

ENDING FORCED LABOR IN XINJIANG UIGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION, CHINA

Since 2017, the Chinese government has run a massive program to detain and persecute well over 1 million Uighurs and other Muslims and Turkic language speakers in China's largest province, the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The program uses many methods to eliminate the identity and way of life of these people. Aside from running the largest internment program of an ethnic and religious group since the Holocaust, China has broadly deployed state-of-the-art surveillance hardware and artificial intelligence software to thoroughly monitor the lives of these people at home, in public and in their personal communications. Family separation, denial of religious freedom and forced labor are woven together in this massive assault on human rights.

Until recently, most attention to this problem has focused on detention and forced labor in the XUAR and its role in the production of cotton, textile and garments. The Chinese government itself projected there would be more than 1 million low-wage garment and textile workers in the XUAR by 2023. It's now clear that the Chinese government is also exporting this model of cultural eradication by detention and forced labor in many industries to other provinces. More than 80,000 Uighurs [were transferred out of the XUAR to work in factories across China between 2017 and 2019.](#)

Because of the climate of repression, fear and social control in the XUAR and within the Uighur community both inside and outside the region by the Chinese government, human rights due diligence in supply chains cannot be conducted. Likewise, China has not allowed the United Nations or other credible international organizations or press to monitor the situation on the ground. The only way to prevent these forced labor practices from tainting global supply chains and limit the Chinese government's ability to profit from this is for countries and companies both to require an end to the production and sourcing of goods from the region in trade and throughout supply chains.

China has a long record of documented worker and human rights violations. But even in this horrendous context, the extreme gravity, scale and scope of this program to consolidate state power and enrich companies through a model that rests on massive human rights violations stands out. Aside from the Chinese government and state-run companies, an overwhelming number of multinational corporations from around the world are implicated in and profit from

this web of tainted commercial relationships. There is no debate about the gravity and scale of the abuse: The time has come to act to end it.

Since November 2019, the AFL-CIO has been a leading convener of a broad coalition of workers and human rights groups and organizations representing the Uighur community in the United States and globally. We have brought the International Trade Union Confederation and human rights groups based in Europe to this coalition, working to develop strategies that pressure major multinationals, engage multilateral organizations like the International Labor Organization and coordinate trade-based mechanisms to change these policies of the Chinese government. While the coalition's timeline has been changed since mid-March to address the many challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to resume this work is clear.

For these reasons, the AFL-CIO will advocate for and support U.S. trade action and legislation to end these abuses, and work with the global labor and human rights movements to press multilateral institutions to restore the human and worker rights of affected communities in the XUAR. We will continue to work to change corporate purchasing practices in global supply chains to eliminate any use of suppliers that are part of this system. We will demand effective enforcement of U.S. and international laws prohibiting the use of forced labor in imported goods.

In Congress, two bills are advancing toward law. On May 14, [the U.S. Senate passed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act](#) of 2020 by unanimous consent, an important first step to a more comprehensive policy response. This legislation endorses targeted sanctions on culpable Chinese government officials, and creates a mandate for reports on human rights abuses in the Uighur region and on Chinese government harassment of Uighurs living inside the United States. [The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act](#), introduced in the House and Senate in March, established a presumption of forced labor for all goods produced in the XUAR, placing the burden on companies to demonstrate that goods imported from there to the United States are not the product of forced labor. Currently, we are working with the XUAR coalition to ensure passage of these bills in both houses and send a clear message to the Trump administration. At the same time, we are working in coalition internationally so meaningful sanctions cannot be dismissed as a unilateral U.S. policy.

Action against profiteering from forced labor is critical. But the AFL-CIO will work to end human rights and workers' rights abuses by the Chinese government in all forms. Any version of globalization that fails to act in the face of the repression seen in the XUAR and suffered by Uighur communities will never be accepted by the global labor and human rights movement.