

Hanukkah Uyghur Update and Action – December 2022

It is a year since, in December 2021, an independent [Uyghur Tribunal](#) found the Chinese government guilty, without reasonable doubt, of the crimes of torture, crimes against humanity and genocide against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim populations.

“the tribunal is satisfied beyond reasonable doubt that the People’s Republic of China, by the imposition of measures to destroy a significant part of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang as such, has committed genocide” Sir Geoffrey Nice KC, People’s Uyghur Tribunal (2021)

The Chinese government’s persecution of the Uyghurs reflects some of the worst human rights violations including torture, forced sterilisation, sexual abuse, political ‘re-education’, forced labour and separating children from their families. Uyghurs depend on actions taken by decision makers, businesses and civil society to secure a life of dignity and safety.

Here are some key updates since the judgement.

On the issue of forced labour

- A recently published [report](#) by Sheffield University outlines how the Uyghur Region has been transformed into the world’s forced labour capital. The report contains extensive documentation of labour transfers, profiles of individual companies, and explanations of the development of relevant industries in the Uyghur Region.
- The report details, in particular, the depth of the [auto industry](#) links to Uyghur forced labour - practically every car part requires heightened scrutiny to ensure that it is not linked to Uyghur forced labour. This includes components that are being sourced from the Uyghur Region such as batteries, wheels, tires, glass, interiors, electronics, and other parts. Every major car brand – including Volkswagen, BMW, Honda, Ford, GM, Mercedes-Benz, Toyota, Ford, and Tesla to name a few - is at high risk of sourcing from companies linked to abuses in the Uyghur region.
- In May, the [Procurement Amendment to the Health and Care Act \(2022\)](#) was passed, which commits the UK Government to ‘eradicate’ modern slavery from its health care supply chains. This is particularly relevant to the Uyghurs, as many are forced into labour (both in camps and across mainland China) and are present across production supply chains.
- In October, the World Uyghur Congress and the Global Legal Action Network, brought a legal challenge before the High Court in London against the UK government, challenging the UK’s failure to block the import of cotton products associated with state-sanctioned forced labour and other abuses taking place in the Uyghur Region. The court’s ruling is pending.

On the issue of surveillance

- In December, the UK government announced that all departments must ‘cease deployment’ of HikVision equipment and security cameras - a Chinese-state-sponsored CCTV company. Cameras made by Hikvision are deeply integrated into an intelligence programme aimed at tracking and detaining Uyghurs and other ethnic groups in the Uyghur Region.
- It has been revealed that over 100 unofficial overseas Chinese service police stations, in at least 50 countries around the world including the UK, are involved in illegal ‘persuasion and return’ operations, which employ methods of such as threat and harassment – even detention – of family members back home, the deployment of covert operations in foreign land to intimidate the target directly, and even kidnapping.

What Can you Do? A Hanukkah Call to Action

Make a difference in one man's life

Erbakit's story

Erbakit Otarbay was born in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) of China. He is a member of the Kazakh ethnic group against whom, along with the Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslim groups in XUAR, the Chinese government is waging a genocide through innumerable methods of persecution.

As an adult, Erbakit emigrated with his family to Kazakhstan. In 2017, on a trip back to XUAR to visit his sick father, the Chinese authorities confiscated his passport and arrested him. They 'accused' him of having a Muslim prayer book and Whatsapp on his phone. For over a year, Erbakit was detained in prisons and internment camps in XUAR; starved, tortured and forced to undergo 're-education' training in a classroom where detainees were separated from teachers with iron bars. He was then transferred into forced labour in a garment factory.

Following his release, in September 2021, Erbakit bravely travelled to the UK to give evidence at the Uyghur Tribunal investigating China's alleged genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghur, Kazakh and other Turkic Muslim populations. He provided testimony about his experience of detention in the camps and of forced labour. On the basis of evidence including the testimony of courageous survivors such as Erbakit, in December 2021 the Uyghur Tribunal held that the Chinese government is indeed responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and torture against Erbakit's people and the other Turkic Muslim populations.

Erbakit applied for asylum in the UK in September 2021 but remains in limbo awaiting a decision on his claim. During this time he is prohibited from working and forced to survive on the government's stipend of £40 a week, which was just last week found by the High Court to be [unlawfully insufficient to meet basic needs](#). The government-allocated accommodation in which he has been housed is hundreds of miles away from his community in London, isolated from anyone with whom he can communicate.

Despite the risks to his own personal safety and that of his family, Erbakit has spoken out against the Chinese government, testified at the Uyghur Tribunal, and is bringing [legal action](#) in the UK to challenge imports of goods made with Uyghur forced labour.

- Give a donation to the [Global Legal Action Network](#), that is supporting Erbakit with his asylum application

Take a step to end Uyghur forced labour

- 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.
- 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?"
- Call on the UK government to pass legislation criminalising import of products made by Uyghur forced labour.

"You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know" (William Wilberforce, 1789, prior to the vote on the Abolition Bill in Parliament)