

Testimony of Qelbinur Sidik
Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party
March 23, 2023
Hearing on the Chinese Communist Party's Ongoing Uyghur Genocide

Thank you, Chair Gallagher and Ranking Member Krishnamoorthi, for holding this hearing. I am very grateful for the opportunity to testify before the U.S. Congress, and share with the world my experience as one of millions of Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples who are facing genocide at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party.

My name is Qelbinur Sidik. I am from Urumchi. I am Uzbek. I was a Chinese language instructor, and have also worked as a school administrator.

Although it is difficult for me to speak about my experiences, I see it as my duty to be the voice for those people who are still stuck there.

In February of 2017, I was called by my school's principal alongside several other Han Chinese teachers. The principal informed us that we were to have new jobs teaching Chinese to some illiterate, uneducated people. She told us our work was to be conducted with the utmost secrecy, and we were not to discuss what we saw or heard in our workplace with anyone.

I assumed that I was given the job because of my experience teaching Chinese to children, but the principal mentioned my daughter who was studying in The Netherlands multiple times, which seemed to imply the reason was connected to her.

On March 1, I showed up at the bus stop I was instructed to come to and called the phone number we had been given. A Chinese policeman showed up and drove me to a facility I had not seen before. I saw that it was four floors high, and there were guards with rifles at the gate. The walls had razor wire at the top. When I came inside to show my ID, there were more armed guards in the lobby.

I was taken to a large, dimly lit room and informed this was to be my classroom. Inside there were a half dozen guards with rifles standing around the walls, and there were bars separating me from where the students were sitting on stools. There were cameras all around the room. There were men and women, many of the women looked to be in their seventies. Someone was crying. There were about 100 people in the room.

At the end of this first week, upon entering the classroom, the people's appearance had completely changed. Their heads had all been shaved. They were wearing prison uniforms.

On an average day, I would teach for 4 hours in the morning and 2 in the afternoon.

On a few occasions, I saw the cells that prisoners were kept in. The smell was awful. There was one bucket to serve as a toilet, and rolled up mats were their only bedding, with no showers.

It is hard for me to remember all of the prisoners, but some of their faces haunt me. One was a man, a former businessman, who already spoke excellent Chinese. As time went on, he began to get thinner and thinner, until one day, like several of my students, he vanished. A guard informed me that he had died of a urinary tract infection. I asked about his body. The guard said he didn't know what happened to the bodies of students who died. It got harder and harder to keep track of my students, so many would disappear.

In the spring of 2017, a new group of prisoners came, and the offices in the building had to be converted to cells to accommodate.

I noticed that students were forced to line up once a week to receive an injection and a white pill. I was told these were calcium pills because they didn't see the sun much, but I don't believe that was what it was.

Oftentimes I was asked if I felt sympathy for the prisoners. I was scared to be honest, so I would answer carefully. A policeman told me once "These Uyghurs die hard, don't they? Just like when you pour boiling water on lice, they refuse to die."

After my initial contract expired in August of 2017, I was told I had been given a posting at a reeducation center for a six month term. I felt I could not say no. When I came to that center, I was horrified to discover that the place was filled with innocent young women, many of whom were highly educated. Their heads were shaved.

Sometimes when they would come to class, I could tell but how they walked with difficulty or were sobbing that they had been sexually abused. I could not ask them in front of the guards.

One day, I was in the hallway and saw a female prisoner carried past in the hallway who was unconscious and deathly pale. A policewoman I was chatting with told me she had been sent to look into reports of sexual abuse at this camp. The police were raping women but also inserting batons, even electric ones, into their private parts and even men's rectums. Prisoners were being forced into performing oral sex on their captors.

The policewoman told me that she knew her investigation was just a whitewash to pretend that something would be done.

Once, I heard another teacher who was Chinese vent that the guards were intentionally trying to make some of the women pregnant and that their babies would be taken by the State to be raised as pro-Chinese Uyghurs.

As a woman, seeing and hearing these things, and being denied control over my own body, were difficult to endure.

In April of 2017, I was called to the local medical facility to have a mandatory IUD device inserted, in spite of my age and the fact that I had an adult daughter with no plans to have children. I was unable to talk my way out of what was a requirement for all women from ethnic Muslim groups between ages 18 and 50. So in July of 2017 I returned and had the procedure. My abdominal pain and bleeding was so bad that I found a traditional Uyghur doctor and persuaded him to remove the device. Then, not even a month later, the age requirement was shifted to women up to age 55. So I had to comply. If I did not, I would have been reported to the local neighborhood watch committee. It was again almost unbearably painful.

Then on my 50th birthday, I received an order to be sterilized. It was then that I decided I had to get out. It took me months to get the permits required to see my daughter in The Netherlands. I was able to use the excuse that I must seek medical attention for the after effects of these procedures. When I finally made it to my daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren in The Netherlands I could hardly believe it.

Many people also do not understand that even outside the camps, we are living in hell. Chinese officials mandated a program for Uyghurs, Uzbeks, and other Turkic peoples called the “Becoming Family” program. A Chinese official would stay in our home to observe us.

One of those officials was a middle-aged man who would sit around our living room in his boxer shorts and undershirt. During one of his first stays, he came into the kitchen where I was chopping vegetables and put his hand over mine. I tried to pull it away but he grabbed harder then started to kiss me.

One night he came with a bottle of liquor to test us. I do not drink, and my husband was an alcoholic but we were scared to say no to the drink as we might be labeled as religious extremists for refusing alcohol. I had told my husband I was scared of this official. That night I went to the kitchen to make food, and the official followed me. My husband stayed in the living room. The man put his hands all over me. He complained when I would not sleep with him, telling me other Uyghur women were happy to oblige. Sometimes he would even receive video calls from colleagues in the south, supposedly demonstrating on camera the ways that girls under their supervision would oblige them.

My husband was too frightened to intervene. He told me that it was only short-term, that I should put up with it.

Even recalling these horrors I still feel lucky...because I escaped.

I want to ask you to do more. I am fortunate to have been able to come to The Netherlands. But please do more to rescue survivors. There are many more people like me who managed to leave China, but are living in fear in neighboring countries, terrified of being deported back to China or harassed at the behest of the Chinese authorities. Please stop the Chinese Communist Party from expanding its brutal oppression and transnational oppression so that even upon escape we are pursued.

It is my hope that the United States Congress will do the following to help:

Pass the 10 related bills that have been introduced to end complicity in these atrocities and to stop the genocide. I have been shocked to learn how American dollars are funding the surveillance and labor of my people.

I am a teacher. Who am I that I should stand before you to tell of these horrible things? Please have the courage and resolve to do that so many have refused to. Thank you for listening to my story.