

Written Statement of Dr. Rishat Abbas

“The Preservation of Memory: Combatting the CCP’s Historical Revisionism and Erasure of Culture.”

Thank you. I would first like to thank the Commission for the opportunity to share our experience in trying to keep the Uyghur language and culture alive. This question is an existential one. Since 2017, the Chinese government has detained more than 1.8 to 3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic groups in concentration camps, committed mass sterilization of Uyghur women, separated parents from their children, forced Uyghur women to marry Chinese men, eliminated Uyghur religious and cultural leaders through imprisonment, and forced Uyghurs to do slave labor.

Since then, China has been committing what the US government and nearly a dozen Western parliaments determined as genocide and crimes against humanity. They have targeted the Uyghur population in what is now the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, which Uyghurs prefer to call its geographical and historical name – East Turkestan. In August 2022, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released its report on Xinjiang, which stated that China’s treatment of the Uyghur population may constitute crimes against humanity. A month after the release of the UN report, Human Rights Watch published a report on the official figure of prison counts in Xinjiang. The report said China sentenced and imprisoned an estimated half a million Uyghur people. China arbitrarily prosecuted the Uyghurs detained in concentration camps after international outcry over its mass detention of Uyghurs.

Despite international concern over China’s Uyghur genocide, the Chinese government has been aggressively implementing policies of assimilation of the Uyghur language and criminalizing the Uyghur culture and religious beliefs. If Uyghur language, religion, culture, and identity are successfully erased in the Uyghur homeland and lost in the diaspora, the Chinese government wins regardless of how things develop politically and geo-strategically in the future. Many Uyghurs in the diaspora face the Chinese government's transnational

repression for speaking out against Beijing's crimes. Like countless others, my family and I have paid a steep personal price for our advocacy, enduring painful consequences as retaliation from the Chinese government. The horrific atrocities in our homeland affect me personally. My sister, Dr. Gulshan Abbas, a retired medical doctor living in Urumchi, was sentenced to 20 years in prison on fabricated charges of "terrorism." As a medical doctor, she has always been entirely apolitical and dedicated her entire life to caring for her patients. Her unjust detention, despite her chronic health issues, exposes the Chinese government's oppressive policies that target Uyghurs simply for their identity and for the activism of their relatives abroad. My sister's imprisonment is a blatant act of retaliation, as she has never engaged in any form of advocacy during her life.

We all know the Chinese government is committing an ongoing genocide against the Uyghur population in our homeland by eradicating the Uyghur people as the end goal. In addition to this physical aspect of the genocide, China is also simultaneously committing a linguistic and cultural genocide. The Chinese Communist Party has suppressed all forms of cultural expression by Uyghurs in their historic homeland. The Chinese government has also suppressed the use of the Uyghur language in China and eliminated the instruction of Uyghur language in schools. It is essential to the future that Uyghur language and culture are preserved and promoted by diaspora and exile communities outside of China to prevent the ultimate aim of the CCP, which is to eliminate the very identity of a national group.

Although there is overwhelming evidence and confirmation from the Chinese government's own leaked documents and documents globally, Chinese government propaganda has become disturbingly normalized. It is echoed by prominent scholars, amplified by certain media narratives, and even parroted by college students. There is a troubling tendency to overlook these injustices in favor of preserving economic ties with the PRC. This pattern is evident in Hollywood, global corporations, academic institutions, and the silence or inaction of numerous governments worldwide.

The genocide and crimes against humanity in the Uyghur region are not isolated incidents; they are warning signs of a deeper, global erosion of human rights—setting a dangerous precedent for future atrocities. History has shown us the devastating consequences of ignoring such alarms. We know what it means to take principled action, and it is imperative that we demand it now.

Uyghur diaspora community leaders and advocates across the world have made it clear that it is vital to their communities to ensure that the next generation of Uyghur youth abroad learn the language to preserve the core of Uyghur culture as long as Chinese repression continues.

The situation is very similar to the position that the diaspora communities of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania faced after annexation by Stalin and the Soviet Union from 1939 to 1989. Many fled to far flung locations around the world. For fifty years the Soviet regime tried to force the Russian language and Soviet culture on the local population. They moved waves of Slavic immigrants into the Baltic States. But in diaspora communities across the world the language was kept alive for two generations. Nobody knew if or when the Soviet Union would collapse, but when it did thousands of Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians born abroad returned home to help rebuild their nations. This gives today's Uyghurs hope, and a task – to pass the culture and language on to the next generation at a level sufficient to participate in everyday interactions but also to be ready to live and work in the Uyghur language at a policy-expert level.

Our organization, The Uyghur Academy, is a global Uyghur intellectual network with branches in the United States, Canada, Europe, Turkey, Central Asia, Japan, and Australia, as well as four institutes. The Academy promotes effective collaboration among Uyghur organizations, communities, universities, NGOs, and key stakeholders in the diaspora to highlight the Uyghur Genocide and counter the CCP influence.

Since 2022, with funding and collaboration from USAID and the United States Institute of Peace, Uyghur Academy has organized three international conferences, bringing together community leaders and teachers from around the globe. Most of these teachers are

simple community volunteers with no real teacher training. We held training workshops for them to help them learn basic teaching techniques as well as the nuances of how a “heritage learner” - someone who speaks Uyghur from the crib at home but lives in the dominant language outside the home – learns differently from a non-native learner.

With the generous support of USAID and USIP, we successfully organized two extraordinary Uyghur global youth language summer schools in 2023 and 2024. These schools brought together seven esteemed instructors, renowned for their dedication to preserving Uyghur culture and identity, to guide enthusiastic young Uyghurs from 14 countries. Participants were immersed in a vibrant exploration of language, culture, history, and art - fostering a profound sense of purpose and belonging. This was more than an educational event—it was a transformative journey connecting young Uyghurs to their heritage and to each other. They learned not just to endure challenges but to face them with resilience, finding joy even in adversity. Smiles lit up their faces as friendships blossomed, and tears flowed as they parted, marking the end of an unforgettable experience. For many, it was their first opportunity to interact with peers in the Uyghur language, an experience they now cherish deeply.

Even after the schools ended, participants stayed connected through platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram, forming networks that extend beyond borders. Some have already begun organizing advocacy efforts for Uyghur issues in their respective countries. This is just the beginning, and there is enormous potential to expand these initiatives. To truly empower the next generation, we must go further. We need to nurture Uyghur entrepreneurs, scientists, and policy experts who are not only fluent in their language but also equipped to lead in fields like artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and public policy. This effort requires additional investment, enabling us to ensure that the Uyghur language evolves alongside cutting-edge global developments. By scaling up these activities, we can safeguard our culture while preparing future leaders to excel in a rapidly changing world.

There is great demand in the Uyghur diaspora communities for these efforts. There is more we could do to counter CCP propaganda and raise awareness in those countries with

diaspora communities. This is part of a transformation of traumatized, scattered, and isolated Uyghur exile communities into a global network of organized and resilient diaspora communities. We believe that, with the proper resources, these communities can preserve the language, identity, and culture for the next generation, in turn, resisting CCP efforts to destroy our culture.

In 2024, Uyghur Academy celebrated its 15th anniversary with notable achievements, including the publication of the "Uyghur Language and Literature" textbook series, developed with support from USAID and USIP. These textbooks were introduced at a special event held here in Congress on May 22, 2024. Themed "Preserving the Uyghur Language and 3D Modeling Amidst the Uyghur Genocide," this event was organized by the Uyghur Academy, Campaign for Uyghurs, Uyghur Transitional Justice Database, and the Center for Uyghur Studies. Representatives from the U.S. Congress, USAID, State Department, USIP, Uyghur organizations, NGOs, and scholars attended and delivered encouraging remarks. The event also showcased innovative educational tools and initiatives.

Finally, if you ask “what can we do to help actual Uyghurs today?” then this is one of the most important answers. Programs that network isolated Uyghurs and keep the language alive give Uyghurs, especially young Uyghurs, hope for the future. Hope is the rarest commodity in a situation like ours.

It is critical to sustain and amplify efforts to hold the CCP accountable for its crimes against humanity. This is not merely a matter of justice for the Uyghur people—it is a fight for the principles of democracy, human rights, and freedom that underpin the world we wish to leave behind for future generations.

Allowing the CCP's atrocities to go unchecked threatens to erode these values globally, emboldening authoritarian regimes and weakening the foundation of the free world. The stakes are far greater than the Uyghur people alone; they encompass the shared future of all who believe in dignity, liberty, and justice.

By standing firm against these crimes, we send a clear message: oppression and genocide will not be tolerated, and those who perpetrate such acts will face consequences. This is a defining moment, not just for the Uyghurs, but for the legacy of freedom and democracy we pass on to the next generation. Together, we must act with unwavering resolve to protect these ideals and ensure a future where such horrors are not repeated.

Thank you for your time, and thank you to the American people and to Congress for your unwavering support of the Uyghur cause.