

‘No More Business as Usual’: Global supply chains tainted by forced Uyghur labour in China – Briefing and Call to Action

Summary

Millions of Uyghurs are currently being detained by Chinese authorities and held in concentration and forced labour camps in the Uyghur Region of China, or forcibly transported to work in facilities in other regions in China. Too many companies, across industries such as apparel, solar, technology and agriculture, are complicit in Uyghur forced labour throughout their supply chains, imposing conditions intended to destroy the Uyghur people, with little if any accountability while continuing to profit from Uyghur forced labour.

Slavery is fundamental to the narrative of the Jewish people. The Jewish festival of *Pesach* recalls the story of Exodus, in which the Israelites were liberated from the shackles of slavery, and we acknowledge our freedom in prayer: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁלֹא עֲשִׂנוּ עֶבֶד. As a people, we are guided by our experience and fundamental principles of justice and fairness. We believe that the British public, and the Jewish community, have an important role in ensuring these principles apply when slavery and persecution are experienced by others.

When 80% of Chinese cotton comes from the Uyghur region, and 20% of the world’s cotton comes from China, the reality is that one in five cotton garments globally is most likely tainted by forced Uyghur labour.

It is up to governments to adopt legislation that will stand against products made with Uyghur forced labour and **companies must exit the Uyghur Region at every level of their supply chains, from raw materials to finished products, to prevent the use of forced labour of Uyghurs and other groups in other facilities, and to end relationships with suppliers supporting the forced labour system.**

Background

Since 2017, more than three million Uyghurs and other Turkic people are held in concentration camps known as ‘re-education centres’ in the Xinjiang (Uyghur) region of China, where they are subject to routine torture, sexual abuse, forced labour and forced sterilisation. Across the region, the Chinese government has constructed a system of mass surveillance to curtail the Uyghurs’ religious freedom, erase indigenous cultural practices and forbid political dissent. Families are torn apart, with children separated from their parents and no communication allowed with relatives in exile for fear of retribution. The Chinese government denies the claims, saying people willingly attend special ‘vocational schools’, which combat “terrorism and religious extremism”.

On 9 December 2021, the International Day for the Prevention of Genocide, the [Independent People’s Uyghur Tribunal](#) panel found ‘proof beyond reasonable doubt for nine out of 11 Crimes Against Humanity, for Torture, and for Genocide on the ground of Article 2d (prevention of births) committed by the People’s Republic of China against the Uyghurs.

With this judgement, civil society now has the leverage needed to hold governments and businesses accountable for their relationships with the People’s Republic of China including in their supply chains.

What have governments done so far?

Some progress has been made recently in the fight to end Uyghur forced labour, including [G7 commitments](#) in [June](#) and [October 2021](#) to address forced labour of targeted ethnic-religious groups. In addition, the passage of the [Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act](#) in the United States at the end of 2021 was a monumental step in holding corporations accountable for their complicity in the forced labour scheme. In February 2022, the European Commission [committed](#) to introducing an EU instrument to ban forced labour products from entering the EU.

Response from the UK government has been less decisive. In March 2021 the government introduced sanctions against responsible Chinese officials and entities. In response, China sanctioned 11 British organisations and individuals, including six parliamentarians. This prompted UK Parliament in April 2021 to unanimously declare China's treatment of the Uyghurs to be Genocide as defined by the UN's Genocide Convention.

In April 2022, an amendment to the Health Care Bill will ensure that health service organisations, including the NHS, remove slavery and human trafficking from their supply chains – products made in the Uyghur region are said to have been found in NHS hospitals.

With legislation passing in the USA and similarly predicted to pass in the EU, the UK government must take steps to ensure the UK does not become a 'dumping place' for Uyghur forced labour products – this can only be done through binding laws and legislation so it does depend on companies' good will and discretion.

Call to Action

Together with over 400 organisations, and as part of [the Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labour](#), we are calling on leading companies:

- To ensure that they are **not supporting or benefiting** from the prevalent and extensive forced labour of the Uyghur population and other Turkic and Muslim-majority peoples, perpetrated by the Chinese government.
- Companies to **exit the Uyghur Region** at every level of their supply chains, from raw materials to finished products, to prevent the use of forced labour of Uyghurs and other groups in other facilities, and to end relationships with suppliers supporting the forced labour system.

Asks

1. **This London Fashion Week**, 11-13 June, we call on Gucci, Balenciaga, Yves Saint Laurent, Bottega Veneta, Alexander McQueen, Brioni and [other fashion houses and apparel companies](#) to make a commitment to exit the Uyghur region and prevent use of forced labour of Uyghur and other Turkic people



2. **Write to the CEO** of your favourite fashion or apparel company, urging them to take the necessary steps in order to fulfil their corporate responsibility obligations to respect human rights.
3. Call on the UK government to pass legislation criminalising import of products made by Uyghur forced labour.
4. When you are next on the high street, before entering [these shops](#), ask yourself – “are forced labour and persecution a price i am willing to pay and a practice to which I can turn a blind eye?”

About René Cassin

René Cassin works to promote and protect universal rights drawing on Jewish experience and Jewish values.

René Cassin works **within the Jewish community** – by building support for human rights values amongst British Jews, and **in the wider community** – by bringing the authority of a Jewish perspective on issues that resonate with Jewish experience

We aim to:

- Remake a compelling case for human rights values – we believe that those values, which inspired the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Advocate for the rights of vulnerable minorities, particularly on issues – such as genocide, modern slavery, asylum, hate crime, and discrimination – that resonate with Jewish history
- Work on women’s rights and social justice as a means to address long-standing inequalities and to bolster wider support for human rights by emphasising their everyday relevance
- Build the capacity of the next generation of activists to promote and protect human rights in the future

Founded in 2000, René Cassin has a small staff team, supported by an engaged Board of Trustees, an expert Advisory Council and a wider group of alumni, volunteers and supporters.