

MARCH 8, 2021

## **Statement: Honouring the Bravery of Uyghur and Turkic Women**

This International Women's Day, the Coalition to End Forced Labour in the Uyghur Region stands in solidarity with and celebrates the bravery of Tursunay Ziawudun, Gulzire Auelhan, Sayragul Sauytbay, Qelbinur Sedik, Zumrat Dawut, Mihrigul Tursun and all other women in the Uyghur region who have told their stories of forced labour, discrimination, body policing and gender based violence at the hands of the Chinese government.

Accounts about the campaign to degrade and break Uyghur and Turkic women are not new, but recent [testimony](#) further illustrates the systematic and widespread nature of rape, sexual abuse and torture in forced labour and detention camps in the Uyghur Region . The Chinese government has responded to these accounts by openly attacking women who have already been subjected to these crimes and by banning the BBC World News from broadcasting in the country – a belated attempt to stifle powerful voices of Uyghur women.

Gender based violence and discrimination is not acceptable in any form but state-sponsored gender based violence and discrimination is most egregious. It is a tale as old as time that women's lives and bodies are used by the powerful to inflict further blows against perceived enemies. It is clear that, in the attempt to destroy an entire people and culture, Uyghur women, as the traditional culture bearers, are a specific target of the Chinese government.

It is not enough that Uyghur women are forced to work under threat of further persecution. It is not enough that Uyghur women's reproductive rights are policed with reports of forced sterilisations, often without the knowledge much less consent of the women involved. It is not enough that women are forced to change the way they dress whether they want to or not. It is not enough that mothers are separated from their children or spouses. It is not enough that the most vile and violent sexual crimes are committed against Uyghur women in detention camps. It is not enough for Uyghur women to be separated from and risk the ire of their families when

they seek safe haven elsewhere and speak out to try and save other women from suffering the same fate.

Now the Chinese government is explicitly attacking these women for the whole world to see in a manner that is transparently sexist and inhumane. They are sharing women's private medical data and information about their fertility. They are spreading rumours about these women having affairs or sexually transmitted diseases. The fact that the content of the response of the Chinese government has been so irrelevant to the issues raised shows their intent – to destroy these women.

This is unacceptable in 2021 as we make a global effort towards greater gender equality and respect for the dignity of women everywhere. We condemn the Chinese government's despicable attack on Uyghur women. Uyghur women's rights are human rights.

This International Women's Day, we honour the bravery of women who are challenging this powerful perpetrator of crimes against humanity.