appointed to the national parliament. In that position, however, she spoke out against China's treatment of the Uighur community, which is both an ethnic and religious minority.

The picture above is the one which our group had of Rebiya Kadeer in 1999, when Amnesty declared her a prisoner of conscience. Amnesty groups all around the world put pressure on China to release her. After more than five years of abuse in prison, Kadeer was released on medical grounds in March 2005. She ended up in Virginia, and from there she has maintained her advocacy for the Uighur community. *Continued on Page 2.*

August 20th at Providence Heights

We don't have any news from Vietnam concerning **Thich Quang Do** or **Nguyen Van Hoa** (see June newsletter). In the signing of petitions and messages of encouragement on August 20th, they will be included, along with **Ahmed Mansoor** of the UAE (see July newsletter).

Amnesty International Group 524

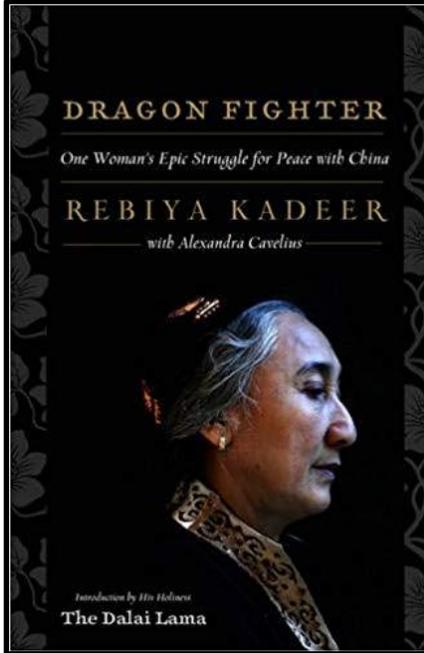
Meeting Schedule: Third Tuesday of the month, at 7:00 p.m.
Meeting Location: Providence Heights
9000 Babcock Blvd., Allison Park, PA 15101



Contact John Warren (jf.warren@verizon.net or 412-766-2506) for more information on material in this mailing, or visit the Amnesty USA website (www.amnestyusa.org) or the website of Amnesty International Group 39 (amnestypgh.org).

China: Mass Crackdown on Uighur Muslims (continued)

In the 20 years that have passed since Group 524 added its efforts to the global campaign on behalf of **Rebiya Kadeer**, much has changed. Compare the photographs below to the picture on Page 1. In addition to simply the passage of time, some of the change in her appearance can certainly be attributed to the abusive treatment during more than five years in a Chinese prison. Kadeer has always stated that, although she was severely abused during those years in prison, she survived because the Chinese were conscious of the worldwide campaign for her release.



Kadeer's effectiveness as a leader-in-exile of the Uighur people can be clearly established by considering the efforts by China to put pressure on her by going after members of her family. These flagrant abuses against her family members, which began when she was still in prison and have continued to this day, were the subject of a recent Urgent Action issued by Amnesty.

On Page 3 is a model letter from that Urgent Action. It is directed to President Xi Jinping (with a copy to the ambassador in Washington), calling upon China to halt the abusive actions directed against Rebiya Kadeer's family. The model letter includes the option of sending an email message to each of the officials. (Note that Amnesty – as it does with 'Viet Nam' – uses a variant spelling of 'Uyghur'.)

Beginning on Page 4 is an article by **Zubayra Shamseden**, a member of a younger generation of Uighur human rights activists – a generation inspired by Rebiya Kadeer. Shamseden works for a Washington-based nonprofit organization which focuses on human rights issues that impact the Uighur people. Her article ("I Have Revised My Idea of What a Uighur Heroine Should Be") was published at the China File website in April 2019.



China: Model Letter to President Xi Jinping

President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping
Zhongnanhai
Xichangan'jie
Xichengqu, Beijing Shi 100017
People's Republic of China
Email: english@mail.gov.cn

Dear President Xi:

It remains a grave concern that, since 2017, up to 30 relatives of Uyghur human rights defender and former prisoner of conscience, Rebiya Kadeer, are still believed to be arbitrarily detained in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang).

Rebiya Kadeer's son, Ablikim Abdiriyim, is one of those thought to be detained. A former prisoner of conscience, he previously served 12 years in prison, where he was repeatedly tortured. It is believed he was sentenced in retaliation for his mother's human rights advocacy.

Among the other family members who are believed to be detained are Kahar Abdiriyim, Kadeer's eldest son; Ayugul, Kahar's wife; Aydidar, Kahar's daughter; Zulpikar, Kahar's son; Dildar, Kahar's daughter; Alim Abdiriyim, Kadeer's youngest son; Xelchem, Kadeer's sister; Atikem, her son-in-law; Imam, Xelchem's son; Ahmetjan, Kadeer's brother; and Gheni, Kadeer's brother.

Formerly a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Rebiya Kadeer was detained in 1999, and sentenced to eight years in prison for "stealing state secrets." Rebiya Kadeer is one of the best-known Uyghur human rights advocates and is a leader of the World Uyghur Congress.

I call on you to release Rebiya Kadeer's family members unconditionally and immediately, unless there is sufficient credible and admissible evidence that a given individual has committed an internationally recognized offense. In any such case, the individual must be granted a fair trial, in line with international standards. Members of Rebiya Kadeer's family must have regular, unrestricted access to family and lawyers of their choice, and must not be subjected to torture and other ill-treatment.

Yours sincerely,

Ambassador Cui Tiankai
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
3505 International Place NW
Washington, DC 20008
Email: chinaembpress_us@mfa.gov.cn
Salutation: Dear Ambassador:

China: Article by Zubayra Shamseden



Zubayra Shamseden

Zubayra Shamseden is Chinese Outreach Coordinator at the **Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP)**, a documentation and advocacy group based in Washington, D.C. She has been campaigning for the human rights and political freedom of the Uyghur people since the late 1980s. Before joining UHRP, Shamseden worked as an Information Officer, Researcher, and Translator at the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation (IUHRDF). She has worked in multicultural education and community liaison for nonprofit, academic, and government organizations in Australia and the U.S. for over two decades. Shamseden is a 2016-2018

Fellow at the Institute for Global Engagement's (IGE) Center for Women Faith & Leadership (CWFL). She has a Bachelor's degree in Library and Information Science from East China Normal University in Shanghai, a certification in Chinese from the Industrial University of Xinjiang, a diploma in Russian language and literature from the State University of Eastern Kazakhstan, and a graduate diploma in Information Studies and a Master's degree in International Studies from the University of South Australia, where she focused on the modern history of Uyghur human rights. She is fluent in English, Uyghur, Chinese, Uzbek, and Russian, and has a working knowledge of Turkish.

I Have Revised My Idea of What a Uighur Heroine Should Be

The Chinese government would have you believe a good Uighur woman is one who knows how to apply false eyelashes and cook dumplings. She is neither too modest nor too forward. She is “good at singing and dancing.”

Since leaving China, I have spent a lot of time reflecting on what it means to be a Uighur woman. This year in particular, I spent International Women's Day thinking about how absurd it was to see the Chinese government praise itself for the “benefits” it provides by “re-educating” Uighur women in concentration camps.

Uighur women are diverse in looks, lifestyles, and roles in the community, but to the Chinese government there appears to only be one correct way to think and act, namely that the Chinese Communist Party (C.C.P.) is the benevolent parent teaching us how to wear our own culture.

Among the many defenses that the Chinese government has advanced in recent months for the mass detention and repression in East Turkestan (as many Uighurs still prefer to call the region China's government refers to as Xinjiang) is that it is helping to free Uighur women from “religious extremism.”

Such arguments are belied especially vividly when one considers stories of Uighur women like me, who have deep connections to our culture and have pursued successful professional careers in a way that builds on our traditions and experiences as members of the Uighur community.

The Chinese government doesn't want to free us of oppression; it wants to erase Uighur culture and identity by remaking its women.

Whether they are conscious of it or not, women are the guardians and bearers of Uighur tradition, culture, education, language, and religion. They often assume matriarchal or other leadership roles within the community. With that responsibility comes *japa*: burden, or sacrifice.



China: Article by Zubayra Shamseden (continued)

Uighur children are raised on stories of *japa*. As a teenager, the legend of “Nuzugum” loomed large in my imagination. The folktale recounts the life of a Kashgari girl of the 19th century who stands up for herself and her people, defends herself against authorities trying to force her to marry an official, and escapes prison. As in so many of our stories—and the stories of other colonized people—her life ends in tragedy. In retaliation for her defiance, she is killed by Qing dynasty forces. Uighurs laud her for her bravery and fortitude.

I was born in 1968 and raised in Ghulja (the city the C.C.P. calls Yining), East Turkestan, in a religious and intellectual Uighur family. It was difficult to have powerful female role models in a climate where, even then, the C.C.P. would imprison, kill, or remove from their positions Uighur people with influence. But such women were there.

The real-life heroines for me were the honest and determined women around me, the many ordinary Uighur women who remained resilient despite their daily challenges. As anthropologist Cindy Yung-Leh Huang has written, a persistent theme in the narratives of Uighur women is the importance of being *japakesh*. A *japakesh* person is “one who perseveres through difficulty [and] suffers with a moral purpose. In conversation on matters big and small, Uyghur women offered it as both praise for one’s hard work and empathic recognition of one’s troubles.”

My mother was an ordinary Uighur woman who fulfilled her *japakesh* role with dignity and incredible strength. Rather than pursuing her education, or using her small inherited wealth and popularity to live quietly as a well-behaved socialite, she sacrificed herself to raise children who would be valuable contributors to Uighur society. And she fought against the injustices her community faced.

My older sister once told me that in the mid-1970s, a Chinese government official came to our house and began to lecture and bully my mother into complying with the orders of the suburban Party Committee to attend “political study sessions” and to “follow the Party road.” She had looked right back at the official and retorted: “I am not going to your nonsense meetings. I have children to look after. I am raising my children to be beneficial to society. They will be far better people than you are. I have better things to do than go to your meetings! Go and tell your boss this is what I said to you!”

My mother taught me to be strong, decent, and educated; my aunt, a chemistry lecturer at Ghulja Medical Institute, was my role model for being a career woman; my older sister, a teacher with an amazing voice and witty sense of humor, was my protector and provider. All of us, in turn, were supported at each step of the way by the men of our family and community. These women in my life did not need to be educated in a Chinese school or to be influenced by Chinese culture in order to be “civilized” or “liberated.” They were the typical offspring of Uighur education and culture.

More well known are the stories of women like Rebiya Kadeer, a businesswoman who quickly became one of the richest women in all of China, used her wealth to help women and children, and even held positions in the Chinese parliament. Or Rahile Dawut, a well-respected and highly accomplished anthropologist and scholar, and one of the first Uighur women to receive a Ph.D.

All these women were powerful—in their families, in their communities, and farther afield. And for this, like so many other Uighur women, they were punished by the Chinese government.



China: Article by Zubayra Shamseden (continued)

After the Ghulja Incident in 1997, the Chinese government's pressure towards my family intensified. I had already left the country by then to work on Uighur rights issues in Australia, but family was suspected of being the brains behind the "revolt." My younger sister and a niece were arrested, one of my cousins and a nephew executed, and one of my brothers received a life sentence. He maintains his innocence. He is still in prison.

My parents escaped in 2001 and were granted asylum in Australia. When my mother died in 2017, it was with a heavy heart, never having been able to return home and knowing she would not be able to rest in peace in her hometown.

My younger sister Mesture is a 47-year-old housewife with a son and a daughter aged 18 and 22, who were studying at high school and vocational school. Her husband Abbas is a skillful farmer and businessman who grew wheat and vegetables on his land and had supported the family without any "government benefits" for over 24 years. They had not committed any crimes, nor disrupted "stability" or "harmonious society." Yet, according to my niece in Australia, who indirectly communicated with them through her friend on WeChat, all four of them have been detained in camps since 2016.

Rebiya Kadeer was arrested in 1999 and vilified in China for being a separatist and terrorist; she spent nearly six years being tortured in prison before being released and granted amnesty in the U.S. Rahile Dawut disappeared in December 2017; no one has heard from her since, and it is presumed she remains in secretive detention.

On February 27, China's foreign ministry spokesperson stated that the mass detentions of Uighurs and others "aim[s] to help them master skills and return to the society and their families. By learning the knowledge of national laws, vocational skills and common language, they will be able to conduct normal production and have a normal life." The government's "measures" are providing training to those who "don't have any decent jobs and lack working skills."

Is that true of my sister and Dr. Dawut? What of Gulgine Tashmemet, a Ph.D. candidate who is supposed to be studying in Malaysia and disappeared into a camp in Ghulja in early 2018? Or Gulshan Abbas, a retired medical doctor placed in a camp in September 2018? These and untold numbers of other women have no need of "training." They are suffering indefinite detention in the vast prison-camp system as a way to erase what it means to be a Uighur woman, nothing less.

Women who have not yet been taken into the camps suffer, too. They are dealing with the stress of living in a high-pressure surveillance state, being separated from family members and loved ones, and having Party members live in their houses and report on "suspicious activity" to send more people to camps.

And attempts to erase Uighur identity go even deeper. State policy now encourages marriage between Han men and Uighur women. I have begun hearing credible, though as yet unverifiable, reports that Chinese officials and local Han residents are abusing their power to make personal demands of Uighur women, especially those whose families and relatives may already be detained. If Uighur women refuse an offer of marriage, what is to stop officials from branding these women, or their families, as "suspicious," to be taken away without charge or trial, never to be seen again? Under these circumstances, how could a woman dare to refuse an unwanted marriage?



China: Article by Zubayra Shamseden (continued)

And so, we come back to the story of Nuzugum. Why is it that in 2019, Uighur women must choose between marrying a stranger and having their families detained? I do not want any of them to fight and die in a battle with their oppressor, as Nuzugum did.

Uighur women have the potential and ability to advocate for their sisters in East Turkestan. Uighur women need constructive and practical support, recognition from both the Uighur diaspora and international rights groups, and strong coalition partners in the international women's movement.

Already, Uighur women leaders like Kadeer; scientists and academics like Dil Reyhan, Maya Mitalipova, and my daughter Munawwar Abdulla; a new generation of activists like Irade Kashgary, Ajinur Setiwaldi, Aydin Anwar, Adila Yarmuhammad, Jewher Ilham; and many other Uighur women are a key part of the global movement to close the camps and bring Chinese officials to account for their brutal repression.

These women—all of them now living away from their homes—lend their voice to those who cannot speak, those struggling inside the internment camps of East Turkestan or suffering under the omnipresent eye of state security.

In the almost 30 years since I've left my home, I have revised my idea of what a Uighur heroine should be. The role of heroine should no longer be only for the woman of sacrifice, the "burden-bearer" who exemplifies the moral strength of *japakesh*. Instead, our most admirable Uighur women should be those who simply forge ahead to achieve greatness.