

United Nations Human Rights Council, 45th Session (14 September to 6 October 2020)

**Interactive Dialogue with the Working Group on Enforced Disappearances
Speaker: Humanists UK representative, Andrew Copson¹**

This statement is given jointly with British Muslims for Secular Democracy.

We welcome the Working Group's report and its acknowledgement that the mass detention of Uighur people in a number of facilities in China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region amounts to enforced disappearances.²

The United Nations human rights programme, of which this Council is a key part, arose out of the abuses of the Second World War and the Holocaust with a singular commitment: that never again should we see the mass internment of, or attempts to eradicate, a group of people on the basis of their ethnicity or religion.

And yet, there have been reports of Uighurs being blindfolded, forced on to trains,³ imprisoned, shaved, denied the right to practice their religion, and subjected to forced abortions and sterilisations,⁴ among many more examples of abuses. It is estimated that up to one million Uighur people are currently interned in camps across the region.⁵

There can be no claim of national security or sovereignty to justify such treatment, and it is unacceptable that China has denied the Working Group access to these facilities despite requests being issued every year since 2014.⁶ I ask the Working Group what further steps can be taken to inspect and report on the internments in Xinjiang in the face of China's continued refusal to engage with this Council, and does the Working Group take a view on whether such treatment meets the legal definition of genocide?

Thank you.

¹ Humanists UK is the operating name of the British Humanist Association.

² Human Rights Council, Forty-fifth session: *Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/45/13>

³ BBC News, 'China's ambassador challenged on treatment of Uighurs', 19 July 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-asia-53463242>

⁴ BBC News, 'China forcing birth control on Uighurs to suppress population, report says', 29 June 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-53220713>

⁵ Amnesty International, 'Up to one million detained in china's mass "re-education" drive', <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/09/china-up-to-one-million-detained/>

⁶ Human Rights Council, Forty-fifth session: *Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances*. <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/45/13>