

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?”

We face the specter of genocide in Xinjiang

– JIANLI YANG AND AARON RHODES

Newsweek (12.08.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3kIvwkS> – “Genocide” is a word that should only be used with great caution in the world of international relations and human rights. If genocide is recognized and verified, it imposes an unconditional moral obligation to intervene to stop the extermination of the victimized group. We are correct to preserve a narrow definition of the term, and to apply it only in cases that reach the threshold of horror it signifies; otherwise, the term will lose its meaning.

But by the same token, we must seek and face the bitter truth when evidence of genocide appears. We owe it to the millions

of ghosts from the last century—victims not only of genocide, but of denial, appeasement, bureaucratic dithering, prejudice and indifference. Even more, we owe it to people at risk today, like the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, China. Make no mistake, free and democratic nations today face a moral test the likes of which have not been seen since the onset of Nazi Germany's (largely successful) effort to exterminate Europe's Jews.

Today, we know and should understand more. Since it came into force in 1951, we have the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. The Convention defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

1. Killing members of the group;
2. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
3. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
4. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
5. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

While no government has declared a genocide in Xinjiang, documentary evidence has become irrefutable that all of these things are happening to the Uyghur population. At the very least, it is certain that we are witnessing a genocide in the making, and it is our highest responsibility to prevent it from developing into a mass slaughter.

Like all international treaties concerning humanitarian issues, the Genocide Convention rests on a foundation of national sovereignty and self-regulation. It obligates states to prosecute those who incite genocide, those who conspire and perpetrate the international crimes it includes, and those who

are complicit.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination describes Xinjiang as “a massive internment camp shrouded in secrecy, a ‘no rights’ zone, while members of the Xinjiang Uyghur minority, along with others who were identified as Muslim, were being treated as enemies of the state based on nothing more than their ethno-religious identity.” Yet when China’s human rights record was last examined by the UN, only a handful of states challenged the Chinese delegation’s official characterization of the Uyghur detention camps as “vocational educational and training centers”—a tactic apparently inspired by the Nazi regime’s cynical charades.

In a future, democratic China, perpetrators of the crimes in Xinjiang will hopefully be fairly tried by independent courts. But this is the specter paradoxically driving the genocidal dynamic in China, and we need only refer again to Nazi Germany for insights into its internal logic. There, the policy of extermination assumed a thoroughly apocalyptic form; knowing their crimes would be punished hardened the Nazis’ position, and they accelerated their crimes as the Allied Powers closed in on Berlin. The persecution of the Uyghurs is part of a racist-nationalist strategy to mobilize the Han Chinese by demonizing minority groups—a project which will end in disaster for its architects if it fails. Potential witnesses must be silenced or destroyed. Huge numbers of Chinese Communist officials are apparently more strongly committed to the preservation of their inhuman regime precisely because they face trials and retribution if it falls.

The Genocide Convention has 152 contracting parties, but offers those parties no real leverage for constraining states on the verge of committing a crime. The International Criminal Court could take up the issue, even though China is not a party to the Court’s underlying treaty. Unfortunately, the politics of multilateral human rights organizations and international courts may encourage high-minded posturing, but

they mitigate against decisive actions, as good-faith efforts to use available tools encounter paralysis and moral equivalence.

Realistically, the only way the atrocities against the Uyghurs will end is by international concerted efforts led by the bilateral actions of powerful states—and those of the Chinese people themselves. Some Muslim states have oil-based leverage on China, but have shamefully ignored the problem; Iran has even entered into an alliance with China. Germany, the strongest country in Europe, is waffling.

In this situation, the United States government has taken the lead with legislation and sanctions. In June, President Trump signed the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020 into law. The Chinese government said the bill “wantonly smeared China’s counter-terrorism and anti-radicalization efforts.”

Will these actions interrupt the dynamic of genocide? It seems doubtful, unless they are joined by many more. With the world’s second-most powerful state tightening a noose around the neck of the Xinjiang Muslim population, China is threatening not only the Uyghurs, but also the fragile moral fabric of solidarity with threatened peoples everywhere.

Dr. Jianli Yang is founder and president of Citizens Power Initiatives for China. Dr. Aaron Rhodes is president of the Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe.

The views expressed in this article are the writers’ own.

UNITED STATES/IRAQ/SYRIA: H.R.390 – Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2018 115th Congress (2017-2018) | 11 December 2018

Iraq and Syria Genocide Relief and Accountability Act of 2017

Congress (11.12.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2PzUamI> – (Sec. 4) This bill states that it is U.S. policy to ensure that humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery assistance for nationals and residents of Iraq or Syria, and of communities from those countries, is directed toward ethnic and minority individuals and communities with the greatest need, including those individuals and communities that are at risk of persecution or war crimes.

(Sec. 5) The Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development may provide assistance, including financial and technical assistance, to support the efforts of entities, including nongovernmental organizations with expertise in international criminal investigations and law, to address crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes in Iraq since January 2014 by:

- conducting criminal investigations,
- developing indigenous investigative and judicial skills

- to adjudicate cases consistent with due process and respect for the rule of law, and
- collecting and preserving evidence for use in prosecutions.

The State Department shall encourage foreign governments to identify and prosecute individuals who are suspected of committing such crimes, including members of foreign terrorist organizations operating in Iraq or Syria.

(Sec. 6) The State Department shall identify:

- threats of persecution, genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes against members of Iraqi or Syrian religious or ethnic groups that are minorities in Iraq or in Syria with respect to whom the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has committed such crimes in Iraq or Syria since January 2014 or who are members of other persecuted religious or ethnic groups;
- persecuted religious and ethnic minority groups in Iraq or Syria that are at risk of forced migration and the primary reasons for such risk;
- humanitarian, stabilization, and recovery needs of these individuals; and
- entities, including faith-based entities, that are providing such assistance and the extent of U.S. assistance to or through such entities.

(Sec. 7) The State Department shall provide Congress with:

- a description of the efforts taken and proposed to implement this bill; and
- an assessment of the feasibility and advisability of prosecuting individuals for acts of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes in Iraq since January 2014 or in Syria since March 2011.

See as well : Trump signs bill to help religious minorities in Iraq, Syria:

<https://www.apnews.com/6c456d1fc4f1443699eb7ef8b7670e92>

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CANADA : End forced

sterilizations of Indigenous women

By Nickita Longman

The Washington Post (4.12.2018) – <https://wapo.st/2G2uH69>– Last month 60 Indigenous women sued the Saskatoon Health Region, the province of Saskatchewan, the Canadian government and medical professionals for their experiences with coerced, forced or pressured sterilization in Saskatchewan over the course of 20 to 25 years. The procedures, which occurred from about the 1930s to as recently as 2017, targeted Indigenous women specifically. Each claimant is filing for \$7 million in compensation, citing psychological and physical damage since the procedures.

While some women do not recall giving consent for sterilization, others say they consented because of post-delivery exhaustion and persistence from health staff. Some women state that they were unclear about the permanent damage such procedures would have or were told that the sterilization could be reversed later. Others cite that health officials leveraged the procedure as a means to be able to see their newborn children immediately after birth.

This is plainly an act of genocide and should not be labeled as anything less, in accordance with Article II of the United Nations convention on genocide which prohibits “imposing measures intended to prevent birth within a group.”

In November 2015, two Indigenous women contacted local media to tell their personal experiences with the sterilization procedure within the Saskatoon Health Region. Brenda Pelletier reported that after providing consent post-birth, she had done so to relieve the badgering and pestering of health staff. Once on the operating table, the exhausted mother once again contested the operation, but the procedure was carried out despite her protest.

In an interview on Oct. 27, 2017, Alisa Lombard, a lawyer with Maurice Law who filed the statements, posed the question: Where would our communities be if not for the coerced or forced sterilization of our women? The procedures have larger implications for our community and its ability to thrive and work toward self-determination.

Sen. Yvonne Boyer, a Métis lawyer and former nurse who has conducted an external review on tubal ligations in the Saskatoon Health Region, has suggested that if this happened in Saskatoon, it has likely also happened in other cities on the prairies where the Indigenous population is dense. The government of Canada has had a long history of violence and oppression against Indigenous people, and this is especially true on the prairies. Saskatchewan in particular has one of the highest incarceration rates of Indigenous people of any province in Canada; most victims of police shootings in Saskatchewan were Indigenous; it also has one of the highest rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and alarming rates of poverty, including child poverty, both on and off reserve.

The harm of ongoing colonization, including theft of land, resources and children, is no secret on the Canadian prairies.

It should be noted that the child welfare system is big business in Canada. As it stands, there are more Indigenous children in the government's care than there were at the height of Canada's infamous residential school era. In fact, Saskatchewan hosted the last of the residential school closures as recently as 1996. Is sterilization the government's attempt at addressing the very social conditions it has created over time? Is forced sterilization of Indigenous women the Canadian state's most reasonable solution to a population living in enforced poverty?

The Canadian government, the province of Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon Health Region have remained complicit in yet another form of contemporary genocide under the guise of eugenic ideology. It has attempted the erasure of Indigenous motherhood and in turn has limited the growth of the Indigenous nation. In the House of Commons on Nov. 21, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the "coerced sterilization of some Indigenous women is a serious violation of human rights" and acknowledged the systemic discrimination and racism that Indigenous people face within the health care system. But at this time, the Liberal government has not taken concrete action as it continues to sidestep the nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous people it promised in its platform.

Sen. Boyer has called for a nationwide review; Lombard, the lawyer, has delivered her findings in Geneva to the U.N. Committee Against Torture. Before the lawsuit cases hit the courtroom in 2019, the physicians performing these procedures, as well as the nurses and social workers who are assisting by pressuring for consent, should be prevented from practicing medicine. All levels of government need to immediately address this issue and ban sterilization without free, prior and

informed consent from each patient.

Forced, coerced or pressured sterilization of Indigenous women breaches the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples' definition of "free, prior, and informed consent," which in Canada is often cited in relation to land. It is important to note that in many Indigenous traditions, the land is viewed as mothering. The ravaging of the land and water in the name of colonization and capitalism has devastating effects on the living. It stunts our growth and, in some cases, our survival. This same lens can be used when understanding the damaging effects that sterilization can have on a woman physically.

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Century of Genocides: End or Continuity? (Jan Figel)

Paper of Jan Figel on the occasion of the International Day of Religious Freedom

HRWF (31.10.2016) – The annual International Day of Religious Freedom on October 27 is a reminder that freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) is neither a self-evident reality, nor a broadly winning international trend. Quite the opposite is the case, since the actual tendency is negative.

This essential, universal human value is currently seriously restricted or attacked in the majority of the world's countries and territories representing 74% of the total world population (Pew Study Center Report, 2013). The day also reminds people of the hard, long, often bloody road from serfdom, deep societal divisions, sectarian hatred, and violent oppression against efforts to form free, pluralist and tolerant societies respecting the rule of law, human rights and basic universal values. No society is the perfect role model in this, but we learn as we go. Many peoples, communities, leaders and governments in Europe, Asia, Africa, Americas, Australia and Oceania struggle to improve the quality of democracy, to embrace and care more about these principles and values. Many dictators, autocratic regimes and violent groups struggle in the opposite direction: they proclaim rule without law instead of the rule of law; the power over people instead of the service to people...

While more than 84% of people in the world can be described as "religiously affiliated" (ibid.), FoRB is more widely applied. It is a fundamental freedom relevant for all, as it also covers the rights of atheists, agnostics, and non-believers. **The right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or conviction is linked to the freedom of expression, of assembly**

and other important civil and political rights. FoRB is a litmus test of all human rights, because when the religious freedom is missing then other civil freedoms are missing as well.

A culture of human dignity is inconceivable without FoRB. In my homeland of Slovakia, then Czechoslovakia, the struggle to overcome the totalitarian, communist regime peaked after Bratislava Good Friday 1988, when a peaceful prayer manifestation of citizens in the center of the capital city with requests for religious and civil rights was brutally attacked by police forces. Afterwards, a trend towards “Velvet revolution” and overall political change in 1989 became unstoppable.

Freedom is not purposeless and cannot survive without shared responsibility. Therefore, claims for more religious liberty are in my mind implicitly linked to active engagement of religious leaders and communities for peace, justice, human togetherness and solidarity. This is very much needed in the 21st Century. Since 1915-16, the systematic extermination of 1.5 million Armenians, which constituted the first recognized genocide of the 20th Century, mankind went through similar horrors on religious, racial, national or ethnic foundations in many parts of the globe – in Nazi and Soviet concentration camps, gulags and mass graves, in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, etc. Unfortunately, the **“Never Again” promise from the Nuremberg Tribunal of 1946 was broken repeatedly, again and again. We abandoned commitment to prevent genocide or inhumane treatment too often.** In reality, people in need have been abandoned as well as those who have been persecuted for their religion, conviction, race or ethnicity.

The current systematic murder, torture, enslavement, kidnapping, raping and persecution of religious and ethnic minorities on territories dominated by the “Islamic State” constitute the very same type of the greatest crime – genocide. This position was strongly expressed by

parliamentary bodies of the Council of Europe, EU, USA, UK and Australia. Thus, a very timely and alarming question arises: "Shall the century of genocides end or continue?" After Christians, Yezidis, Shia-Muslims and some other communities in Iraq and Syria, who will follow next? The answer is crucially important and commitment is decisive. I am sure with many like-minded supporters, that a better century is possible. A more human century is our moral obligation! If we want to share more peaceful and better times, we have to prevent that repetitive tendency, prevent returns of inhumanity. This means to stop persecution of innocent people and to help voiceless and defenseless victims, and to finally bring perpetrators of crimes to justice. **Ignorance, indifference or fear helps fanatics and perpetrators of crimes; our silence hurts the victims.**

Besides genocidal persecution there are many other forms of religious oppression – blasphemy laws, anti-conversion laws, sectarian violence, totalitarian regimes which try to eliminate religious manifestations and freedom of conscience and conviction for the sake of their ideology and uniformity. Already Marx and Lenin despised religion as "the opium of the people". And they have created their own political religion, a new coercive and militant ideology. The major dictators of the 20th century – Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot – all have something in common: They fiercely suppressed FoRB.

Without understanding the aims, structure and effects of religions, including the abuse of religion, i. e. by Islamist terrorists, we cannot understand what is going on in our world. Subsequently we cannot find efficient solutions that help society to recover from inter-religious strife. The promotion of FoRB, an ethic of responsibility, and education for living in diversity is the principal way to tackle religious fundamentalism, violent extremism and terrorism.

When there is indifference, ignorance and fear become the allies of evil. But when we continuously cut the roots of

indifference, ignorance and fear, a culture of human dignity for all and everywhere may grow and bear positive fruit in our century.

Ján Figel' is the Special Envoy for promotion of FoRB outside the EU.

27 October 2016

See interview of Jan Figel in Christianity Today (27 October 2016)

Religious freedom is a litmus test of overall freedom, says EU Special Envoy

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/religious.freedom.is.a.litmus.test.of.overall.freedom.says.eu.special.envoy/99102.htm>