



**RECOGNIZE
CELIL**

HUSEYIN CELIL

UIGHUR CRISIS

DOSSIER

Last Updated: May 26, 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Huseyin Celil's heartbreaking story is the epitome of the Uyghur struggle and crisis. Long before Canada and the world realized what was happening to the Uyghur community in China, Huseyin was advocating for religious and political rights on behalf of his Uyghur community. As a consequence for his campaigning, he was imprisoned for 48 days, became a refugee, eventually settled with his family in Canada (in October 2001) and gained Canadian citizenship.

March 27, 2021 marks 15 years since Huseyin was arrested in Uzbekistan (visiting family) on behalf of China. Shortly after, the critical juncture happened when he was handed over to China. Canada was aware and chose not to intervene. It has been 15 years of numerous human rights abuses against Huseyin and uncertainty of his well-being due to China's unwillingness to recognize him as a Canadian, therefore denying him his rights under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations. Huseyin has been taken away from his wife, Kamila, and their 4 kids not because he committed a crime but simply because he is an Uyghur.

China's oppression of the Uyghur community meets the definition of genocide. The international community's response to the crisis has been mixed, although some countries have widely recognized the atrocities and have slowly started to use the 'g' word against China. Canada became the second country to formally declare China's actions as genocide, following the United States and followed by the Dutch parliament.

Huseyin has been victim of this genocide. His sentence was reduced since he took part in a 're-education' program, which aims to brainwash the Uyghur's thoughts and beliefs, use them for labour and ultimately eliminate the Uyghur identity.

For years Canada has not spoken of Huseyin or done enough to bring him home to Canada despite making few advancements against China. Huseyin is a Canadian and should not be forgotten by the Canadian government. Unfortunately, Huseyin is caught in between Canada's political battle against China in terms of Meng Wanzhou's arrest and the detainment of the two Michaels. As a result, Huseyin has been abandoned by both the Canadian government and media.

15 years after Huseyin's arrest, his whereabouts remain in question as China continues its repression against the Uyghur community. Canada must do its best to bring back Huseyin home to Canada and to his family. 15 years is long overdue. Recognize Huseyin Celil.



WHO ARE THE UYGHURS?

To grasp the story of Huseyin Celil, we must first understand who the Uyghur people are. The Uyghurs are a minority group composed mostly of Muslims who live in Xinjiang, a north-western area of China. Their population is approximately 11-12 million, making up less than half of the population of Xinjiang. They speak their own language which is part of the Turkic group of languages.



Many Uyghur people refer to their homeland as East Turkestan (or East Turkistan). In 1949, China annexed it to its current name 'Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).' In Mandarin, 'Xinjiang' translates to 'new territory' or 'new frontier'. The Uyghur have diasporas to a smaller scale in Kazakhstan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and elsewhere. In Canada, there are about 2,000 Uyghurs.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE UYGHUR PEOPLE? **GENOCIDE.**

China is committing genocide against the Uyghur community. According to the United Nations, in the present [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), Article II states "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. killing members of the group;
- b. causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."



The [Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy \(with Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights\)](#) is “the first independent expert application of the 1948 Genocide Convention to the ongoing treatment of the Uyghurs in China.” The report factually demonstrates how each of the aforementioned acts are being committed to the Uyghur community:

- a. mass deaths and deaths of prominent Uyghur leaders either by death sentence (execution or long-term imprisonment)
- b. systematic torture and cruel treatment (beatings with metal prods, electric shocks, and whips), including rape, sexual abuse, exploitation, and public humiliation
- c. Uyghurs of childbearing years, household heads, and community leaders are targeted by authorities, birth-prevention measures on Uyghur women, separate Uyghur children from their parents, and transfer Uyghurs on a mass scale into forced hard labor schemes
- d. forced IUD insertions, abortions, and injections or medication halting their menstrual cycles, depriving the Uyghur population of the ability to reproduce. Growth rates in Uyghur-concentrated areas are increasingly approaching zero.
- e. Uyghur children are being sent to State-run orphanages and raised in Chinese-language environments with standard Han child-rearing methods.

WHY THE UYGHURS?

China sees the Uyghur community and its land as a threat to their regime. The two main dangers that China views the Uyghur of espousing are separatism and religious extremism. Alongside these two aforementioned threats are the Uyghur’s discouragement of state promoted Chinese Han migration into their lands and economic incentives such as Xinjiang being the home to China’s largest coal and natural gas reserves.

There has been tension between China and the Uyghur in the past however the critical juncture occurred in 2019 when a riot broke out in Xinjiang’s capital, Urumqi. The reasons for the Uyghur uproar were the frustration of the economic and cultural discrimination. According to experts, this marked a turning point in Beijing’s attitude toward Uyghurs.

HOW? INTERNMENT ‘RE-EDUCATION’ CAMPS AND CRACKDOWN

According to The Guardian, the internal leaked reports in late 2019 indicate that China is running the [largest mass internment](#) of an ethnic-religious minority group since World



War II. The ‘vocational training’ and voluntary education camps as China refers to them started in 2014 but expanded in 2017. Not much information was known about these camps until internal Chinese government documents leaked in late 2019. The [New York Times](#), the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#) and the [Australian Strategic Policy Institute](#) (ASPI) have extensively analyzed and highlighted key points from the ‘China Cables’/’Xinjiang Papers’. There are approximately 1-3 million Muslims in hundreds of camps, the majority being from the Uyghur community.

According to ASPI, those who are in the camps have been subjected to:

- political indoctrination,
- forced to renounce their religion and culture,
- torture: physical torture, rape, and sleep deprivation, and
- thereafter, once they have ‘graduated’, they are forced to work in factories.

The repression against the Uyghur community goes beyond these camps to the general Uyghur population. The extreme crackdown includes and is not limited to:

- surveillance state: monitor millions people via police and technology
- police checkpoints
- biometric data
- preventing religiosity
 - growing beard, wearing veil
 - sending texts containing Quranic verses
 - mosques destroyed
 - certain names are banned like ‘Mohamed’
 - halal food is harder to find



- detaining people who have too many children
- repatriating Uyghurs from abroad

Per [The Jamestown Institute](#), women are threatened into internment camps if they refuse to abort pregnancies that exceed the birth quota. Applying to the aforementioned women and women who have not exceeded birth quotas were either involuntarily given intra-uterine devices (IUDs) or coerced sterilisation surgery. In addition, it has been reported that children have been separated from their families. As a consequence, this is negatively affecting the Uyghur population. The natural population growth in Xinjiang has significantly faltered.

The Chinese government has facilitated the mass transfer of Uyghur and other minority groups from Xinjiang to factories all over the country. The horrid working conditions fit the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicators of forced labour. Some examples of these breaches include: living in segregated dorms, subject to constant surveillance and limited freedom of movement. The factories where individuals have been sent after graduating in the ‘re-education’ programs are forced to work. According to [ASPI](#), approximately 80,000 Uyghurs have been sent to these factories from 2017 to 2019. Furthermore, ASPI reports that “Uyghurs are working in factories that are in the supply chains of at least 82 well-known global brands in the technology, clothing and automotive sectors, including Apple, BMW, Gap, Huawei, Nike, Samsung, Sony and Volkswagen.”

With this background information, how did China get their hands on Huseyin Celil who is native to both Xinjiang, China and Burlington, Canada?



WHO IS HUSEYIN CELIL?

Huseyin Celil is a dual Canadian and Chinese citizen who is part of the Uyghur community. Huseyin will turn 52 years old in March 2021. Huseyin is a proud Uyghur and has advocated for religious and political rights for his community. In 2001, he fled China after being jailed for 48 days for using megaphones to amplify the Muslim call to prayer in his home province of Xinjiang. He landed in Uzbekistan and married his wife, Kamila Talendibaeva. After the United Nations recognized Huseyin as a refugee, he and his family settled in Burlington, Ontario. Huseyin was very much involved in his new community, a testament to his good character. He is a loving husband with 4 beautiful children.



Pictured: (Left) Huseyin Celil holding Canadian flag; (Right) Huseyin's wife, Kamila and kids

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS COMMITTED AGAINST HUSEYIN

In March 2006, Huseyin and his family traveled to Uzbekistan to visit family. This was the last time Kamila and their boys would see Huseyin. After going to a nearby passport office to extend their family's stay, the Uzbeki police arrested Huseyin claiming they were apprehending a "fugitive" on behalf of the Chinese government.

His short time (6 weeks) in Uzbekistan under arrest could have been helpful for Canada to block this handover. Unfortunately, it was not quick or efficient enough and he was handed over to China. Huseyin was 38 years old at the time of arrest.

Since China does not recognize Huseyin's Canadian citizenship, they did not give any access or information to Canadian officials. Huseyin was held in secrecy and not given



any access to family or a lawyer. Furthermore, the Chinese authorities threatened and forced him to sign a confession. Hence his trial was unfair, unjust and unlawful. On April 19, 2006, Huseyin was handed a life sentence on heinous terrorism charges. Shortly after Huseyin was arrested, family members were told he had been accused of the assassination of a Chinese official in Kyrgyzstan in March 2000, charges for which he would likely face the death sentence. As for the stunning accusation of political murder, the Chinese have not named the assassinated official or disclosed any of the evidence of his death. Huseyin's family has offered documentary proof he was in Istanbul at the alleged time of the killing - including pictures of a meeting he had that day with Turkish government officials.

A decade or so later, this sentence was reduced to approximately 18-20 years since he took part in a 're-education' program and signed a confession. This means that Huseyin will serve a total of approximately 32 years in prison and will be free when he is 68 years old. During Huseyin's time in detainment, his mother and sister visited him once or twice a year until things changed very quickly.

When China ramped up its anti-Uyghur developments in 2017 with internment camps and crackdown on the general Uyghur population, Kamila stopped receiving information on Huseyin. It is with this uncertainty that Huseyin's case is viewed upon. We must assume that he is alive and ensure that the Canadian government does its best to find and bring Huseyin back home.

Huseyin has endured many human rights violations:

- no access to a lawyer, his family, or Canadian officials
- torture
- forced confessions
- denied his Canadian citizenship
- heinous charges, he was detained and imprisoned because he is a Uyghur
- solitary confinement



- re-education program (psychological effects)
 - Freedom of belief, thought, expression, and religion has been violated

According to Huseyin Celil's lawyer, Chris MacLeod, "For a Canadian citizen to somehow be captured, detained, tortured, and have no access to the Canadian government, for that person to be facing those sorts of human rights abuses is a particular affront to Canadians and the government of Canada."

CHINA'S UNFULFILLED COMMITMENTS

China has failed to live up to its commitments in regards to consular relations. This is a direct violation of Huseyin Celil's human rights. He is a Canadian and therefore China should give Canada consular access to him and information about his whereabouts.

China endorsed the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations of 1963 in 1979. Under Article 36, consular officials "have the right to visit a national . . . who is in prison, custody or detention, to converse and correspond with him and to arrange for his legal representation."

China signed a consular agreement with Canada that came into force in 1999. Under Article 8, "a consular officer shall be entitled to visit a national . . . who is under detention, arrest or deprived of freedom in any other means."

CANADA'S FOOTPRINT IN HUSEYIN'S CASE

During Huseyin's 15 years of detainment, there have been 5 Canadian federal governments in power (3 consecutive Conservative leadership followed by 2 consecutive Liberal leadership).

Canada has struggled to make its voice heard in Huseyin's case because of China's reluctance to view him as a Canadian citizen. When he was arrested in March 2006, the Conservatives were in power with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the minister of foreign affairs Peter Mackay mentioning Huseyin's case in public and to Chinese officials. Although Canadian officials met with Huseyin in Uzbekistan, Huseyin's case was made harder to solve once he was extradited to China in June 2006.

HUSEYIN'S CASE IS CAUGHT IN BETWEEN CANADA'S POLITICAL BATTLE AGAINST CHINA

A decade and more later, Huseyin's case was vaguely brought back to the spotlight after leaked Chinese documents exposed China's treatment against the Uyghurs; however,



this coincided with the arrest of Men Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei, in Vancouver by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) under provision of the United States. This sparked the political conflict between Canada and China. Subsequently, China detained two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor (aka the 2 Michaels). As a result, Huseyin Celil's case has since been overshadowed and forgotten by both the Canadian government and media.

This was exacerbated by the lack of knowledge of the new Canadian ambassador to China, Dominic Barton, of Huseyin Celil's case. At the end of 2019, A spokesman for Global Affairs Canada said the government was "deeply concerned" about Huseyin's ongoing detention. However in early 2020, Dominic Barton, embarrassingly stated that he could not have met Celil because he was not a Canadian citizen. The minister of foreign affairs at the time, François-Philippe Champagne, corrected this untrue claim a few days later. Barton apologized to the Huseyin's family.

Additionally, Canada launched the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations on February 15, 2021. 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 in China for 2 years. In all of this, Huseyin was pushed to the side and forgotten by the Canadian government and media.

SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION TO THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

On October 20, 2020, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development agreed to a motion to undertake a study on the human rights situation of the Uyghurs. This motion incorporates all evidence received during hearings held from July 20 to August 13, 2020, in the 1st session of the 43rd Parliament – including Kamila and Chris' testimonies.

The Subcommittee came up with 15 recommendations to the House of Commons or the Government. One of these recommendations was in response to Huseyin Celil. 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.



CANADA'S FOOTPRINT IN THE UYGHUR CRISIS

DECLARING GENOCIDE

The Canadian government has progressed slowly but not definitely in declaring China's genocide against the Uyghur people. It has taken the opposition parties' non-binding motion House of Commons vote for Canada to formally label China's actions as genocide. Beyond this important juncture, there have been efforts taken to counter the atrocities occurring in Xinjiang by the government, the opposition, subcommittees, and civil society.

A non-binding motion introduced by the Conservative Party was passed in a 266-0 margin in favour of formally labeling China's human rights abuses as genocide. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and all his cabinet ministers abstained from the vote. In mid-February, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was reluctant to declare China's actions as genocide, saying that the international community should only use the term when it is "clearly and properly justified."¹ The United States was the first country to call out China's actions as genocide when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made the announcement a day before Joe Biden was inaugurated as President.

ACTIONS TAKEN

The Canadian government has taken some action against China. To illustrate, in early 2021, they joined other countries in cracking down on companies who are doing business with certain firms based in Xinjiang. Canada are also signatories to 2 statements² that acknowledge the credible reports on the violations occurring in Xinjiang and call China to stop.

A notable advancement Canada made has been the statement from the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. In its statement, the Subcommittee "is persuaded that the actions of the Chinese Communist Party constitute genocide as laid out in the Genocide Convention."³ This Subcommittee convened in 2018 with testimony from several witnesses but stagnated until an urgent meeting was held in July 2020. The testimonies were from survivors of the atrocities in China, academics and civil society.

¹ [Huffington Post Canada Article](#)

² [Statement by UK Representative](#) and [Statement by German Representative](#)

³ [Subcommittee's News Release](#)



CIVIL SOCIETY VOICES

In terms of civil society, there have been many organizations and activists that have spoken for the Uyghur community and against China's actions. Human rights groups have documented and raised awareness of the issue. These include:

- Amnesty International
- Justice for All
- The Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China
- National Council of Canadian Muslims
- Human Rights Watch Canada.
- Universities. For example, McMaster University brought a former Uyghur detainee was disrupted and recorded by individuals with Chinese government ties.

Despite a small population of Uyghurs in Canada, there are some Uyghur organizations and activists in addition to non-Uyghur organizations who specifically support the cause. These include:

- the '[East Turkistan Association of Canada](#)' which was founded in 2018 and became a legal and registered organization in Toronto.
- [URAP - Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project](#)
- [Vancouver Uyghur Association](#)
- [Darman Foundation](#)
- [International Support for Uyghurs \(ISU\)](#)

Activists such as Mehmet Tohti and Alim Ablimit advocating against the human rights abuses committed by China have been facing harsher interference such as threats and



intimidation. To illustrate, Canadian Uyghur activists have been threatened with rape and death, in addition to retaliation against relatives in Xinjiang.