

Tahir Imin Testimony

Chairman, Ranking Member Khanna, Ranking Member McGovern, and Members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Tahir Imin. I am from Poskam, in Kashgar, a heartland of the ancient Silk Road near the Taklamakan Desert, where China conducts its nuclear weapons testing. I come from a business family rooted in Uyghur tradition and culture.

In 2016, when Chen Quanguo became Party Secretary of the Uyghur region, I watched prominent Uyghur intellectuals and business leaders arrested. I knew what Chinese detention and forced labor looked like, because I had lived it myself. I was arrested for writing about threats to Uyghur culture and language, and spent two years, from 2005 to 2007, in detention in Urumqi and at Xihu Labor Camp, where I was subjected to forced labor and to physical and psychological torture under military control.

I did not want to end up in that prison again. So I made the painful decision to leave my homeland.

I left behind my family, my six-year-old daughter, my friends, my business, everything I had built. I went first to the University of Haifa in Israel. Even there, Chinese authorities threatened me and demanded I return, warning that otherwise they would come and get me. I chose the United States because I believed it was a country where I could be safe and continue my work for my people.

But after I arrived in the summer of 2017, the Chinese government's reach did not stop. My wife was forced to divorce me. My daughter was pressured to cut off contact with me.

When reports emerged that China was detaining and imprisoning millions of Uyghurs, I began publicly sharing my own experience and the experiences of my people. The Chinese government and state media branded me an "East Turkistan separatist element" and retaliated against my family. My mother, Tuhan Memet, a fashion designer who served her local community, was arrested and sentenced to prison.

My brother Adil, a businessman and father of three young children, was sentenced to a long prison term, along with many other members of my extended family — aunts, uncles, cousins. None were involved in political or religious activity that could make them suspects in China's system.

The Chinese government also arrested my friends and co-workers, including the Uyghur musician Tursun Sheyih, pop singer Ablajan Awut, poet Rahmitulla Turkesh, and cultural activist Nurmuhammad Imin.

Here in the U.S., I founded Uyghur Times and Uyghur Post, because when a government tries to erase a people's voice, documenting the truth becomes an act of preservation.

But our work has made us a target. Uyghur Times and Uyghur Post have faced repeated cyberattacks. In a widely reported incident this March, Uyghur Post was hit by a coordinated distributed-denial-of-service attack generating more than 180 million requests a day, alongside a network of ten imitation websites that copied our design and domain to spread disinformation against Uyghurs.

Last week, Anthropic revealed that Uyghur Post was specifically targeted in a China-aligned campaign to suppress Uyghur diaspora journalism — including plans for coordinated mass reporting, foreign-front delegitimization, and bot-network amplification. Anthropic assessed the operation was run by a contractor working for PRC state security.

The online threats, cyberattacks, and harassment have become part of my daily life. But the greatest cost has been personal. For ten years, I have lived with the pain of being separated from my daughter and the guilt of knowing that people close to me have suffered because I spoke out. The Chinese government took a father's love away from my daughter's childhood. I don't know how she grew up without it.

I ask the United States not to abandon its leadership on human rights. It was the first country to formally determine that China's treatment of Uyghurs constitutes genocide. Uyghurs and our friends worldwide look to the United States and its allies to confront these crimes and protect those who speak for justice.

Human rights may seem like an abstract concept to some, or a minor issue to others. But for us Uyghurs, human rights are a matter of life and death. They are about the survival of our people and the preservation of a civilization with thousands of years of history and a rich contribution to human culture and civilization.

For Uyghurs, America is not just another country. The United States is the last, best last hope for Uyghurs. Every Uyghur I know across the world looks to America because it stands on a founding promise that is the same for all of us: that all people are created equal, with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I've submitted my recommendations to the Committee, and I look forward to further discussion.

Thank you.