Uyghur’s case: why are they persecuted?

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The 1st October 2020, on Chinese national day, the European deputee Raphaël Glucksmann called for Instagram and Twitter users to replace their profile picture with a blue square, Uyghur’s colour, as a mean to manifest their support to this persecuted minority in China. But between mediatic silence and harsh reality, who are the Uyghurs and why are they repressed by the Chinese government? Therefore, let’s figure out what’s going on.

Present in China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey, Uyghurs are a Muslim Turkish-speaking population. Ethnic group from China, 12 millions of them live in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Xinjiang is the largest of the fifth autonomous regions of the People’s Republic of China, where Uyghurs are the ethnic majority.

It was Gay McDougall, vice-president of the United Nations, who set fire to the powder keg on August 10, 2018 in Geneva. Indeed, he declared having received numerous reports denouncing the construction of a hundred camps in which a million Uighurs would be detained. But why? What are the reasons for what could be called today the largest mass detention of the 21st century?

The Uyghurs marginalisation

First of all, it’s important to understand that Uyghurs are ethnically and culturally different from the Hans, the ethnic group with the majority in China.

The region of Xinjiang, on the other hand, did not integrate the People’s Republic of China until 1949, during the dismantling of what had been the Second Republic of East Turkestan, a mainly Uyghur republic, which ended after only 4 years.

This late addition to the rest of the country aroused tension and the fear of Uyghur’s separatism. Moreover, Uyghur’s separatists have been responsible for several terrorist attacks in China as the one in Kunming’s train station on the 1st March 2014. The situation is such that the Kök Bayraq, flag of East Turkestan, which has become a symbol of the Uyghurs cause, has been banned throughout the country.

The Uyghurs discrimination started during the Cultural Revolution in 1966 with the implementation of a policy of assimilation of minorities as a mean to sinicize and incorporate the whole country to the communist’s ideology. With Mao Zedong’s death, the president of the Chinese Communist Party at the time and the one responsible for the Cultural Revolution, repressions seemed to calm.
down but with the 9/11 terrorists attacks on New York, the Chinese government, just as the United States of America, began its fight against jihadism by directly attacking Uyghur’s culture and the people of Xinjiang.

**A population hunted down and send to camps**

The real turning point took place in 2013 with Xi Jinping coming to power, and more specifically with the nomination of Chen Quanguo as Communist Party Secretary of Xinjiang in 2016. The region has become a police state, hunting every Uyghur’s move. Entire neighbourhoods have been emptied and their inhabitants have been sent in what is called by the government “political rehabilitation centers”.

However China’s national television shows men and women in good health learning mandarin chinese and receiving professional training. But the reality of the camps is very different: lack of hygiene, water and food... Living conditions are catastrophic. Former prisoners even declared having been tortured, receiving regular injections making them amorphous and depriving them of any desire for rebellion.

Unfortunately horrors against Uyghurs do not stop here. In november 2019, the New York Times revealed a 400 pages confidential report from the chinese government describing in a very detailed way how Uyghur’s population should be treated. In this same report Xi Jinping’s opinion is crystal clear:

"We should have no mercy with Uyghurs"

Xi Jinping

"No mercy", this is indeed how the Uyghurs are treated by the chinese government who, since 2016, has been pursuing a birth control policy in the region of Xinjiang. Uyghurs women are sterilised against their will, those who refused abortion are sent to camps, and children are taken from their parents to be educated according to the values of the Chinese Communist Party.

The persecution of the Uyghurs is still not considered today as a genocide however, applying "measures to prevent births within a group" is one of the five criteria for genocide, according to the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, established in 1948.

So let us ask ourselves the following question:

How many additional evidence of Uyghur’s persecution will it take for the international community to finally intervene and save Uyghurs and their culture?
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