



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice China

China – CHN36092 – Xinjiang – Uighurs –  
Ahmet Igamberdi – Retirees – Retired  
government employees – Freedom of  
religion – Ostracism  
9 February 2010

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**1 Please provide any information available about Ahmed Igambardi, reportedly a Uighur campaigner in Australia?**

A search of the sources consulted did not locate information on “Ahmed Igambardi”. Information was found on Ahmet Igamberdi, who is referred to in an article dated 16 June 2009 as the chair of the Australian Turkestan Association in Melbourne<sup>1</sup>, as “a spokesman for the Eastern Turkistan Association of Australia” in an article dated 13 June 2007<sup>2</sup>, and as the “founding President and its Honorary Chairman” of the East Turkistan Australian Association (ETAA), which “was established in 1992 to cater for the expanding East Turkistan Community in Australia.”<sup>3</sup> A *Voice of America* article dated 27 August 2005 refers to Ahmet Igamberdi as “an Uighur exile based in Australia who identifies himself as the president of a government in exile that was proclaimed last year.”<sup>4</sup>

An RRT research response dated 29 May 2007<sup>5</sup> mentions an earlier document dated 26 April 2002 on the East Turkistan Information Center website which refers to Ahmet Igamberdi as the chairman of the Australian Turkestan Association.<sup>6</sup>

**2 Please provide information on whether there are restrictions on retired Uighurs, and in particular retired government employees, practicing their religion in Xinjiang.**

Sources indicate that state employees and retirees in Xinjiang have faced restrictions on entry to mosques and observing Ramadan. Retired government officials were not allowed to make the Hadj pilgrimage without special permission.

An RRT research response dated 30 September 2009 provides information on how the authorities in Xinjiang would treat an unemployed woman or girls if they were discovered praying at home or going to a mosque. Sources mentioned in the research response include information on limitations placed on government employees regarding access to mosques and displaying religious affiliation. Another source provides information on the authorities

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<sup>1</sup> Gladney, D.C. 2009, ‘Uighur Nationalism’, *Congressional Testimony by CQ Transcriptions*, 16 June – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> Smiles, S. 2007, ‘Australia urged to take in Chinese Muslims’, *The Age*, 13 June – Attachment 2.

<sup>3</sup> ‘About ETAA (undated), East Turkistan Australian Association website <http://www.etaa.org.au/HTML%20Files/About%20ETAA.html> – Accessed 4 February 2010 – Attachment 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ramirez, L. 2005, ‘China may be preparing another crackdown on Ethnic Muslims in Xinjiang’, *Voice of America*, 27 August – Attachment 4.

<sup>5</sup> RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response CHN31854*, 29 May – Attachment 5.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Uighur Organizations Around the World’ 2002, East Turkistan Information Center website, 26 April [http://www.uygur.org/adres/uygur\\_organization.htm](http://www.uygur.org/adres/uygur_organization.htm) - Accessed 28 May 2007 – Attachment 6.

applying differing levels of strictness in their control over Muslims, including in relation to who could attend mosques, according to how religious Uighurs were in different districts in Xinjiang.<sup>7</sup> The research response refers to an article dated 7 February 2006 which indicates that “a sign above the gate of a mosque in the poorer southern part of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, forbidding Muslims to attend for worship”, listed people prohibited from entering the mosque. The list included “[s]tate employees, workers, and retirees.”<sup>8</sup>

A more recent article last updated on 6 September 2009 in *The Epoch Times* refers to World Uyghur Congress spokesman Dilxat Raxit saying that “Uyghur Communist Party cadres throughout Xinjiang had been forced to sign ‘letters of responsibility’ promising to avoid fasting and other religious activities” during Ramadan, and that “[f]or the first time,... the crackdown has extended to retired Communist Party members.”<sup>9</sup>

An article in *The New York Times* dated 9 September 2008 indicates that local governments administering areas in the western part of Xinjiang had “imposed strict limits on religious practices during the traditional Muslim fasting month of Ramadan”. The website of the town of Yingmaili listed nine rules, including “barring teachers and students from observing Ramadan,” and “prohibiting retired government officials from entering mosques”. Also, “[i]n nearby Xinhe County, the government has decreed that Communist Party members, civil servants and retired officials must not observe Ramadan, enter mosques or take part in any religious activities during the month.”<sup>10</sup>

In relation to Uighurs seeking to travel on the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, an article in *The New York Times* dated 19 October 2008 refers to a Uighur man in Kashgar in Xinjiang, now retired, who was once a government employee and Communist Party member, who “might very well lose his pension if he went on the hajj”.<sup>11</sup>

A Human Rights Watch report from 2006 indicates that in relation to Uighur Muslims, “only state-sponsored Hadj pilgrimages were permitted, and government employees and retired government officials were not allowed to make the journey without special permission.”<sup>12</sup>

**3 Please advise if there is any information suggesting that Uighur families with overseas relatives or who are targeted by the authorities, are likely to be ostracised by fellow members of the Uighur community?**

A search of the sources consulted found little specific information on whether Uighur families with overseas relatives or who are targeted by the authorities are likely to be ostracised by fellow members of the Uighur community.

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<sup>7</sup> RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response CHN35420*, 30 September, (Questions 4 & 5) – Attachment 7.

<sup>8</sup> ‘East Turkestan: China Bans Officials, State Employees, Children from Mosques’ 2006, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) website, 7 February <http://www.unpo.org/content/view/3699/236/> - Accessed 24 September 2009 – Attachment 8.

<sup>9</sup> ‘China’s Muslim Uyghurs Forbidden to Fast During Ramadan’ 2009, *The Epoch Times*, 6 September <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/content/view/21899/> - Accessed 5 February 2010 – Attachment 9.

<sup>10</sup> Wong, E. 2008, ‘Curbs Imposed on Muslims in Western China During Ramadan’, *The New York Times*, 9 September <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/09/world/asia/09china.html?pagewanted=print> – Accessed 5 February 2010 – Attachment 10.

<sup>11</sup> Wong, E. 2008, ‘Wary of Islam, China Tightens a Vise of Rules’, *The New York Times*, 19 October <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/world/asia/19xinjiang.html> - Accessed 25 November 2008 – Attachment 11.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch 2006, *China: A Year After New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted*, 1 March [http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740\\_txt.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740_txt.htm) - Accessed 17 March 2006 – Attachment 12.

A section on the harassment of Uighur returnees, exiles or their families by the Chinese authorities in Xinjiang in an Amnesty International report dated 7 July 2004 refers to “measures reportedly taken by the Chinese authorities in the XUAR to monitor and restrict contacts between local Uighur families and their relatives abroad”, and to the authorities apparently targeting “families in an attempt to force Uighur exiles to return or prevent them from engaging in political activities abroad.” The report indicates that “more distant relatives” of an exiled Uighur activist whose family had been visited by officials from the Chinese department of state security “had apparently shunned his family for fear of reprisals.”<sup>13</sup>

A more recent Human Rights Watch report dated October 2009 which “documents the enforced disappearances of at least 43 Uighur men and teenage boys who were detained by Chinese security forces in the wake of... protests” which occurred between 5-7 July 2009 in Urumqi, Xinjiang, indicates that many of the witnesses to the disappearances spoken to by Human Rights Watch “said they were afraid to discuss the circumstances of the arrests even with their neighbors.” According to the report:

Virtually every Uighur with whom HRW spoke had knowledge of young men—often their relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, or local vendors and business owners they knew—who “disappeared” after security forces had taken them away.

However, only a limited number of witnesses agreed to provide detailed accounts of the “disappearances” that could be included in this report. All of the witnesses were scared. Many said they were afraid to discuss the circumstances of the arrests even with their neighbors. Interviewees spoke about plain-clothes or uniformed patrols, as well as CCTV cameras monitoring them.

The report also refers to varying views held by Uighurs regarding Chinese rule in Xinjiang:

Although China’s sovereignty over the region is not in dispute at an international level, many Uighurs have never fully accepted Chinese rule, and tend to view the Chinese expansion in Xinjiang as an oppressive process of assimilation. Others think that the Chinese state has made a genuine effort of accommodation by raising economic standards but insist that that the government should sanction pervasive socioeconomic discrimination, implement autonomy laws that in theory guarantee a greater say in policy-making and control over economic riches, and relax control of religious activities. Some Uighurs have chosen to join the ranks of the local bureaucracy, including the police and the army, even though all positions of real power are generally in the hands of Han cadres.<sup>14</sup>

The statement dated 16 June 2009 by Professor Dru C. Gladney to the US Congress Committee on House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight includes general background information on the Uighurs’ culture and history, including information on the diversity of the groups under the Uighur nationality designation. The statement indicates that “although within the region many portray the Uighur as united around separatist or Islamist causes, Uighur continue to be divided from within by religious conflicts, in this case competing Sufi and non-Sufi factions, territorial loyalties

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<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International 2004, *People’s Republic of China: Uighurs fleeing persecution as China wages its “war on terror”*, 7 July <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170212004> - Accessed 6 February 2007 – Attachment 13.

<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Watch 2009, “*We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them*”: *Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang’s Protests*, October, pp. 5, 8-9 <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/xinjiang1009webwcover.pdf> - Accessed 22 October 2009 – Attachment 14.

(whether they be oases or places of origin), linguistic discrepancies, commoner-elite alienation, and competing political loyalties.”<sup>15</sup>

An article in *The New York Times* dated 2 September 2008 which indicates that an attack on ethnic Uighur police officers in Xinjiang suggested “that some of the recent violence in Xinjiang could be aimed at Uighurs seen by other Uighurs as collaborators with the ethnic Han Chinese,” notes that while “[m]any Uighurs resent rule by the Han Chinese and advocate greater political freedom and economic benefits or an independent Uighur-run nation... some Uighurs have also benefited from policies put in place by the Communist Party, including many who work in the security forces or in the local government.”<sup>16</sup>

## List of Sources Consulted

### Internet Sources:

#### Government Information & Reports

Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada <http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/>

UK Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

US Department of State <http://www.state.gov/>

Congressional-Executive Commission on China <http://www.cecc.gov/index.php>

#### United Nations (UN)

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain>

#### Non-Government Organisations

Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org>

#### International News & Politics

BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

#### Topic Specific Links

East Turkistan Australian Association <http://www.etaa.org.au/index.html>

#### Region Specific Links

#### Search Engines

Copernic <http://www.copernic.com/>

### Databases:

FACTIVA (news database)

BACIS (DIAC Country Information database)

REFINFO (IRBDC (Canada) Country Information database)

ISYS (RRT Research & Information database, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, US Department of State Reports)

MRT-RRT Library Catalogue

## List of Attachments

1. Gladney, D.C. 2009, ‘Uighur Nationalism’, *Congressional Testimony by CQ Transcriptions*, 16 June. (FACTIVA)

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<sup>15</sup> Gladney, D.C. 2009, ‘Uighur Nationalism’, *Congressional Testimony by CQ Transcriptions*, 16 June – Attachment 1.

<sup>16</sup> Wong, E. 2008, ‘Uighurs on both sides of conflict in China’, *The New York Times*, 2 September – Attachment 15.

2. Smiles, S. 2007, 'Australia urged to take in Chinese Muslims', *The Age*, 13 June. (FACTIVA)
3. 'About ETAA' (undated), East Turkistan Australian Association website <http://www.etaa.org.au/HTML%20Files/About%20ETAA.html> – Accessed 4 February 2010.
4. Ramirez, L. 2005, 'China may be preparing another crackdown on Ethnic Muslims in Xinjiang', *Voice of America*, 27 August. (CISNET China CX132486)
5. RRT Country Research 2007, *Research Response CHN31854*, 29 May.
6. 'Uighur Organizations Around the World' 2002, East Turkistan Information Center website, 26 April [http://www.uygur.org/adres/uygur\\_organization.htm](http://www.uygur.org/adres/uygur_organization.htm) - Accessed 28 May 2007.
7. RRT Research & Information 2009, *Research Response CHN35420*, 30 September.
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9. 'China's Muslim Uyghurs Forbidden to Fast During Ramadan' 2009, *The Epoch Times*, 6 September <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n2/content/view/21899/> - Accessed 5 February 2010.
10. Wong, E. 2008, 'Curbs Imposed on Muslims in Western China During Ramadan', *The New York Times*, 9 September <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/09/world/asia/09china.html?pagewanted=print> – Accessed 5 February 2010.
11. Wong, E. 2008, 'Wary of Islam, China Tightens a Vise of Rules', *The New York Times*, 19 October <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/world/asia/19xinjiang.html> - Accessed 25 November 2008.
12. Human Rights Watch 2006, *China: A Year After New Regulations, Religious Rights Still Restricted*, 1 March [http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740\\_txt.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/01/china12740_txt.htm) - Accessed 17 March 2006.
13. Amnesty International 2004, *People's Republic of China: Uighurs fleeing persecution as China wages its "war on terror"*, 7 July <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa170212004> - Accessed 6 February 2007.
14. Human Rights Watch 2009, *"We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them": Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang's Protests*, October <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/xinjiang1009webwcover.pdf> - Accessed 22 October 2009.

15. Wong, E. 2008, 'Uighurs on both sides of conflict in China', *The New York Times*, 2 September. (CISNET China CX209310)