
Detailed Briefing Note

Huseyin Celil & Uyghur Crisis

Last updated: May 25, 2021

Who is Huseyin Celil?

- Huseyin Celil is a dual Canadian (from Burlington) and Chinese citizen and part of the Uyghur community who has been detained by Chinese authorities since 2006.
- Celil fled China in 2001 after he was jailed for using megaphone to amplify the Muslim call to prayer in his home province of Xinjiang. He was also an advocate for religious and political rights on behalf of his Uyghur community.
 - The United Nations recognized Celil as a refugee.
- Celil arrived with his family in Canada in October 2001 and became a Canadian citizen.
- Celil is married to Kamila Telendibaeva and they have 4 children.
- Celil will be 52 years old in March 2021.

What Happened to Celil?

- In March 2006, he and his family went to Uzbekistan to visit his wife's (Kamila) family.
 - China knew he was in Uzbekistan and asked the Uzbeki police to arrest and hand him over to them.
- China does not recognize Celil as a Canadian and therefore gave no access to Canadian officials.
- His trial was unfair and unjust. China claims that Celil is a terrorist and separatist. It is clear that China arrested and detained him because he is a Uyghur.
 - He was given a life sentence. However, the sentence was reduced (the number of years is unclear but it is approximately 18-20 years) because he took part in the 're-education' program and signed a confession.
- Since China ramped up its internment camps efforts in 2017, Kamila has heard no information about Huseyin's condition.
 - Celil's family had contact with him prior to this. China's repression against the Uyghur goes beyond the internment camps, the population is monitored and under surveillance.

Celil Is Caught In Between Canada's Political Fight Against China

- Celil has been forgotten in the wake up:
 - The Meng Wanzhou affair
 - Meng Wanzhou is the Chief Financial Officer of Huawei who was arrested in late 2018 in Vancouver by the RCMP on behalf of the United States.
 - Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig's detainment by China
 - Following Meng Wanzhou's arrest by Canadian officials, China detained Spavor, a businessman based on the China-North Korea border, and Kovrig, a former diplomat who worked for the International Crisis Group in North East Asia, and Kovrig

Canada's (In)action in Celil's Case

- Since China does not recognize Huseyin's Canadian citizenship, it has been very hard for Canada to gain information about Celil.
- Previous governments have mentioned Huseyin to international and Chinese officials although nothing concrete has been achieved.
- There have been calls by supporters of Huseyin for Canada to appoint a special envoy to secure the release of Celil. However, this has not happened.

Subcommittee Recommendation to the Canadian Government

- The Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development's Recommendation #10 states: " The Subcommittee recommends that Global Affairs Canada use all the tools at its disposal to secure the release of Huseyin Celil, including but not limited to the appointment of a special envoy specifically tasked with seeking his release and return.

Who are the Uyghur?

- The Uyghurs are a minority group composed mostly of Muslims who live in Xinjiang, a north-western area of China.
- Many Uyghur people refer to their homeland as East Turkestan (or East Turkistan).

Why the Uyghur?

- China sees the Uyghurs as a threat:
 - Politically: separatism and Uyghur's discouragement of state promoted Chinese Han migration
 - Religiously: extremism
 - Economically: Xinjiang is home to China's largest coal and natural gas reserves.

What is Happening to the Uyghurs?

- Genocide
 - Crackdown on the Uyghur population: internment 're-education' camps and daily lives
 - 1-3 million Uigurs in these camps where: political indoctrination, renouncing their religion and culture, torture (physical torture, rape, and sleep deprivation) and forced labour happens.
 - Daily lives: extreme surveillance, biometric data, preventing religiosity, repatriating Uyghurs from abroad to detain them.
 - Women given involuntary given intra-uterine devices (IUDs) or coerced sterilisation surgery.

Canada's Recent Developments on China

- The Conservative Party's non-binding motion to formally label China's actions against the Uyghurs as genocide was passed by a margin of 266 to 0.
 - Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and all his cabinet ministers abstained from the vote.
 - Recently, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declined to label China's actions as genocide, stating that the international community should only use the term when it is "clearly and properly justified."
- On February 15, 2021, Canada launched the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations.
 - The declaration aims to raise awareness and stop the practice of arbitrary detention.
 - Although the declaration is not aimed solely at China, the media focused on the two Canadians, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, who have been arbitrarily detained for 2 years.
- Despite all of this, Huseyin Celil has been barely mentioned by Canada and the media.