

Systemic abuses and mass detentions in China demand Human Rights Council action
UPR Adoption – China
March 15, 2019

Thank you, Mr. President,

Let me start by acknowledging China's active participation in the UPR process – not just through its national report, but also through its tireless efforts to encourage such a large number of States to uncritically endorse its approach.

The many GONGOs who spoke before me illustrate that freedom of expression is enjoyed in China by government cheerleaders, while dissenting voices are routinely suppressed.

China has provided no accountability in the death of human rights defender Cao Shunli in 2013, or those of Liu Xiaobo, Tenzin Delek Rinpoche, Yang Tongyan, and Muhammed Salih Hajim. Under President Xi Jinping, Chinese authorities have reversed key legal gains, constricted space for independent civil society, and undertaken a campaign of arbitrary detention of Turkic Muslims that is unprecedented.

Faced with mounting concerns about mass detentions and denials of freedom of religion in Xinjiang, China initially denied the existence of detention centres, then claimed these are needed to combat terrorism, and now asserts that they are vocational training centres. Today the delegation sought to clarify these are not “camps” but “campuses”. Yet one former detainee told us: “They say this is a political education camp, but in reality, it is like a prison, it is surrounded by metal bars everywhere.”

To the numerous States expressing concern through the UPR, China has responded: “there is no such problem as arbitrary detention” in Xinjiang. We would ask the delegation: how does China determine who should be assigned to these “vocational training” programs? Is it voluntary? Can they leave when they want? Have they committed any crime? At a civil society event we hosted, a member of the Chinese delegation described these facilities as “preventative.” Doesn't that imply the detainees haven't yet done anything wrong? Do they have a means to challenge their confinement?

Mr. President, no-one is fooled by the photo exhibit. An independent international assessment is urgently needed. If indeed China has nothing to hide, it should cooperate with the requests made by the High Commissioner, and by Special Procedures, and allow full, unfettered access to international monitors.

Council members are expected to “uphold the highest standards of human rights.” China is failing to meet that standard. Other states should not abandon the victims of those violations, but take action to address them. If not now, then when?

Mr. President, distinguished delegates ... we thank you for joining us in a moment of silence in memory of Cao Shunli, and all defenders unjustly detained for promoting human rights in China.