

# **CHINA: Special Weekly FoRB Newsletter (29.09-06.10.2020)**

**06.10.20 – CCP officials: ‘Christianity doesn’t belong in China’**

On top of removing crosses, Chinese authorities order to replace Christianity’s main symbol on churches’ seals with the five-pointed star.

**Continue reading...**

**04.10.20 – Persecution of protestant churches intensifies**

House churches and state-controlled Three-Self churches across China are raided and closed down. Believers are questioned, and their homes are searched.

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**03.10.20 – Ancestral temples repurposed for public use**

Even the venues where familial clans meet to honor their ancestors and celebrate important events have become targets of the CCP’s crackdown on religion.

**Continue reading...**

**02.10.20 – CCP investigates leaks about religious persecution**

Increasingly criticized by the international community for crackdowns on people of faith, China’s regime enforces more stringent measures to cover up its crimes.

**Continue reading...**

**30.09.20 – China’s persecution of the Uyghurs: A human rights emergency**

The situation in Xinjiang is getting worse rather than better. It is time for the international community to speak up.

**Continue reading...**

**30.09.20 – While a U.S. House bill targets Xinjiang slave labor, new voices support the Uyghurs**

France calls to similar action. Ms. Tursunay Ziyawudun flees safely from a detention camp. Two awards honor the Uyghur cause.

**Continue reading...**

**29.09.20- Catholics increasingly harassed ahead Vatican-China deal renewal**

Some churches refusing to join the Patriotic Church are repurposed by the state, while others are barred from activities in the name of “epidemic prevention.”

**Continue reading...**

**29.09.20 – Surveillance devices planted in believers’ homes**

To keep members of The Church of Almighty God under constant control, the police follow their every move through listening and tracking devices.

**Continue reading...**

**29.09.20 – Now they come for the Utsuls: sinicizing another Muslim minority**

Denied its traditional clothing and identity, a Chamic-speaking people in Hainan Island is challenging the CCP with public protests.

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# Who are the Uyghurs? Canadian scholars give profound insights

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*– FOREF interview with Dr. Susan J. Palmer\* & Marie-Eve Melanson\* McGill University, Canada*

- **Cultural genocide:** An estimated 3 million Uyghurs are currently in Chinese concentration camps according to new investigative reports
- **Horror stories of kidnapping, torture, rape, separation from their families, being forced to break dietary laws, destruction of their mosques and more by Chinese authorities made headlines in Western media.**
- **The CCP (Chinese Communist Party) is even persecuting them in foreign countries.**

Foref Europe (07.09.2020) – <https://bit.ly/3cR7252> – Numerous democratic states have expressed alarm, but Chinese authorities insist they are simply fighting “terrorism.” Palmer and Melanson explain some of their findings of their current research on Uyghurs in Canada in the following interview:

**What are the main questions you and your team addressed in this project?**

**PALMER:** Our research explores the reasons and processes whereby many Uyghurs left China and settled in Canada, with a focus on the challenges related to transmitting the Uyghur identity to their children in both countries.

While over 12 million Uyghurs live in the northwestern region Xinjiang, since the election of president Xi Jinping in 2013, there has been an accelerating religious and cultural repression of Islam and traditional Uyghur practices that have made it difficult for Uyghurs to transmit the distinctive traits of their religious and cultural identity to the next generation.

On the basis of our interviews with over 25 Uyghurs who have arrived in Canada, it is evident there is a strong concern to safeguard and transmit their collective identity, as a response to what some of them refer to as the “cultural genocide” in China.

However, the challenges of achieving this goal in the Canadian context are daunting. In Canada, the Uyghurs are less than 2000, including first and second-generation immigrants, and they are spread out across the country. One challenge has been financial; many had to start their studies of professional activities over after they immigrated, although a few have recently begun to enjoy a more stable lifestyle. Another is familial. Since 2017, many Uyghurs living in Canada have lost contact with their relatives in China. Phone calls through the

Chinese app WeChat were not answered, or their relatives begged to stop calling, since it prompted police visits and arrests. There are obstacles in obtaining tourist visas to invite family members to visit them in Canada.

After 2017, many cancelled their trips to China, fearing it would place their relatives in danger of being arrested and interned in the so-called “re-education centres”, where many already have friends or relatives detained. One might argue that these events appear have triggered a collective trauma that has become central to the Uyghur identity in Canada, as might be seen by the strong response to our research.

### **How did you go about this research?**

**PALMER:** In February 2020, our team, including my research assistants Marie-Eve Melanson and Shane Dussault (graduate students in Religious Studies at McGill) and myself as principle investigator, visited the Uyghur School in Châteauguay, near Montreal, which is aimed at teaching children the Uyghur language, history, and culture.

We conducted our first interviews with some of the parents we met at the school. From there, word spread that researchers from McGill University were doing research on the Uyghur community in Canada, and we started receiving emails from Uyghurs we had already interviewed suggesting that we contact their friends or relatives across Canada.

Others contacted us directly after they received the

information about our study from a WhatsApp group for Canadian Uyghurs. Currently, we have interviewed over 25 Uyghurs.

Despite the fact that many have serious concerns that their participation in our research could affect the security of their relatives living in China (thus their wish to remain anonymous (and we have taken steps to hide their identity), there is a resolute willingness to speak up and denounce what is currently happening to Uyghurs in China.

Since many Uyghurs go through or settle in Turkey after they leave China, we have recently started interviewing Uyghurs established in Istanbul, where political activism appears to be strong and well-organized. Turkey is a natural destination for Uyghurs who wish to leave China, as a majority Muslim country with a culture and a language similar to the Uyghurs'.

Moreover, Turkey offers Uyghurs a permanent residence permit, which allows them to legally reside in Turkey without a valid passport from China but also without being granted the same rights and privileges as Turkish citizens. Some of our Canadian participants have expressed a fear about Turkey's friendly relationship with China in the last decades, which has led them to settle in Canada instead of Turkey.

## **What are the typical reasons your interviewees immigrated to Canada?**

**MELANSON:** Many of our participants were professionals in China, in particular, successful traders and

businessmen, nurses, electricians, engineers or university professors. Some came with student visas, but most arrived as skilled immigrants in the last two decades (i.e., at a time where the repression of the Uyghur identity was less severe than it is today). While the immigration stories collected in our interviews are all unique, we can discern at least three patterns of exodus for Uyghurs to leaving their native land.

The first reason is *discrimination*. This prevails in the workplace, where Uyghurs have reduced chances of getting a good job or a promotion despite being qualified. Obtaining certain privileges that are readily available to the Han majority (e.g. a passport or a travel visa) can also be difficult for Uyghurs, who must pay off a number of people or need connections to obtain what they need. When Uyghurs face discrimination, it is also impossible for them to complain without risking further trouble. One of our participants told us that he quit his job as a university professor after he was unexpectedly requested to teach all his courses in Chinese language instead of Uyghur language, although almost all of his students were Uyghurs. Quitting was, according to him, the best way not to comply. Many of our participants said they left China so their children would not have to face discrimination and find better opportunities in a democratic country.

The second reason Uyghurs cited for leaving China was *incessant harassment* from the authorities. Many rationales for harassment are given by the CCP: making too much money, having traveled abroad, having been in touch with foreigners (especially if from a Muslim-majority country), having too many children, perceived to be an overly enthusiastic Muslim, or for opposing state policies. Police harassment can also occur after a Uyghur's relative has been accused of one of

those things. One participant recounted how, although they had the right number of children that was permitted for them at the time, they frequently received visits from police officers they had to bribe in order to be left alone. Since his wife could not take the contraception the authorities provided for medical reasons, she had to report to the police every month for a pregnancy test. She was forced to have an abortion seven times.

The third reason for leaving China is *fear in the justice system*. Uyghurs fear that if they get trapped in the Chinese legal system—which can happen for various reasons—that they are going to be sent to jail or the rehabilitation camps. Some participants have seen their relatives, friends or acquaintances unjustly charged and tried for crimes they did not commit, or for actions that would not be considered “crimes” in the Western world (e.g. having participated in a student protest demonstration). Some have heard stories about Uyghurs being kidnapped in neighboring countries and brought back to China only to be jailed. Those who fear the justice system are often people who have ties with intellectuals, activists or religious figures and who know that they are being watched by the authorities, or who have been placed on the “black list” (sometimes because of politically active relative abroad).

## **How has the situation of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang changed in recent years?**

**PALMER:** Since 2017, many Uyghurs living in Canada lost contact with their relatives in China. Either their phone calls were not answered, or their relatives suddenly begged them to stop calling. Those who are “lucky enough”—as they say—to still be



in contact with their relatives can talk to them through the Chinese app WeChat, which they know is monitored. For this reason, they keep their conversations to mundane topics.

Most Uyghurs interviewed immigrated before 2017, and they have only witnessed the increasing policing of Uyghurs in Xinjiang whileabroad. Since it is highly risky for Uyghurs still living in China to share their experience in the camps with their relatives living abroad (or even with their relatives in China), the information that Uyghurs in the diaspora are able to get on the situation in Xinjiang (which they always refer to as “East Turkistan”) mostly comes from other Uyghurs in the diaspora who haveshared their experiences viavarious media outlets, or social networks, or by giving speeches at events and protests.

In general, many of our participants claimed they never fully realized the scope of the problem the Uyghurs face in China until after they emigrated, since they could not access this kind of information in China due to censorship of the Press and the internet. When they came to Canada, many thus became more engaged in activist activities, especially once they felt settled in their new life.

## **Were any of your contacts forced into detention facilities in Xinjiang?**

**MELANSON:** None of the Uyghurs we interviewed have been in the rehabilitation camps (which they routinely refer to as “concentration camps”). However, many have friends and relatives who have been detained or are currently detained in

the camps. Those who got out of the camps do not necessarily want to speak about their experience with their relatives. One participant mentioned that her sister got out of the camp in very poor health and has practically stopped speaking ever since. Detainees are sometimes able to call their relatives or send them letters, however, they are strictly monitored. One participant whose uncle had been detained for a few years explained that whenever his uncle call his son, he will only speak in Chinese, although he did not speak any Chinese before he entered the camp. The family also received a letter from him written in Chinese.

## **Based on your interviews, how important is Islam to Uyghur Identity?**

**MELANSON:** While there has been many discussions in the media about the Chinese Communist Party's repression of religious practices, not being able to practice Islam in China or having to adapt their Islamic religious practices to fit the patriotic requirements of the Chinese Communist Party appears to be a secondary concern for Uyghurs in our interviews.

Although Uyghurs have much to say about repression in China, the lack of freedom of religion in Xinjiang/East Turkestan almost never comes up unless we ask about it – although Islam is an important part of many Canadian Uyghurs' life. This is perhaps due to the fact that, from a global perspective, Islam is thriving; unlike the Uyghur people's history and culture which is currently threatened by the CCP's policy of assimilation by the Han majority.

Being Muslim seems to be an important aspect of Uyghur

identity of Uyghurs – one that they have in common with other ethnic peoples, rather than something that belongs specifically to them. An illustration of this is that there do not seem to be any real efforts to resist the Arabization of traditional Uyghur religious practices among Uyghurs, either in China or in the diaspora. On the other hand, there are strong efforts to recover and disseminate Uyghur history and literature. Thus, Uyghurs do not carry the burden of safeguarding Islam, while they do carry the burden of safeguarding their own ethnic identity. In short, it is principally the “ethnic” part of the ethno-religious identity of Muslim Uyghurs that seems to be the focus of Uyghurs’ concerns today, probably because it is this part of their identity that is being threatened with assimilation from a global standpoint.

## **How do Uyghurs seek to safeguard the Uyghur identity?**

**PALMER:** There seems to be three main ways by which the Uyghurs aim to safeguard the Uyghur identity in the current context. The first one is transmitting the Uyghur language, which is essential for many Uyghur families living in Canada. This is done by speaking the Uyghur language at home and by teaching their children□ the Arabic script.

Another way to safeguard the Uyghur identity is through marriage. Our interviewees almost all mentioned that they hoped their children would marry within the Uyghur community, often citing as a reason the need to “counter the genocide going on in China.” Some of our participants who were first-generation immigrants have themselves married within the Uyghur diaspora after having immigrated. Many met their partner on Facebook or through a WhatsApp group, and then

traveled to the location where the person was living to get married. They then sponsored their spouse as an immigrant to Canada.

Finally, there is a concerted effort in the diaspora to publish and disseminate Uyghur books, especially books that have been banned in China. One of the main Uyghur-owned publishing houses is located in Istanbul (we interviewed the owner). This publishing house seeks to obtain and publish works by Uyghur authors (academics, writers, poets, theologians, etc.), the purpose being to safeguard the writings of influential Uyghurs and to prevent Uyghur history from being erased. Other publishing houses also produce children books in the Uyghur language throughout the diaspora.

## **How do Uyghurs in Canada support their community?**

**MELANSON:** Most Uyghurs we interviewed support their community, but some do it more publicly than others. On the one hand, some think that it is crucial to protest, loudly and clearly about the dire situation that Uyghurs are facing in China, despite the risks involved for their relatives living in China, because this is the only way for the Uyghur community to find justice. In this case, they will often be engaged in activism (e.g. organizing demonstrations, sending letters to politicians) or they will join an established association working for the defense of Uyghur interests. On the other hand, some prefer to play it safe and not “give the Chinese authorities one further reason” to arrest their relatives in China. In this case, they may prefer to make donations to Uyghurs in need, or to organizations working to defend the interest of Uyghurs in Canada or internationally. They can also be involved in the Uyghur schools, either supporting the

school financially or by volunteer work; teaching children the Uyghur language, music, dances, cuisine, history, folk traditions, etc.

## **How has oppression of Uyghurs in China affected their lives as immigrants?**

**PALMER:** Some of the Uyghurs we interviewed claimed to suffer from PTSD after having gone through traumatic events in China. Many expressed anxiety about the well-being of their relatives back home, which impaired their ability to function well in their daily life. One participant living in Turkey explained how he had trouble pursuing his studies after he learned of his mother's detention. He states that he does not want to be informed about what is going on in the camps in East Turkestan/Xinjiang since it would make him more worried. Many Uyghurs we interviewed in Canada have said the situation of Uyghurs in China is constantly in the back of their mind. While they do have opportunities to share their worries together, in particular during the *meshrep*, a traditional festive gathering, most do not receive any kind of government support or professional assistance for dealing with traumatic memories and practical difficulties they have experienced since arriving in Canada.

**Note:** *Dr. Susan J. Palmer is a leading expert on religious movements, and a member of FOREF's Scientific Committee.*

**Marie-Eve Melanson is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Religious Studies at McGill and Head Research Assistant on the Uyghurs in Canada project. McGill and Concordia graduate students, Shane Dussault Sean Renz and Maryam Amirdust are also Research Assistants Head on the team.**

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# **CHINA: Special Weekly FoRB Newsletter (22-28.09.2020)**

## **28.09.20 – Church-run schools eliminated to advance patriotic education**

The CCP cracks down on educational institutions with ties to places of worship to ensure that the young generation receives only “proper” communist training.

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## **28.09.20- Islamic symbols and inscriptions purged in Henan**

The provincial government banned in April all Islam-related writings and symbols on public signages and private residences, also in businesses, like shops and cafes.

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## **28.09.20 – Detention facilities in Xinjiang: there are more, not less**

The report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, and other sources, confirm that the CCP propaganda claim that camps are being closed is a lie.

**Continue reading...**

## **27.09.20 – Shouters sentenced to jail penalties in Anhui**

Six members of the movement received jail terms up to five years in Ma'anshan City.

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**26.09.20 – One more priest tortured to force him into official church**

Father Liu Maochun from the Diocese of Mindong, who refuses to join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, was arrested and deprived of sleep to break his will.

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**26.09.20 – CCP continues to destroy Uyghur families: The story of Mirehmet**

He and his brother live a successful life abroad. This is a crime in China, and a third brother has “disappeared” after having been arrested

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**25.09.20 – Ethnic Kazakhs arrested: A relative fears violence and jail rape**

Gulaisha Oralbay speaks out. Her brother and two sisters have received heavy sentences to be purged in a notorious jail for crimes the Chinese authorities have refused to disclose to her.

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**24.09.20 – CCP rewriting The Gospel: Jesus actually “killed” The woman taken in adultery**

The story in John 8 is presented to Chinese students as one where the Savior waits for the Pharisees to leave, then stones the adulterer himself.

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### **23.09.20 – Tibetan buddhism ‘sinicized’ across inland China**

Implementing President Xi Jinping’s orders to advance the ‘sinicization’ of Tibetan Buddhism, local authorities eradicate traditional architecture and symbols.

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### **23.09.20 – 63 MPs from all over the world call for “magnitsky-style” action protesting cultural genocide in Tibet**

A statement by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC) builds upon Dr. Adrian Zenz’s new findings to denounce atrocities and Western immobilism.

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### **22.09.20 – Militarized labor training and indoctrination: Xinjiang schemes exported to Tibet**

Although not necessarily involving detention, the CCP’s militarized training of Tibetan workers, sent to work far from home, is suspiciously similar to what is being done to the Uyghurs.

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### **22.09.20 – More demolitions of temples and religious statues in Hubei**

In May, the CCP launched another large-scale drive against Buddhist and Taoist venues in central China’s province where the coronavirus originated.

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### **22.09.20 – Nearly 120 Church of Almighty God members arrested**

In August, authorities in Zhejiang and Shandong provinces launched unified arrest operations, utilizing the data collected through long-term tracking of believers.



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**22.09.20 – Official catholic church: State-approved, hounded nonetheless**

joining the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association does not mean that persecutions end: state-sanctioned venues are also harassed, unduly controlled, and shut.

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## **CHINA: Special Weekly FoRB Newsletter (15-21.09.2020)**

**21.09.20 – The architecture of Hui schools in Inner Mongolia ‘hanified’**

Buildings with Islamic architecture elements, like domes, are rectified as part of the CCP’s Islam “sinicization” campaign in areas populated by Muslim Huis.

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**21.09.20 – Nearly 550 protestant venues shut down in Jiangsu Province**

During a six-month crackdown last year, authorities merged and repurposed places of worship using threats, intimidations, and other deceitful methods.

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**20.09.20 – Church of Almighty God members driven to suicide**

After years of abuse and harassment, living under close

surveillance, some members of this banned religious group in China chose to take their own lives.

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### **19.09.20 – Teachers denied freedom of speech and religion**

China's communist regime implements drastic censorship and ideological control measures to ensure that educators follow the Party line.

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### **19.09.20 – Sexual Abuse of Uyghur Women by CCP Cadres in Xinjiang: A victim speaks out**

Now a refugee in Europe, Qelbinur has decided to break her silence and tell Bitter Winter the reality about Han Chinese "relatives" sent to Xinjiang to live in the homes of Uyghurs

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### **18.09.20 – House Church believers arrested for practicing their faith**

It's increasingly hard for unregistered Protestant churches to survive, as numerous venues are closed to make believers join the official Three-Self Church.

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### **17.09.20 – Buddhist statues removed from temples and tourist sites**

Using various trumped-up pretexts, the CCP continues its campaign to eliminate outdoor religious statues across China.

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### **16.09.20 – Unregistered catholics told to obey CCP or face consequences**

As the Vatican-China Deal of 2018 expires this month, priests refusing to join the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association are threatened with more restrictions.

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### **16.09.20 – Uyghur students taught to neglect native language and culture**

Han teachers working in schools for Uyghur children reveal the ugly side of the CCP's campaign to "support Xinjiang."

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### **15.09.20 – A thousand-year-old tibetan buddhist temple destroyed in Shanxi**

The Fuyun Temple in the northern province of Shanxi was demolished after several attempts by the government to rectify it.

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### **15.09.20 – Tibetan youth 'sinicized' through education**

The CCP brings gifted students from Tibet to study in inland China, forcing them to give up their culture, language, and traditions in exchange.

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# **CHINA: Special Weekly FoRB**

# **Newsletter (01-08.09.2020)**

**07.09.20- Branded: a woman's 28-year-long religious persecution in China**

A new film tells the story of a devotee who joined The Church of Almighty God at its beginnings. She was hunted, detained, and tortured ever since.

**Continue reading...**

**06.09.20 – Banned religious groups' members 'transformed' in Xinjiang camps**

Followers of The Church of Almighty God, Falun Gong, and Jehovah's Witnesses are kept in camps until they renounce their faith and betray fellow believers.

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**06.09.20 – Religious venues suppressed in the name of epidemic prevention**

Churches and temples were rigorously restricted to reopen after coronavirus measures were eased, and authorities used the situation to expand control over them.

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**05.09.20 – Awards offered to snitch on unregistered religious venues**

To prevent members of state-run churches from joining unregistered places of worship, the government implements new repressive measures to control them.

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**05.09.20 – Uyghurs discriminated and abused in inland China**

Authorities across China impose draconian control measures on Muslims from Xinjiang, prohibiting them from renting properties and running their businesses.

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#### **04.09.20 – A people’s tribunal to investigate allegations of Chinese genocide against the Uyghurs**

World-famous legal expert Sir Geoffrey Nice has accepted to preside what is announced as the most thorough investigation ever of CCP crimes in Xinjiang.

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#### **04.09.20 – Inner Mongolia: The CCP tries to blame all problems on “cults”**

While protests on school reforms continue, the authorities launch a “Prevention of Xie Jiao Propaganda Month,” and claim that banned religious groups are threatening the region’s stability.

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#### **03.09.20 – Islam ‘sinicized’ further in Ningxia after President Xi’s visit**

When the president scolded local officials in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region for not doing enough to curb Islamic culture, they rolled up their sleeves.

**Continue reading...**

#### **02.09.20 – The disappeared: relatives of vanished Uyghurs tell their sad stories**

August 30 was the International Day of the Disappeared. Bitter Winter interviewed exiled Uyghurs who are in the vain search of their loved ones.

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**02.09.20 – State-run churches in Handan City destroyed as 'illegal'**

Authorities in Hebei Province's Handan city intensify crackdowns on Protestant churches with valid, government-issued religious activity certificates.

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**02.09.20 – Bishop Jia Zhiguo under house arrest again**

The popular bishop was taken away by authorities on August 10. He has been harassed for months to close an orphanage for disabled children he runs for 30 years.

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