

**Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing, and
Congressional-Executive Commission on China**

**Hearing
on
China, Genocide and the Olympics**

**May 18, 2021- 1:00 p.m.
Virtual, via WebEx**

**Statement of Rayhan Asat
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I am grateful to Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and China-Congressional Executive Commission for convening this important hearing in response to one of the most pressing human rights concerns of our time, the genocide and crimes against humanity targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic ethnic groups.

I am a human rights lawyer of Uyghur origin and a sister to a victim of the Chinese government's 21st-century prison camp, Ekpar Asat. In 2008, when China hosted the Olympics, I was a young college student in Wuhan among a few Uyghurs studying there. My friends and I got up early to watch the Olympic torch relay tradition, a historical and glorious moment for China. I was inside of China at that time and totally unaware of the discussions taking place outside of China concerning the human rights abuses and China's unrelenting support of the Sudanese government's state-sanctioned violence in Darfur. Back then, the Beijing authorities evicted many Uyghurs who were living there.

Soon after, I left China to study in Canada, then later Harvard. Before I made the US as my permanent home, I also worked in Turkey. I used to visit my family regularly until the spring of 2016 that changed the course of my life. Before the Uyghur crisis began, I was just like many other Americans who are living their lives, exploring the world, and contributing to our respective society in different ways. All my life, I believed in building bridges like my brother Ekpar. Since I grew up in Xinjiang, China, I always hoped for a prosperous Xinjiang and thereby a prosperous China. Wherever I went, I spoke at or organized conferences to foster relationships between China and the countries I lived at that time. For example, I organized the very first Turkey-China conference hoping that through my role, the Chinese government would see the Uyghurs as a powerful link between itself and other Turkic communities. I also believed China is making progress while mindful of its deep flaws. This observation was limited to my experience and I don't wish to disregard others' lived experience. My contribution to the Chinese society demonstrates that like many people who love China, I sought to be a friend and ambassador of goodwill but that did not help. I learned the hard way, that as long as we're born Uyghurs, persecution always looms.

Since 2016, with the so-called "strike hard campaign," China has taken a different course in its progression, especially concerning how it deals with the Uyghur and other ethnic minorities including my brother, once viewed as an upstander.

My brother Ekpar is a tech-entrepreneur, media founder, and philanthropist. His tireless work of peacebuilding through entrepreneurship and philanthropy landed him recognition within China and outside China alike. The Chinese media outlets extolled him a star in the tech world, a positive force for humanity, and a bridge-builder. However, even Ekpar could not escape the largest detention and prison camps the Chinese government has built since World War II for the past 5 years. He languished into the prison camps immediately after returning from taking part in the State Department's International Visitors Leadership Program. The camp is the implementation of the Strike hard campaign, which was ultimately shaped in the form of the "Strike Uyghur campaign" to "break Uyghurs' lineage, connection, roots, and origin."

Today, we are gathered to debate whether China should host the Olympics whilst committing horrific acts against humanity such as: detaining millions of people, forcibly separated families, taken children from their guardians, prohibited people practicing religion, destroyed religious and cultural shrines, forcibly sterilized women, installed over a million Han officials into Uyghur homes as mind watches, promoted forced marriages between Han and Uyghur people, facilitated environment for mass rape in the prison camps, are just a few from among the lists I could not exhaust yet. As each day passes, life is being lost in these camps, human dignity suffers, families are separated, and innocent children are raised without their parents' embrace. Thus, my recommendation as an attorney, reflects how our actions will directly affect the victims and how we can best mitigate the unspeakable human suffering. I analyze the complexity of rejecting China hosting the Olympics *vis a vis* endorsing China to host this fine game and will seek to present a nuanced perspective.

1. Use the Olympics as an opportunity to demand the Chinese government to free the innocent people and close the prison camps; This requires united effort from the democracies.
2. Diplomatic boycott should be exercised if the Chinese government remains undeterred to cease its repression.
3. Provide an opportunity for the impacted community to meet with the athletes to debrief them about the ongoing crimes against humanity.

Does the Olympic Present an Opportunity for the International Community to Secure Human Freedom and Champion for Human Rights?

While the Chinese government bears the responsibility for the state-sanctioned terror and violence it unleashed in the Uyghur region, we as the international community will be complicit if we choose to look away. The ongoing violence against the Uyghur people doesn't just dehumanize the people it's inflicted upon – it also dehumanizes anyone who stands by and lets it happen. Now we have a chance to make it right.

Five years and still ongoing, the Chinese government has shown no sign of closing the camps and releasing innocent people like my brother. In fact, the Chinese government and its cruelty have only intensified. I learned that my brother had been held and continues to be held in **solitary confinement** in Aksu, far from home, since **January 2019**. Perhaps due to my consistent advocacy the past year, two months ago, he was seen by my family in a 3 to 4 minute video call; my brother looked gaunt and a shadow of his former self. The physical torture coupled with mental isolation has destroyed him. Would I ever see him coming out alive from these barbaric prison

camps remain to be seen? Many Uyghur families are suffering the exact same pain to varying degrees.

Thus, first and foremost, I do believe that the Olympics presents an opportunity for the US, allies, and democracies around the world to put pressure on China to close the concentration camps and seize the ongoing atrocities in Xinjiang. I urge the US to coordinate a united front to defy China together. Last week, at the UN side event, Turkey also joined in expressing grievances over the abuses and violence against the Uyghurs. To safeguard the rules-based order that the US and allies assembled together, it is important for the democratic country leaders to invite other countries to join in their combined effort to free the detained, enslaved, and imprisoned Uyghurs. With the pandemic still surging in some countries and the crisis in the Middle East and Myanmar, democracies are grappling with several global crises. Nevertheless, we must still focus on the Uyghur crisis, and leading democracies must make conscious, deliberate, and coordinated efforts to seek solutions that compel Beijing to free the innocent. After all, the bare minimum the international community is calling for is “Let the Uyghurs Live with Dignity and Be Free.”

If China remains undeterred and continues to hold these innocent Uyghurs, Kazaks, and other people despite the best collective effort, we must consider first relocating the game to another city. Rejecting Beijing to host the Olympics should not be controversial. This boycott would be far different from any we have seen so far, and we may even liken it to the Olympic games held in Germany in 1936, which helped Hitler’s Germany advance their public image and set the groundwork for mass atrocities to come.

Why Should We Boycott the Beijing Olympics?

The debate around the Olympics presented two opposing views. First, some argue that the purpose of hosting an international sports game is for the world to come together in unity, friendship, and togetherness. So we should leave sports out of politics.

But how could we as a world come together to play when there is an ongoing genocide taking place? How could we cheer for our beloved athletes knowing that millions of people are held in the concentration camps knowing that four hours flight away? How could corporations who pledged to promote diversity, gender equality, and racial equity sponsor a game that would glorify a country that’s committing such atrocious crime in the 21st century? How could we bear witness to the Uyghurs dancing for the camera while holding back tears in a government-orchestrated staged performance? Make no mistake, the universality and popularity of the Olympics would provide a golden opportunity for China to lament its global standing as a member of a community of nations that promote human rights, racial equality, and diversity and inclusion.

Some take the view that this would be an opportunity for the athlete to highlight the abuses in Xinjiang. I don’t find this argument persuasive as the sports industry has been awfully silent on the Uyghur crisis due to China’s lucrative market. Unless we take active steps to make sure the athlete community is aware and shocked by the horror of the camps, then our athletes will fall to the pressures and remain silent.

I am keenly aware of the enormous challenge that a potential boycott would present to leaders, advocates, the Uyghur community, the sports industry, and many more stakeholders. I also don’t want to take the athletes’ chances away from celebrating their hard work. But, if the world can

postpone the game for COVID, the Olympic Committee can postpone it in the face of genocide and crimes against humanity.

Another dissenting view against the boycott is that it would be ineffective. Given the enormity of the crisis and the depth of the destruction taking place, we should not merely regard effectiveness as a deciding factor. We must try to understand what the victims seek from us. I can hear a loud “**Save Uyghurs**” from the dark cells.

As it stands, several big business giants have wowed their commitment for corporate sponsorship for the Olympic game. For example, Coca-Cola, a company that is a sponsor of Major League Baseball, supported moving the all-star game out of Atlanta in response to the Georgia voting rights law, citing it discriminates against black voters. However, Coca-Cola cannot express the same solidarity with the victims of concentration camps who are dehumanized, tortured, sterilized, forcibly disappeared, and raped in the camps. Families are bleeding. My brother’s forced disappearance has taken years out of my parents’ lives, and it changed the course of my own life. The Uyghurs are human beings too, and their dignity must be defended and honored by those high-profiled and champions for racial equity. Congress must demand answers from companies who choose to disregard the suffering of the Uyghur people whether they wish to enable the Chinese government to further repress the Uyghurs and other Turkic communities?

As a compliance attorney who defended companies in corruption charges, I believe companies can uphold business ethics and norms if the environment supports it. We must demand answers from corporations who are seeking profit out of the Beijing Olympics that will inevitably lead to the Uyghurs being further terrorized and dehumanized. American corporations should champion American values, the rule of law, and righteousness wherever they operate.

When China hosted the Olympic 2008, many hoped it would lead to China’s democratization and China will become a country that champions the values of diversity, inclusion, and pluralism. Let’s look at where China is now? Repeatedly allowing China to host another game would not only create a culture of impunity when a country commits crimes against humanity, it also sends a message that the rules vary against a superpower. Our endorsement of China hosting the Olympics suggests that we deny the suffering of the Uyghur people. Denialism is one of the ten stages of genocide that would inevitably bring about the determined destruction of the Uyghur people. I don’t believe we can afford a beautiful culture, people, and community being destroyed in plain sight after we vowed “never again.”

Addressing Hypocrisy of the IOC

The IOC’s stance is “it has neither the mandate nor the capability to change the laws or the political system of a sovereign country.” No one is asking the IOC to change China’s political structure but rather we are asking the IOC to uphold the values of the Olympic to achieve the purpose of universal sports. The game can be relocated to another city that espouses the values of the Olympics, potentially Tokyo, as the facility can be reused.

And let’s keep in mind that the IOC has taken a position against the South African apartheid state, and it can do so against China. The Chinese state discriminates against Uyghurs and likens

them to tumors and their religion to mental disease. It has forcibly sterilized women, prevented the birth of the Uyghur population, and forced Uyghurs to work in factories under inhuman conditions, and tainted the global supply chains with slave labor. The Chinese government has always created multiple obstacles for the Uyghur players to be included in the sports. In rare cases, when the Uyghurs represented China and became a star, they still could not escape the imprisonment in the camps.

I do commend the Olympics for standing up against the apartheid government. A story of an esteemed South African Judge named Albie Sachs deeply touched me. He was jailed during the apartheid government. He used to sing a song in solitary confinement to fight the isolation. The song goes,

So this is what prison is like.
The quiet is complete
and I am alone in my cell,
the shock of the slammed door still echoing in....

I don't know how my brother finds solace in his solitary confinement. In my good consciousness, I cannot give up without at least trying to implore the world, our athletes, and leaders to reject a totalitarian country from hosting a game that will only serve as a PR for its global standing notwithstanding its racist and ruthless policies that are tearing up families.

Should the Athlete Boycott?

My brother loves sports. I recall the days when my dad and brother would watch the Olympics and other sports games together. To recruit me in their enthusiasm, they would patiently explain the basic rules and norms no matter how uninterested I appeared. I keep wondering how my brother would feel that the game he loves will be hosted in Beijing in absolute disregard to the barbed wire camps and those who are yearning for their freedom behind the wires.

A few athletes have spoken out in support of Uyghurs despite priding themselves as champions for racial, social, and economic inequality. I don't wish to further alienate athletes by demanding them to speak out against China and forgo lucrative opportunities.

However, I do ask to be given an opportunity to have a face-to-face exchange with the athlete. It's important for the athletes to hear Ekpar's ordeal from my own words. I believe I have a shot at convincing the athletes to take action. The athletes should have a choice to choose whether participating or refraining from the game. It's a fine White House tradition to host athletes. I hope the Biden administration can create a space for a dialogue between advocates and the athletes about the best ways to achieve the desired goal of all parties and concerned stakeholders. After hearing directly from the impacted community, I can imagine athletes joining me and others to call for the game to be relocated. Together we would make a compelling case in the interest of justice, fairness, and global peace. Kindness and decency trigger the same action. Athletes from other countries will likely join the call and we can successfully postpone the game to host it in another city.

However, if the athletes still believe going to China will advance our interests as the global community, I can no longer impose my values. In that instance, I can hope after being debriefed by the impacted community, the athletes would protest in unity during and once the game is over. We

can lay out creative options to amplify the crimes against humanity. Perhaps they will continue to speak out against the egregious abuses after returning to their respective countries. A picture speaks 1000 words, but the Chinese government's Orwellian style surveillance often conceal the horrors in the camps. Given the world cannot see many shocking pictures, at least they owe to us a chance to convey our pain.

The End