

URGENT ACTION

UYGHUR HELD IN SOLITARY CONFINEMENT FOR 2 YEARS

Uyghur tech entrepreneur Ekpar Asat has been held in solitary confinement since January 2019, according to information shared with his family. It is believed that his prolonged isolation, malnutrition and lack of access to proper medical care has caused his health to dramatically deteriorate. Convicted without any known trial on charges of “inciting ethnic hatred and ethnic discrimination” and sentenced to 15 years in prison, there are grave concerns for Ekpar Asat’s condition and wellbeing.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Director Wang Jiang
Prison Administration Bureau of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
No 380, Huanghe lu, Urumqi
830000, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
People's Republic of China

Dear Director Wang:

I am writing to express my grave concern for Uyghur tech entrepreneur **Ekpar Asat** (艾克拜尔·艾赛提), who I understand has been held in solitary confinement since he was moved to a prison in Aksu Prefecture in January 2019.

During the first video conversation with his family since his detention, in January 2021, Ekpar Asat was seen to have lost a lot of weight and looked pale with black spots on his face. As he continues to suffer from a lack of sunlight exposure and malnutrition, it is feared that Ekpar Asat's health will deteriorate further without access to proper medical care.

According to international human rights laws and standards, solitary confinement shall be used only in exceptional cases as a last resort, for as short a time as possible and subject to independent review, and only pursuant to the authorization by a competent authority.

Prolonged solitary confinement, particularly when combined with isolation from the outside world, may violate the prohibition against torture and other ill-treatment and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

I therefore call on you to:

- Ensure that, while detained, Ekpar Asat is treated in full accordance with the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), and specifically does not subject him to torture or other ill-treatment, including poor conditions of detention, inadequate food and health care and prolonged solitary confinement;
- Ensure Ekpar Asat has regular, unrestricted access to a lawyer of his choice and his family;
- Release Ekpar Asat unless there is sufficient, credible and admissible evidence that he committed an internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ekpar Asat is a Uyghur tech entrepreneur, media founder and philanthropist dedicated to helping older people and children with disabilities. He founded a popular social media app that featured information on a variety of current affairs and cultural topics. He went missing in April 2016, after which he was later convicted without any known trial on charges of “inciting ethnic hatred and ethnic discrimination” (民族歧视、煽动民族仇恨) and sentenced to 15 years in prison. His family only found out about the trial through communications between the Chinese authorities and a few US senators in December 2019 and January 2020. He is currently detained in a prison in Xinjiang’s Aksu Prefecture.

Ekpar Asat was finally able to communicate with his family in January 2021 for the first time since 2016. Based on this communication, his family reports that his health appears to have deteriorated. During the three-minute video conversation with his family members in late January 2021, he was seen to have lost a lot of weight and looked pale with black spots on his face. He told his family members that his health was declining both physically and mentally.

The US embassy in Beijing encouraged Ekpar Asat to apply for the US State Department’s International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) after he met with Max Baucus, then the American ambassador to China, in Xinjiang in 2014. The IVLP is a professional exchange programme in which current and emerging foreign leaders in a variety of fields experience the US first hand and build relationships with American counterparts.

The US State Department mentioned Ekpar Asat’s case in its 2019 human rights report on China. After a bipartisan group of US senators urged China to release Ekpar Asat, the Chinese embassy in Washington, DC, responded by email in January 2020 with information about Ekpar Asat’s conviction and sentencing but without providing any further details.

Xinjiang is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in China. More than half of the region’s population of 22 million people belong to mostly Turkic and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, including Uyghurs (around 11.3 million), Kazakhs (around 1.6 million) and other populations whose languages, cultures and ways of life vary distinctly from those of the Han who are the majority in “interior” China.

Media reports have illustrated the extent of new draconian security measures implemented since Chen Quanguo came into power as Xinjiang’s Party Secretary in 2016. In October 2016, there were numerous reports that authorities in the region had confiscated Uyghur passports in an attempt to further curtail their freedom of movement. In March 2017, the Xinjiang government enacted the “De-extremification Regulation” that identifies and prohibits a wide range of behaviours labelled “extremist”, such as “spreading extremist thought”, denigrating or refusing to watch public radio and TV programmes, wearing burkas, having an “abnormal” beard, resisting national policies, and publishing, downloading, storing, or reading articles, publications, or audio-visual materials containing “extremist content”. The regulation also set up a “responsibility system” for government cadres for “anti-extremism” work and established annual reviews of their performance.

It is estimated that up to a million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim people have been held in the “transformation-through-education” centres. The Chinese authorities had denied the existence of such facilities until October 2018, when they began describing them as voluntary, free “vocational training” centres. They claim that the objective of this vocational training is to provide people with technical and vocational education to enable them to find jobs and become “useful” citizens. China’s explanation, however, contradicts reports of beatings, food deprivation and solitary confinement that have been collected from former detainees.

China has rejected calls from the international community, including Amnesty, to allow independent experts unrestricted access to Xinjiang. Instead, China has made efforts to silence criticism by inviting delegations from different countries to visit Xinjiang for carefully orchestrated and closely monitored tours.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English, Chinese
You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 26 June 2021

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Ekpar Asat (he, him)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/3839/2021/en/>