

# Authorized to “Wash Clean the Brains”

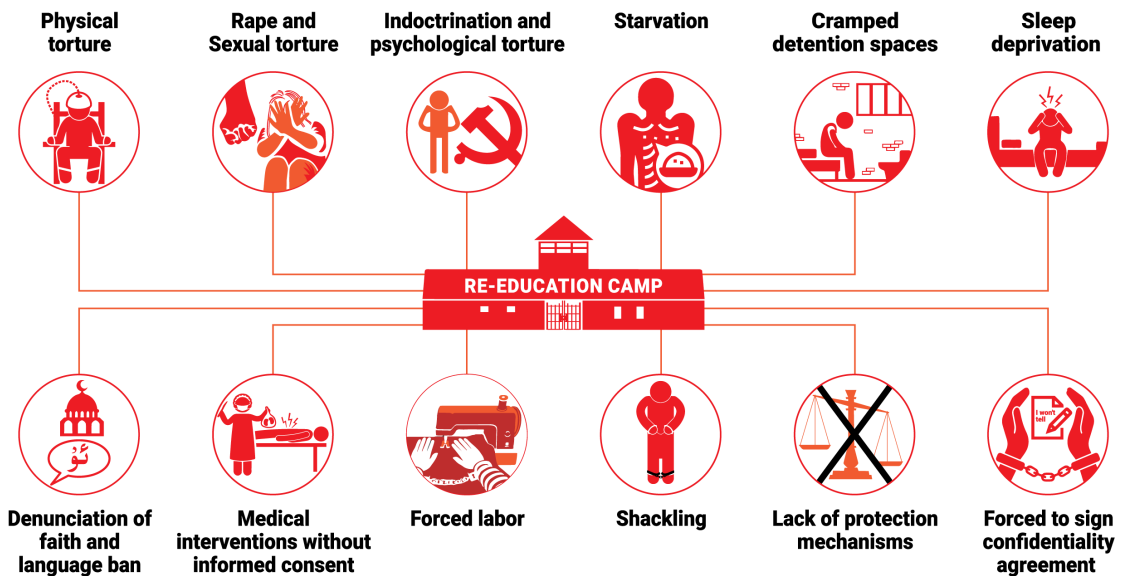
## “Re-education” Camps 101

contact@uyghurrightsmonitor.org

### Executive Summary

The suggested estimate of [mass detention](#) in the Uyghur region proposes an upper limit of 1.8 million, corresponding to approximately 15.4 percent of the Uyghur and other Turkic group adult population. Leaked police records such as the [Qaraqash](#) list, [Konasheher](#) list, and other files provide significant evidence for the mass detention campaign's massive scale and arbitrary nature. Australian Strategic Policy Institute researchers have [identified and mapped](#) over 380 detention facilities across the Uyghur region through satellite imagery analysis. Reports from various sources, including [the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#), provide significant evidence for mass human rights violations in these facilities that constitute crimes against humanity.

### Life in the "Re-education" Camps in the Uyghur Region



## Who needs “re-education”?

[Mass detention](#) of the Uyghur and other Turkic people in the Uyghur region is an attempt to engage in [coercive and abusive political re-education](#) in the so-called “[vocational training centers](#),” aka “re-education” camps, to exterminate Uyghurs culturally and physically and use them as the cheap labor force. The Chinese government wanted to “[wash clean the brains](#)” and “[cleanse hearts](#)” of individuals who have been influenced by what the government refers to as “[extreme ideologies](#),” a term that has not been clearly defined by China itself, with the strict [de-extremification policies](#) and rapid expansion of detention camps under the regional leadership of Chen Quanguo since 2016. The Chinese government began to arbitrarily detain Uyghurs and other Turkic groups “[infected by unhealthy thoughts](#)” in extralegal detention centers on an unprecedentedly large scale. Although the Chinese government frames its repressive policies as “counterterrorism,” researchers [suggest](#) that religion, culture, and identity play a central role in the policymaking and implementation processes targeting Uyghurs and other Turkic people in the region.

Detainees in the “re-education” camps include individuals who have been convicted of “terrorist” or “extremist” crimes – those incited, coerced, or induced into such activities – and individuals who have been accused of [promoting religious activities, ethnic hatred, or discrimination](#). The government’s definition of “extremism” largely punishes forms of ethnic, religious, and cultural identity and expression. These extreme measures [resulted](#) in 10 to 30 percent of the rural Uyghur adult population being detained in some form of extrajudicial internment or formally sentenced to prison. Religious leaders, intellectuals, activists, business people, celebrities, and cultural figures are also [targeted for inferior reasons](#), such as having contact with someone abroad. [Testimonies](#) and [evidence](#) show that detention reasons can be based on factors like ethnic identity, religious observances, cultural practices, and language use. [Signs of extremist tendencies](#), for instance, [include](#) abstaining from alcohol and pork, praying, fasting, performing a traditional funeral, owning a tent, extra food or compass, wearing any clothes with religious iconography, speaking Uyghur at schools or government work groups, or using a VPN or WhatsApp in the mobile phone. These activities are criminalized as [fraud](#), [public order disturbance](#), [illegal use of the internet](#), “[untrustworthy person](#),” or simply “extremism” or “terrorism.”

## What happens inside a camp?

A detailed review of existing research, reports, and testimonies of camp survivors reveals that the following rights violations take place inside the “re-education” camps.

1. **Physical torture:** Former detainees [reported](#) experiencing treatment that could be classified as torture or other forms of ill-treatment.[1] They were beaten with batons, including electric ones, while strapped in a “tiger chair.”[2] Water was poured on their faces during interrogations, and they endured prolonged solitary confinement and were forced to sit motionless for long periods.
2. **Rape and sexual violence:** Women and girls experienced sexual violence, including rape. Guards would select young girls and women, taking them away at night for [sexual abuse](#). [In one instance](#), a young girl was publicly raped as a form of punishment and loyalty test.
3. **Indoctrination and psychological torture:** Detainees were subjected to [intense mental pressure and indoctrination](#); they were forced to learn and teach propaganda, party guidelines, and speeches of Chinese Communist Party leaders. Detainees were also [compelled](#) to learn and memorize “red songs” and other Party materials as a pervasive aspect of their time in the camps,[3] indicating [forced indoctrination](#) into a specific ideological framework. They had to repeat slogans praising the Communist Party and engage in self-criticism. Detainees were under [constant surveillance](#) through cameras.
4. **Starvation:** Detainees [described](#) experiencing constant hunger and severe weight loss throughout their time in the camps, indicating inadequate or insufficient food provisions; The provision of food was [contingent](#) upon the detainees declaring their loyalty to the Party and the State.

5. **Cramped detention spaces:** The detainees were [held in overcrowded](#) cells with limited space, lying on cement floors with only thin blankets. The [cells were dark with sealed windows](#), lacked showers, and had limited toilet facilities. Detainees were allowed minimal time for personal hygiene.
6. **Sleep deprivation:** Dorms or cells had lights switched on throughout the night, [depriving](#) detainees of sleep and rest.
7. **Denunciation of faith and language ban:** Detainees were [prohibited](#) from speaking their native languages, such as Uyghur or Kazakh, and were unable to practice their religion, including praying and they were forced to denounce their religious beliefs and culture.
8. **Medical interventions without informed consent:** Detainees [reported](#) receiving regular injections, pills, and blood samples without proper information or the ability to refuse such medical procedures.
9. **Forced labor:** Detainees were [coerced](#) into engaging in long hours of hard physical labor, and failure to meet expectations set by authorities resulted in punishments like hunger, solitary confinement, exposure to harsh weather conditions, and physical beatings.
10. **Shackling:** Several individuals mentioned being shackled while they were confined in the camps, restricting their movement and freedom.[4]
11. **Lack of protection mechanisms:** Concerns were raised about the absence of independent oversight mechanisms and effective means for detainees to report human rights violations and seek justice or redress.[5]
12. **Forced to sign confidentiality agreement:** Detainees were forced to sign a [contract of confidentiality](#) that explicitly prohibits disclosure of the occurrences within the camp to third parties. Their family members were not allowed to visit them, and were not informed about their release date and their conditions inside the camps.

## Notes:

[1] In line with its standard methodology, in cases of torture or sexual and gender-based violence, OHCHR has predominantly relied on its first-hand victim and eyewitness statements when assessed as credible and in line with other known information. Additionally, OHCHR reviewed dozens of victim and witness accounts to understand the nature of the allegations and general context. However, OHCHR's findings on this matter are based on interviews and contextual analysis of applicable laws, policy statements, and other open-source documents; China is a party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. See also Article 5, UDHR and Article 7, ICCPR. The prohibition of torture is considered a norm of customary international law, as well as a peremptory norm of international law from which no derogations are permitted.

[2] "Tiger chairs" are generally devices whereby an individual is strapped to a chair by their hands and feet. This is often accompanied by beatings or other forms of torture. See UN Committee against Torture concerns on the use of the "interrogation chairs" in Concluding Observations on China, 3 February 2016, CAT/C/CHN/CO/5, para. 26: "In this regard, the Committee expresses concern at the State party's explanation that the use of the so-called "interrogation chair" is justified "as a protective measure to prevent suspects from escaping, committing self-injury or attacking personnel," which is highly improbable during an interrogation." The use of "tiger chairs" in camps was further detailed by the "Xinjiang Police Files", including a number of internal instructions for the camps referring to: (i) police guards being armed, (ii) corrective measures and punishment of those responsible for attempting to escape, including shoot to kill orders (iii) Individuals seeking medical treatment are to be made to wear restraining equipment [i.e. cuffs, shackles] (iv) handcuffs, shackles and hoods to be worn by trainees during transfers; (v) all trainees are interrogated upon registration and undergo a medical examination. These police protocols are further accompanied by photographs that show the internal workings of the centers, where detainees are seen wearing shackles and hoods alongside armed police guards.

[3] According to a former detainee, these rules included prohibitions on Islamic greetings, Uyghur and Kazakh writing on Uyghur restaurant signs, the use of Uyghur or Kazakh in public spaces, Uyghur- and Kazakh-language schools, and the establishment of minority-only chat groups on WeChat, QQ, and other social media websites; a ban on communications with any person in the 26 “sensitive” countries; and cash rewards for the intermarriage between Han Chinese and Kazakhs.

[4] OHCHR interviews; Human Rights Watch, “Eradicating Ideological Viruses,” p. 41-42.

[5] Article 62 of the XIM (version after 2018 amendment), for example, provides that staff of counter-terrorism institutions and relevant departments who “fail to perform their duties in counter-terrorism work” may be reprimanded and educated, given administrative sanctions where the circumstances are severe, and held criminally responsible where a crime was committed (unofficial translation). Article 94 of the CTL, in turn, sanctions the abuse of power of personnel of counter-terrorism institutions and “other conduct violating laws or discipline,” providing that “all units and individuals have the right to report it or make an accusation to the competent department” (unofficial translation)