

**The Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing
on
The State of Religious Freedom Around the Globe**

**July 13, 2021–2:00 p.m.
Virtual, via WebEx**

Statement of Gulzira Auelkhan, survivor of China's concentration camps

Dear Honorable Cochairmen Representatives Jim McGovern and Chris Smith, members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, my fellow distinguished witnesses, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Gulzira Auelkhan. I was born on June 20, 1979, in Yining County, Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang, China. My mother, Wasila Nighmet, is deceased. My father, Auelkhan Zhylykbay, currently lives in Gongliu County, China. My husband, Tursynzhan Issanali, and I married on June 23, 2011. Our daughter, Bayan Tursynzhan, lives with us in the United States. Chinese Communist Party (CCP) authorities are holding my three stepdaughters in Xinjiang.

First, I would like to ask the two Co-Chairmen, Congressman MacGovern, and Congressman Smith, to allow my full written testimony as part of Congressional permanent record.

In 1993, I left school in the seventh grade to take care of my sick father at home. In 1997 after the CCP forcibly resettled our herding family, I became a peasant. In 2014, when I immigrated to Kazakhstan, Bayan was 10 months old. In July 2017, my brother-in-law, directed by CCP police, phoned and asked me to return to China.

In the middle of July 2017, passing Khorgas Customs back into China, CCP authorities arrested and sent me to Xinjiang's concentration camp in Yili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, Yining County, B San Pu concentration camp. Officials claimed that I had immigrated to Kazakhstan, had problems with my thinking, and needed patriotic education, ideological education, and Chinese language education. I remained there until November 1, 2017, when officials transferred me to a second camp, the former location of the Yining County Maternal and Child Health Hospital.

On July 2, 2018, CCP authorities transferred me to a third camp, converted from the former Yining County No. Four High School. I remained there until August 26, 2018. After international societies pressured CCP officials, Xinjiang authorities transferred inmates, removed cameras, smoothed out the empty places, painted the walls white, and permitted real, high school students to study inside the school.

In the No. Four High School, local authorities held sham group trials, during which correctional officers conducted court hearings for me and other detainees to deal with our charges. Thankfully, in November 2017, my husband reached out to Serikzhan Biyash (Serikzhan Bilash),

the founder of the organization Atajurt—a human rights organization based in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He and my husband began to advocate for me, defending my rights in Kazakhstan (<https://youtu.be/Fa0GQMW0w-I>). Consequently, I did not receive a long criminal sentence. Others received 15 to 20 years.

The day before my trial, authorities revealed 75 official CCP policies to me and other detainees. They forced us to choose our own charges. They cajoled us by saying, “As long as you plead guilty to the charges, you're free.” Some detainees then chose to plead guilty, put their fingerprints on the confessions, and signed their names beneath in Chinese. The next day, when families arrived to take these prisoners home, CCP officials lied to these family members. Authorities told them that their detained relatives had confessed to their charges, and therefore, they were being allowed to go to the camps and correct their thinking. As the family members did not know about the sentences and agreed to them, they marked their fingerprints on a consenting document. Officials charged the prisoners as religious extremist forces, colluding with foreign anti-China forces, etc.

As CCP authorities had installed surveillance cameras throughout each of the four camps where they detained me, including inside the restrooms and shower rooms, I and the others had no privacy. Prison officials had adopted a multitude of strict rules, including allowing less than 10 minutes for us to shower. They gave us less than two minutes to use the restroom. If I or another detainee spent more time than that, guards hit us on our heads with electric batons. On January 30, 2019, because of ensuing headaches and nausea, I began to require medical check-ups.

In our camp, officers forced new detainees to take a “flu shot” that cost 250 RMB. At its worst during the following six months, I experienced nosebleeds two or three times a week. During those times and at others when we were sick, guards would only give us sleeping pills.

I do not like to eat rice, nevertheless, guards forced us to routinely eat it. If we disobeyed, they tortured us, forcing us to sit in the “tiger chair,” a torture instrument like a cucking stool. I considered it strange that I became addicted to eating rice and experienced a stomachache when I did not eat it regularly.

In addition to physical torture, I and the other prisoners also suffered mentally and spiritually. In the concentration camp, guards forced us to study Mandarin Chinese and CCP laws. They also ordered us to learn 3000 Chinese characters. My Chinese language skill, a very basic level, made it super hard for me to pass the test with a required score of 80 and above. As I and other prisoners feared that officials would extend our detention if we failed the test, we secretly wrote the answers on our fingers. When guards caught us, they inserted needles beneath our fingernails. This excruciating pain even pierced our hearts.

When guards punished us by forcing us to sit in the tiger chair, if we fainted because of the pain, they poured cold water on our heads to shock us back to consciousness. Guards then yelled at us, “We are the ones who are tired! How dare you fall asleep?”

One of the most horrible things I witnessed firsthand was that the CCP runs a systematically organized, forced prostitution system inside the concentration camp. I heard women crying after guards sent them into a small room, handcuffed while Chinese speaking men raped them. Guards often forced me to shower these women after the cruel men left.

The most painful rule for me: inmates could not cry. If we did, offices would consider us infected with wrong or improper thoughts and force us to sit on the “tiger chair” for 14 hours. Or they would transfer us to another camp with even stricter rules.

Authorities had split camps into four levels. They detained me in the lightest. Here, when we did something wrong, and when guards transferred us from one building to another, they handcuffed us.

Inmates had no freedom in the camp. Guards put us in various cells where the number of inmates ranged from 18 to 60. As they tried to avoid housing two Kazakhs in the same cell, I usually stayed with Uyghurs, and also with 17 Han, detained for their beliefs (authorities also possibly held Christians and Falun Gong members in this camp). When we entered the camp, guards cut our (new detainees’) hair short. After two months, for unknown reasons, officials administered a blood test to us.

On December 31, 2018, Radio Free Asia cited my case in its report “Xinjiang Yining forces Muslims to be cheap laborers.” As a result, police transported me to their station, and held me there overnight in a dark room. The next day, they sent me to my father’s house in Gongliu County.

On January 3, 2019, police officers transported me from my father's house and questioned me at Dolan Village. After they forced me to sign several confidentiality pledges, they sent me to Khorgas Customs, located between China and Kazakhstan. Finally, on January 5, 2019, CCP authorities permitted me to leave China through Khorgas Customs.

While waiting for guards to free me, a local official, Yang Xinping, secretly met with me and offered me 250,000 RMB if I would remain quiet about what I experienced. I rejected the money.

As I later told the BBC, “I rejected the money because what I long for is freedom. When I returned to Kazakhstan, I wanted to let others know what happened because I am not the only one CCP authorities have detained in concentration camps. Many people like me have been suffering. We all need money, but if I took the money, I would lose freedom.” From that time on, with the hope to help save those still detained inside, I began my journey to tell the truth about the horrific concentration camps. I know I will have to pay the price.

Currently, neither China nor Kazakhstan is safe for me and my family.

Once in Kazakhstan, I started to accept interviews from international media to share my eyewitness account on my personal experiences in Xinjiang camps. As a result, Kazakhstan officials have physically intimidated as well as pressured my family and me. They even kept us

from renting a room. In 2019, Kazakhstan police disrupted my interview with ABC and drove their journalists away.

Today, public attacks on and smearing of minorities like us have increasingly become worse in China. Even before I began to speak out against the CCP's persecution camps, I knew the CCP would not only try to discredit me, but they would also retaliate against and fabricate trumped-up charges against me. I have seen many real-life examples of these tactics. For example, China sentenced Rehejiang to 13 years in prison in Xinjiang for a fabricated charge of "espionage."

Even though free from the concentration camps, the only way to become free was to escape the CCP's reach/control. Knowing this, my husband asked Serkzhan for help. He helped us contact Radio Free Asia, and *ChinaAid* Association. On September 23, 2020, Radio Free Asia interviewed me about the concentration camps and published "New Evidence Further Links Xinjiang Company Sanctioned by US to Forced Labor." Using its resources, *ChinaAid* strategically, successfully rescued my family and me from Kazakhstan to Turkey, and then to the United States.

I will never forget the day I saw Bob Fu holding a United States map to welcome me at DFW International Airport on February 9. *ChinaAid*, with its church families in Midland, warmly welcomed me and my family, and helped us resettle there. With their love, support, and sponsorship, I have vowed to continue to tell the truth to the world, hoping to help save those still detained in concentration camps.

Serving approximately one year and a half in four concentration camps, and a forced labor factory scarred me with horrific, untold physical, and mental, as well as spiritual pain and suffering. I have interviewed with different media, sharing the truth to the world, exposing the Chinese Communist Party's inhumane, cruel concentration camps. In addition, I revealed that the Zhuowan Jiafang Factory paid me and other camp detainees little to nothing to sew gloves for the global market. In September 2020, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency issued Withhold Release Orders (WROs. and banned products from this and other forced labor factories.

Nevertheless, because of my speaking out, if I ever dare to return to China or Kazak, I will surely die. Therefore, my husband, Tursynzhan Issanali, I, and our daughter, Bayan Tursynzhan had to file asylum protection in the USA.

I want to appeal to the United States Congress and government, as well as the international community, please act now to stop the CCP's genocide against innocent women and men (like me) detained in concentration camps before they become "lifeless" statistics.

Thank you for hearing me today.

Gulzira Auelkhan

July 13, 2021