

World for Uyghurs - #WorldForUyghurs - Op-ed 1.10.2020

For years, the world has witnessed a crime against humanity

For years, the Chinese regime has detained millions of human beings in concentration camps, just because they were born Uyghurs. And for years, the international community has stood idly by. Great crimes need great silences. The time has come to break the deafening silence that surrounds the oppression of the Uyghur people.

Systematic sterilizations, forced abortions, children separated from their parents, naysayers sentenced to death, women forced to (literally) share their bed with emissaries of the Chinese Communist Party, massive rapes: since the end of 2016, the "Xinjiang Autonomous Region" has become the other name for the negation of man's humanity. The reasons for the deportations reveal the nature of the repressive system put in place under the authority of President Xi Jinping, the man who urged his officials to show "absolutely no mercy" with the Uyghurs. You don't drink alcohol? You get sent to camps. You send greetings for Eid? You get sent to camps. You read the Quran? You get sent to camps. You call your family abroad? You get sent to camps. And once in the camps, detainees must participate in a ceremony in which, each morning, they renounce their language, their culture, their religion - Islam. This self-abolition is the heart of the policy of "re-education" carried out by the Chinese government: abandon what you are as a people and maybe then will you survive as an individual.

Uyghurs have fallen into a kind of universal black hole. A legal black hole in China: these criminal practices of the Chinese state escape any constitutional framework. A black hole in Western democracies: the Uyghurs were hardly mentioned for a long time in the exchanges that our leaders have with the leaders of Beijing. A black hole in the Muslim world: the leaders of the so-called Muslim countries show no solidarity or even officially support the Chinese repression, like Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. A black hole in our public debate: very few humanist organizations have actively campaigned against the eradication of this people in our universities or on our TV screens.

At last, consciences awaken, and the public opinion begins to grasp the extent of the crimes committed in Xinjiang. Facing this terror, denunciation is necessary, and we call on all the consciences of the world to cry out their indignation. But denunciation is not enough. Recent history - from the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda to the massacres in Syria - has reminded us of the weakness of words like "Never again!" if they are not followed by strong acts. We therefore call for powerful acts. And fast.

We demand that our respective governments implement targeted sanctions against those responsible for the repression in Xinjiang as soon as possible. It is unthinkable that our countries do not prosecute criminals against humanity. This is the only way to get the leaders in Beijing to understand that we are serious in our condemnation of their crimes.

We demand that the 83 multinational companies - from Nike to Zara, from Uniqlo to Apple - identified as benefiting from Uyghur forced labor cease - immediately - all cooperation with their Chinese suppliers exploiting the forced labor of the deportees. We also call on our elected representatives to pass laws as quickly as possible to make such complicity illegal and impossible.

We demand that international organizations like the UN launch commissions of inquiry into the crimes in Xinjiang and do everything - including threatening China with sanctions - to gain access to the camps. It is urgent to open the Xinjiang closed doors.

Finally, we demand that our States establish a policy of receiving and supporting Uyghurs who are fleeing hell, and of helping their efforts to perpetuate their culture or highlight their suffering. We pledge ourselves to stand by their side and become the voices of millions of voiceless people in Xinjiang.

Acting for the Uyghurs is a way to define ourselves as a world. To define what we are and what we want to be as a world. Will we allow injustice and authoritarianism to prevail or will we find within ourselves the resources necessary to defend human dignity and liberties? The time has come to mobilize massively all over the planet.

The time has come to raise our heads and act for the humanist principles that we claim to uphold. The time has come to fight for the right of a people to survive.

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Emmanuelle Pierre-Marie, mayor of the 12 arrondissement of Paris (F)
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First signatories published in Le Monde (30 September 2020):
https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/09/30/collectif-agir-pour-les-ouigours-c-est-une-maniere-de-nous-definir-en-tant-que-monde_6054224_3232.html

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