

URGENT ACTION

Protect Uighurs from return TO TORTURE

Some 50 ethnic Uighurs detained in Thailand for irregular entry must be protected from forcible transfer to any country where they may face torture. Fears for the individuals are heightened following the Thai authorities' forcible deportation to China of around 100 other individuals on 8 July 2015.

The 50 are believed to be part of a group of hundreds of Uighurs whom Thai authorities detained for irregular entry into Thailand in March 2014. At the time of their detention, the media reported that Chinese authorities had identified a number of the group as ethnic Uighurs from the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Thai officials confirmed that on the morning of 8 July, they returned some 100 individuals to China, whom they had identified to be Chinese nationals. They have also confirmed that they sent some 170 individuals to Turkey, and that they have not verified the nationality of 50 more individuals currently in detention in Thailand.

Uighurs from China's XUAR may be at risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment if forcibly returned to China. Amnesty International has documented cases in which Uighur asylum seekers who were forcibly returned to China, were detained, reportedly tortured and in some cases sentenced to death and executed.

Thailand is bound by the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the transfer of persons to any country or jurisdiction where they would face a real risk of serious human rights violations. This principle is protected in numerous international instruments, and has achieved the status of customary international law, binding on all states regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant treaties. The forcible return of persons to a country where they could face torture and other ill-treatment would also constitute a violation of the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, to which Thailand is a state party.

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

- Expressing serious concern that Thai authorities have forcibly returned some 100 people believed to be ethnic Uighurs to China, where they might be at risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment.
- Urging Thailand not to send anyone, including an estimated 50 ethnic Uighurs whose nationality is unknown, to a country where they would be at risk of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 21 AUGUST 2015 TO:

Prime Minister

Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha
Government House
Pitsanulok Road, Dusit
Bangkok 10300, Thailand
Fax: +66 2 282 5131

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Thanasak Patimapragorn
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Sri Ayudhya Road
Bangkok 10400, Thailand
Fax: +66 2643 5320, +66 2643 5314
Email: minister@mfa.go.th

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



Salutation: Dear Minister

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.

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Additional Information

Under Thai immigration law, foreigners in Thailand without valid visas are considered "illegal immigrants" and may be arrested, indefinitely detained and deported.

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 limit the use of the Uighur language, impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion and encourage sustained influx of Han migrants into the region.

Violations of Uighurs' human rights have persisted for many decades, but have intensified in recent years. Following the attacks on the United States of America (USA) on 11 September 2001, the Chinese authorities utilized the "war on terror" to justify an intensification of repression of Uighurs. Since then, the authorities have cast Uighur discontent within the framework of international terrorism, and frequently interpret expressions of Uighur cultural identity not validated by the state as evidence of "separatist" behaviour.

In May 2014, a one-year "strike hard" campaign was launched in the XUAR, and officials prioritized speedy arrests, quick trials and mass sentencing. The government called for greater "co-operation" between prosecuting authorities and courts, raising additional concerns that accused individuals would not receive fair trials. In January 2015, the "strike hard" campaign was extended for the duration of the year. Under such circumstances, many Uighurs make the decision to flee the country. The Chinese authorities have responded by harassing the relatives of those who have left in order to pressure them to return and increasing attempts to curtail the political and human rights activities of Uighur activists in other countries. This has led to growing fears among many Uighurs abroad, including asylum seekers and refugees, of being forcibly returned to China.

In recent years, dozens of Uighur asylum seekers have been forcibly returned from South East Asian or Central Asian countries, to China. For example, in December 2009, the Cambodian authorities forcibly returned 20 ethnic Uighur asylum seekers. Of these 20, five are reported to have been sentenced to life imprisonment, while eight others are reported to have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from 16 to 20 year, after closed trials. In December 2012, Malaysia forcibly returned six Uighurs, whose claims for asylum were pending with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). It has been difficult to confirm information concerning individuals returned.

Names: Over 200 men, women and children in Thailand

Gender m/f: both

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