

URGENT ACTION

UIGHUR SCHOLAR TAKEN FROM HIS HOME

Ilham Tohti, prominent Uighur scholar and founder of the website “Uighur Online”, was taken from his home in Beijing by authorities on 15 January. His whereabouts are currently unknown. He is at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

On 25 January the Urumqi Public Security Bureau in Beijing accused **Ilham Tohti** of a wide range of offences, most notably that he used his “Uighur Online” website to recruit followers to engage in “separatist activities”. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression.

Ilham Tohti, 45, is an economics professor at Central University for Nationalities and a well-known critic of China’s ethnic and religious policies in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), which has experienced several violent clashes between Uighurs and security forces in recent years. Ethnic tensions in the XUAR have been fuelled by restrictions of religious freedoms, employment discrimination and political marginalization.

The move to detain Ilham Tohti comes shortly after the Communist Party of China launched a new “grand strategic plan” for the XUAR on 19 December 2013. This new plan pledged to make “maintaining social stability” the primary strategic goal within the XUAR. Similarly, on 16 January Beijing’s Mayor, Wang Anshun, said that the government would tighten control of the internet in connection with anti-terrorism measures. The government has tightened this control more broadly and also imprisoned members of the New Citizens Movement, a loose network of activists who aim to promote government transparency and expose corruption.

Please write immediately in Chinese, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately disclose Ilham Tohti’s whereabouts;
- Calling on them to immediately and unconditionally release Ilham Tohti as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Urging them to ensure that while Ilham Tohti remains in custody he is not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment, that he has access to legal representation of his choice, his family and any medical care he may require.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 12 MARCH 2014 TO:

President

Xi Jinping Guojia Zhuxi
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie
Xichengqu, Beijingshi 100017
People’s Republic of China
Fax: +86 10 6238 1025
Email: gov@govonline.cn
Salutation: Your Excellency

Premier

Li Keqiang Guojia Zongli
The State Council General Office
2 Fuyoujie
Xichengqu, Beijingshi 100017
People’s Republic of China
Fax: +86 10 6596 1109 (c/o Ministry of
Foreign Affairs)
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Director of the Department of Justice
Abuliz Usour Tingzhang
Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Sifating
27 Renminlu
Urumqi 830
Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu
People’s Republic of China
Fax: + 86 99 1231 1590
Salutation: Dear Directo

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

UIGHUR SCHOLAR TAKEN FROM HIS HOME

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ilham Tohti has been commenting on the situation of Uighurs in China for many years. His "Uighur Online" website reported human rights violations suffered not only by Uighurs but also by ethnic Han Chinese. The website has been shut down by the authorities at least twice: first before the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and again for more than a month in March and April 2009. The authorities put Ilham Tohti under surveillance and interrogated him after he travelled to France in March 2009. During the trip he gave media interviews and criticized China's policies on ethnic minorities.

On 5 July 2009 Uighurs in Urumqi, capital of the XUAR, gathered to protest perceived government inaction over killings of migrant Uighur workers in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province on 26 June. While the demonstration started peacefully, rioting erupted following police use of violence against protesters. According to official figures, 197 died in the course of the violence, mostly Han Chinese. The state media news agency, Xinhua, stated that the Chinese authorities detained over 1,400 participants in the protest, including several key figures accused of instigating the unrest. Ilham Tohti was arbitrarily detained from 8 July to 23 August 2009 shortly after the authorities said that articles posted on his website had fuelled the violence in Urumqi. He has since been detained periodically and been placed under house arrest.

When Ilham Tohti was detained on 15 January 2014, eight of his Uighur students from Central University for Nationalities were also detained. To date, only four have been released. Torture and other ill-treatment are endemic in all forms of detention, despite China having ratified the UN Convention against Torture in 1988.

Uighurs are a mainly Muslim ethnic minority who are concentrated primarily in the XUAR in China. Since the 1980s, the Uighurs have been the target of systematic and extensive human rights violations. This includes arbitrary detention and imprisonment, incommunicado detention, and serious restrictions on religious freedom as well as cultural and social rights. Local authorities maintain tight control over religious practice, including prohibiting all government employees and children under the age of 18, from worshipping at mosques. Chinese government policies that limit the use of the Uighur language, severe restrictions on freedom of religion and a sustained influx of Han migrants into the region are destroying Uighur customs and, together with employment discrimination, fuelling discontent and ethnic tensions. The situation has worsened following the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2011 as the Chinese authorities have used the context of counter-terrorism, to attempt to justify further repression to the human rights of Uighurs

Name: Ilham Tohti

Gender m/f: m

UA: 18/14 Index: ASA 17/003/2014 Issue Date: 29 January 2014