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# **CHINA: Xinjiang government confirms huge birth rate drop but denies forced sterilization of women**

By Ivan Watson, Rebecca Wright and Ben Westcott

CNN (21.09.2020) – <https://cnn.it/3hPVa4h> – Chinese officials have officially acknowledged birth rates in Xinjiang dropped by almost a third in 2018, compared to the previous year, in a letter to CNN in which they also denied reports of forced sterilization and genocide by authorities in the far western region.

The Xinjiang government sent CNN the six-page fax in response to questions for an article published in July that documented a campaign of abuse and control by Beijing targeting women from the Uyghur minority, a Muslim ethnic group numbering more than 10 million people. The fax didn't arrive until September 1, a month after the story was published.

These aren't the first accusations of widespread human rights abuses by the Chinese government in Xinjiang. Up to 2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities are believed to have been placed in mass detention centers in the region, according to the US State Department, where they have allegedly been subject to indoctrination and abuse.

Beijing claims that these centers are voluntary and provide vocational training as part of a de-radicalization program in Xinjiang, which saw a spate of violent attacks in recent years.

But CNN's reporting found that some Uyghur women were being forced to use birth control and undergo sterilization as part of a deliberate attempt to push down birth rates among minorities in Xinjiang.

The article was based on a report by Adrian Zenz, a senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation known for his research on Xinjiang, who quoted official Chinese documents showing a surge in the number of sterilizations performed in the region – from fewer than 50 per 100,000 people in 2016 to almost 250 per 100,000 people in 2018.

Zenz said that these actions fell under the United Nations definition of “genocide” specifically “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.”

In its response, the Xinjiang government strongly denied the claims of genocide, arguing instead that the Uyghur population has been “growing continuously” during the past decade and that Zenz’s report was not “in line with the real situation in Xinjiang.”

According to the government, the population of Xinjiang rose by more than 3 million people, or almost 14%, between 2010 and 2018, with the Uyghur population growing faster than the region’s average rate.

“The rights and interests of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities have been fully protected,” the response said. “The so-called ‘genocide’ is pure nonsense.”

### ***Birth rate plunges***

But the government didn’t dispute the rise in sterilizations or the gap in the ratio of new intrauterine devices (IUDs) between Xinjiang and the rest of mainland China. While IUD implants have plunged in China overall, falling to just 21 per 100,000 people in 2018, in Xinjiang they are becoming increasingly common.

According to local government statistics, there were almost

1,000 new IUD implants per 100,000 people in Xinjiang in 2018, or 80% of China's total for that year.

The Xinjiang government said in its response that the birth rate in the region had dropped from 15.88 per 1,000 people in 2017 to 10.69 per 1,000 people in 2018. The fax said that the drop was due to "the comprehensive implementation of the family planning policy."

Up until 2015, the Chinese government enforced a "one-child" family planning policy countrywide, which allowed most urban couples no more than one baby. Ethnic minorities, such as the Uyghur people, were typically allowed to have up to three but Xinjiang expert Zenz said that families from these groups often had many more children.

When China officially began the two-child policy in January 2016, Uyghur citizens living in cities were limited to two children for the first time as well – their rural counterparts could still have up to three.

The Xinjiang government attributed the sudden drop in population to Beijing's family planning policies finally being properly implemented in the region after 2017.

"In 2018, the number of newborns decreased by approximately 120,000 compared with 2017, of which about 80,000 were because of better implementation of family planning policy in accordance with law, according to estimates by the health and statistics department," the response to CNN said. The government insisted that those who complied with the family planning policies did so voluntarily.

The government attributed the remaining 40,000 fewer babies to increased education and economic development, resulting in fewer children in the region. The Xinjiang government did not include the 2019 birth figures for the region.

“As a part of China, Xinjiang implements family planning policies in accordance with national laws and regulations, and has never formulated and implemented family planning policies for a single ethnic minority,” the response said.

But Zenz pointed out that changes to the natural birth rate should take place over several years or even a decade, not in the space of 12 to 36 months.

In reference to the government’s claims that compliance with the family planning policies were voluntary, Zenz questioned how likely it was that “17 times more women spontaneously wanted to be sterilized.”

“Han Chinese academics from Xinjiang have themselves written that the Uyghurs resist any type of contraceptive (and especially sterilization),” he said in a statement to CNN.

In their fax, the Xinjiang government also attacked Zenz personally, saying that he was “deliberately fabricating lies” and accused him of being a religious fanatic who believed he was “led by God” to oppose China.

Zenz dismissed the Chinese government's allegations, saying they were "resorting to personal attacks" because they couldn't disprove his research. "Far more egregious than these personal attacks on me are Beijing's smears against the Uyghur witnesses," he said in a statement.

### ***Attacks on women***

The Xinjiang government also zeroed in on claims made by two female Uyghurs quoted in CNN's article – Zumrat Dawut and Gulbakhar Jalilova.

Dawut said she had been forced into sterilization by the local government in Xinjiang when she went to a government office to pay a fine for having one too many children. Dawut also said she had been in a detention center in Xinjiang for about three months from March 2018.

In their response, the government said that Dawut had never been inside a voluntary "education and training center," the name used by the Chinese government for the alleged detention centers, and that she had signed a form agreeing to the procedure known as tubal ligation.

In CNN's article, Jalilova, who is a citizen of Kazakhstan and an ethnic Uyghur, said she was held in a detention center for 15 months after being arrested suddenly and without explanation during a business trip to Xinjiang in May 2017.

Jalilova claimed she suffered humiliation and torture while inside the camps and said she was raped by one of the guards.

The Xinjiang government confirmed Jalilova's claims that she had been detained for 15 months from May 2017, alleging she was arrested "on suspicion of aiding terrorist activities." In August 2018 she was released on bail, after which she returned to Kazakhstan.

In their statement, the government denied that Jalilova had been raped or tortured, saying that all of her "rights were fully guaranteed" and the staff who were in her cell could prove it.

When asked to respond to the Chinese government's statement, Jalilova stood by her claims and demanded the Xinjiang authorities provide their proof. "Why don't they show a video? Why don't they show a photo during my time in prison showing that I was well fed and not beaten. The cameras were working 24 hours," she said.

"I am a citizen of Kazakhstan, what right did they have to detain me for a year and a half?"

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