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# amnesty international

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## PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

### Xinjiang: Trials after recent ethnic unrest

21 March 1997

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Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese authorities to refrain from using the death penalty against anybody tried in connection with recent ethnic unrest in the north-west region of Xinjiang. It is also calling on the authorities to disclose the names of, and charges against, the detainees and to ensure that they are not subject to torture or ill-treatment. The organization is concerned that all detainees should have a public and fair trial, with adequate time and facilities to prepare their defence, in accordance with international standards.

Official sources in Xinjiang said on 20 March that 15 people had been arrested as a result of incidents which occurred during February 1997 in the predominantly Muslim region of Xinjiang. On 21 March a court official in Yining<sup>1</sup> confirmed that trials had been concluded for six men accused of involvement in riots in Yining on 5 and 6 February<sup>2</sup>. The official said that the verdicts would not be announced until April. The six men have not been named, but official sources said they are unemployed, aged in their 30s and from the Uighur ethnic minority. They were charged with "hooliganism" and "endangering public order"; crimes which can carry the death penalty.

Exiled opposition sources named two of those detained as Abu Khair and Abdu Medchit, 25 year-old religious students in Yining, who were detained on 7 February, and are allegedly accused of leading the riots in Yining.

Nine other people have also been formally arrested for alleged involvement in bombings which took place in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, on 25 February 1997. Three bombs exploded on public buses on that day, reportedly killing nine people and injuring 74.

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<sup>1</sup> Yining is the main city of the Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture.

<sup>2</sup> *Reuter*, Beijing, 21 March 1997.

The nine reportedly include one ethnic Han Chinese and eight Uighurs whose arrests were approved on 7 March<sup>3</sup>. Some of those arrested, including the Han Chinese, are suspected of selling explosives rather than carrying out the bombings. No trial date has yet been announced, but the authorities are reportedly aiming to announce the sentences before the Muslim festival of Corban on 18 April.

Information about the unrest in Yining in February and its aftermath is still scant and confused, with conflicting reports about the extent of the casualties and the number of arrests carried out. Available reports indicate that violence occurred after over 1000 ethnic Uighurs took to the streets of Yining on 5 and 6 February, calling for independence from China. They reportedly attacked Han Chinese and overturned or burned cars, but little is known about the two days of unrest and the intervention of the paramilitary forces who were called in to quell it. Official sources said that nine people were killed and up to 300 people initially detained after the riot. However, unofficial sources have said that as many as 70 people were killed and that well over 1000 people were detained.

On 12 February, a spokesperson for the Xinjiang regional government in Urumqi described the incident as “a serious case of beating, looting and destruction” carried out “by a small number of hostile elements in Yining city who plotted to overthrow the people’s political power and to split the unity of the motherland”<sup>4</sup>. A *Reuter* report of 14 March quoted Wang Lequan, Xinjiang’s Communist Party leader reiterating that “only an extremely small number of people were involved in these acts of terrorism” and that “most of the criminals have already been caught”. One of those officially detained in Yining following the riots was named as Abdul Halil (Abudu Heilili), a 29 year-old unemployed Uighur man who, according to official sources, had taken part in another demonstration in Yining in August 1995. He has reportedly since been released.

Exiled opposition groups claim that the riots in Yining were provoked by the execution of 30 Muslim nationalists and growing restrictions on religious freedom. One exile source, citing local residents, reported that the unrest had gradually built up after an incident in the Ayden sub-district of Yining on 27 January 1997. On that night, according to the source, several armed policemen attempted to disperse a group of 15 Muslim women who had gone to pray at a Mosque, by pushing and kicking the women because they were forming an “illegal” gathering. Angry local residents who had witnessed the incident entered into a fight with the armed policemen, the source said. As the news spread, further incidents reportedly occurred over the following days and the unrest built up until it erupted in violence on 5 and 6 February. According to other exile sources, the unrest was triggered by the execution on 31 January 1997 of 30 young Uighurs. They were reportedly accused of openly agitating against government officials and were paraded in trucks through the streets of Yining before being executed. These executions have not been confirmed by official sources. The only recent executions reported by official sources in Xinjiang were those of 16 men executed in Urumqi on 30 January 1997, who included one Uighur accused of having planted a bomb in front of a military teaching college in February last year in the city.

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<sup>3</sup> According to an *Agence France Presse*, Beijing, report of 20 March 1997, citing a source from the Urumqi People’s Procuratorate

<sup>4</sup> See *Agence France Presse*, Beijing, 12 February 1997.

Many executions have been carried out in Xinjiang since April 1996 when the “strike hard” anti-crime campaign began. Those executed have included Muslim nationalists accused of involvement in terrorist activities. The crackdown has also led to the arrest of people who peacefully expressed their views, such as Abduvahit Ahmedi, an ethnic Uighur who was sentenced in May 1996 to three years’ imprisonment by a court in Urumqi for writing “reactionary” material “seeking to split the motherland”. A major crackdown on “illegal” religious activities was also carried out in Xinjiang, leading to the closure of mosques and Koranic schools, the confiscation of “reactionary” or “illegal” religious materials, and arbitrary arrests. According to unofficial sources, 180 Muslim religious leaders, Koranic professors and students were detained in Xinjiang between May and September 1996 and over 100 Koranic schools closed down. Some arrests were confirmed by official sources, such as that of Aisha Awasy, a local people’s representative for Kezhou, who was arrested in June 1996 for “longstanding illegal religious activities”. He was held in Akto county, near Kashgar, in western Xinjiang, but his fate since then has remained unknown.

Since the February unrest, officials in Xinjiang and Beijing have publicly called for national unity. Ismail Amat, head of China’s State Nationalities Affairs Commission, has “urged deputies from Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region to struggle against separatism<sup>5</sup>”. He went on to identify “the alleviation of poverty a top priority” saying that “splittist activities” were an expression of class struggle rather than an ethnic problem.

Amnesty International does not condone violence and recognizes the right of governments to punish people involved in criminal and violent activities, but it believes that this rule should apply equally to people in positions of authority and that all prisoners should be treated fairly and humanely in accordance with international standards.

Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese authorities to release anyone detained for their alleged involvement in the recent incidents in Xinjiang if they are not to be charged with a recognizable criminal offence in accordance with international standards. The organization is concerned that any others brought to trial for their alleged participation in the protests and bombings be granted a fair and open trial in accordance with international standards and not be subject to the death penalty. It is calling on the authorities to ensure that the guarantees for access to lawyers, for the right to defence and for public trial, which are provided for in China’s revised Criminal Procedure Law which came into force on 1 January 1997, apply in these cases.

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<sup>5</sup> Xinjiang Television, 6 March 1997.

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*Please send telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters in English, Chinese or in your own language, calling on the Chinese authorities*

- , to refrain from using the death penalty against those already tried and in any further trials in connection to the unrest in Xinjiang;
- , to disclose the names of all those detained in connection with the unrest and the charges brought against them;
- , to ensure that none of the detainees are subject to torture or ill-treatment;
- , to ensure that any further detainees brought to trial are granted access to lawyers of their choice and have a fair and public trial in accordance with international standards, including adequate time and facilities to prepare their defence.

*Please send appeals to:*

Chairman of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Regional People's Government

**ABDULAHAT ABDURIXIT** Zhuxi

Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu Renmin Zhengfu

2 Zhongshanlu

Wulumuqishi 830041

Xinjiang Zizhiqu

People's Republic of China

**Telegram: Chairman of the Regional People's Government, Urumqi, Xinjiang**

**Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China**

**Salutation: Dear Chairman**

Head of Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

**BEKMUHAMET MUSA** Zhouzhang

Yili Hasake Zizhizhou Renmin Zhengfu

Yiningshi 835000

Xinjiang Zizhiqu

People's Republic of China

**Telegram: Head of the Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Yining, Xinjiang Autonomous**

**Region, People's Republic of China**

**Salutation: Dear Sir**

Premier of the People's Republic of China

**LI Peng** Zongli

Guowuyuan

9 Xihuangchenggenbeijie

Beijingshi 100032

People's Republic of China

**Telexes: 210070 FMPC CN or 22478 MFERT CN**

**Telegram: Premier Li Peng, Beijing, China**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

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