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Funded by:

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The Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights (UCDHR)

Creating a Safe Space for Uyghur Women Human Rights Defenders

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Abstract

The special project we present in this report is based on the experience, that it is difficult to conduct actual independent research in countries where free and objective research is not permitted by governments or other powerful political groups, especially if performed by independent researchers or research teams from other countries, and if issues such as human rights are discussed. This means that alternative strategies then in-country research must be followed, such as analysis of satellite images, or, as in this project, testimonies taken from alleged survivors of persecution in exile.

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Special thanks for editing to Jacquie Klesing, Board-certified Editor in the Life Sciences (ELS).

Cover art and all illustrations by YetteSu.

Illustrations on pages 7,21,24 and 31 courtesy of Radio Free Asia (RFA) Uyghur Service.

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Introduction, Background, and General Considerations

In countries where governments or other powerful political groups do not permit free and objective research, independent research is difficult to perform, especially if it involves independent researchers or research teams from other countries and is investigating issues such as human rights. This situation means that projects must use alternative strategies to in-country research, such as analysis of satellite images, or, as in the current project, testimonies from alleged survivors of persecution living in exile.

This research project was funded by the Uyghur Center for Democracy and Human Rights (UCDHR). It focused in particular on women as both a vulnerable group and members of ethnic minorities and on their experience of multiple traumatic situations and distress, not only in their home country, but also in exile. The project considered multiple aspects, such as social, psychological, and medical factors.

The part of the project that collected testimonies was performed in collaboration with the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) Scientific Section on Psychological Aspects of Persecution and Torture and Prof. Thomas Schulze, Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany.

Concern has been increasing about women in their important roles as human rights defenders (1, 2), as reflected in the creation of an international day of women human rights defenders[1] and special institutions and programs arranged by the UN and other organizations.

Several international scientists, such as David Tobin and Adrian Zenz, have documented severe human rights violations against the Uyghur ethnic minority in the People‘s Republic of China (PRC), which does not officially discriminate against minorities. Subsequent to these researchers’ reports, the World Uyghur Congress made several submissions to the UN that analyzed information from various sources, including PRC law and published strategies, for example on forced marriages and birth control[2]. Consequently, a tribunal was held in London to

1 See https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2022/11/international-day-women-human-rights-defenders-statement-united-nations-high

2 See Submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for Consideration on the Report on China Concerning the Rights of the Uyghur and other Turkic and Muslim Peoples, https://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/WUC_FinalSubmission_14Jan.docx.pdf, accessed 31.1.2024

evaluate the allegations and collect testimonies. The tribunal concluded that, as alleged, the PRC was committing a wide range of violations; these conclusions were also confirmed by the publication of internal PCR documents, such as the Xinjiang police files.

In this context, women were also seen as being especially vulnerable targets of various types of abuse, such as persecution; imprisonment without a fair trial; adverse prison conditions, including concentration camp-like detention facilities; sexual abuse; forced exile; separation from family members; and acts of transnational repression, in which persecution occurs also in "safe" countries, such as Germany or the US.

Therefore, in our project we collected testimonies of a pilot group of 10 exiled women living in different European countries. We used qualitative methods to identify the women's experiences of persecution and human rights abuses and to investigate the psychological impact of these acts, which, if confirmed, would violate international and probably also PRC laws and human rights standards.

The interviews were conducted with the participants in their countries of exile (France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Turkey). After the women had given informed consent, they were interviewed in their native language (Uyghur) by a trained and experienced Uyghur interviewer. The interviews were then translated and analyzed by our research team.

Note: Throughout this article, we use the short form "IP" instead of "interview partner." Comments from the researchers who analyzed the interview texts are written in italics to clearly separate them from the verbatim quotes.

The interviews were conducted between May and August 2023. To avoid biasing the interviewee, the interviewer used an interview guideline and posed a series of open questions. Multilingual core team members checked the translations of the interview texts to confirm and ensure sufficient quality. All 10 participants had to have access to local psychotherapists or institutions in case they needed crisis intervention or treatment. To protect the participants and their family members, interviews were conducted in a confidential and anonymized setting, and the associated risks were discussed with all IPs before the interview.

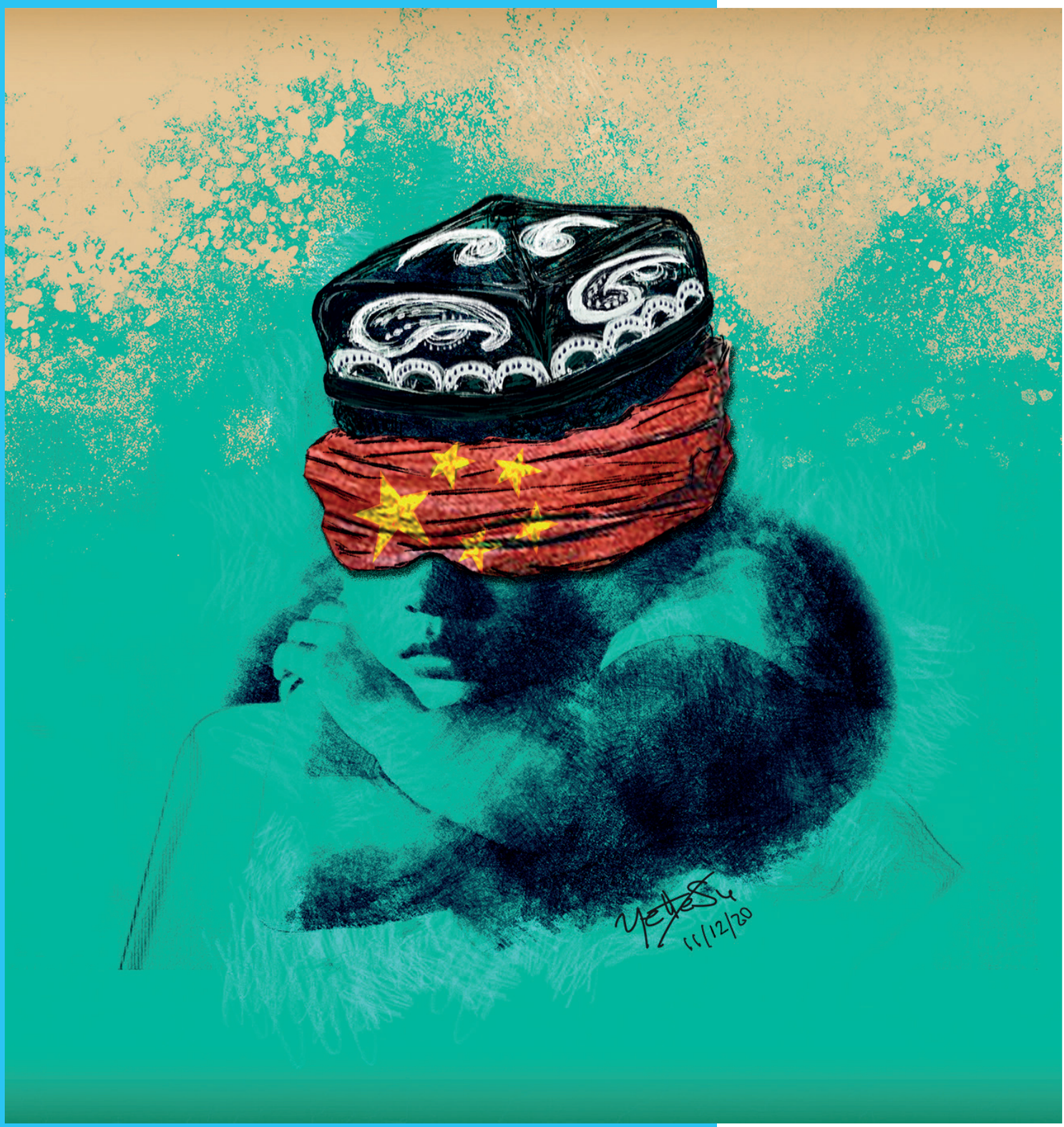
Throughout this article, we use the short form "IP" instead of "interview partner." *Comments from the researchers who analyzed the interview texts are written in italics to clearly separate them from the verbatim quotes.*

Below, we summarize the most important topics our participants related concerning traumatic memories and persecution. To give a clear overview, topics are grouped into analytical categories. A full report and the original interviews are stored in a confidential file.

Transgenerational and historical memories

Some IPs referred to multiple levels of (sequential) traumatic events through the generations, which, as far as remembered by the participants, may have had a potential transgenerational impact.

Terrifying memories of oppression could be transmitted through parents or grandparents during childhood, as one IP described: “Since my earliest childhood, the testimonies and stories of my grandparents have informed me about the horrible atrocities China has committed against us, and I grew up with this. In my father’s childhood, China committed a devastating massacre. When they committed these atrocities, they buried people alive under the earth. At that time, we children simply listened, as if it were a story. But today, because I am living abroad, I have gained a deeper understanding of the whole issue. The IP further reported on the fate of a poet, a close family friend, who “was buried alive” and on her grandmother describing how “people were stringed up on trees.” And she reported: “At that time, I could not completely grasp the extent of the oppression. But over time, I realized how merciless that oppression was. I realized that this did not start in recent times, but went on over generations, even at the time of our great-grandparents.” “Our parents are heartbroken because since the cultural revolution, our parents (spoke) like ‘do not do it, do not say it, just live along,’ because our parents couldn’t handle it if something would happen to us.”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Transgenerational and Historical Memories

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Discrimination and Persecution in the Education System

Ethnic or religious discrimination, ethnic bullying, and even physical violence in the education system were reported by at least nine of the IPs (41 mentioned instances). These events occurred in different school grades, and in the IPs' opinion, they were related to religious discrimination, were attacks against religious symbols and religious practices, and reflected individual convictions.

"When I was a teenager, I did not notice it much because I was still young. I can say that I started thinking broadly after I entered high school. When I entered the second year of high school, I started to think more and more. I started leaning towards religion, it was not forced by others or my parents, my family didn't force me to do anything, they didn't say that you have to pray, and they respected my choice at home. More and more, I realized that what I had done was the right path to take. After that, not only me, but four to five of my friends talked about it. We went into the 11th grade. We were only wearing a Uyghur scarf, and we didn't plan anything, As I said, we started being influenced in school. The school started threatening us when we were about to take the university exam. At that time, I realized that this was my choice as a young person, that my Uyghur scarf was not a piece of cloth, but that it had a spiritual value, just as I loved the flag and knew its spiritual value. I loved my flag, and I felt very proud. I felt it was a good thing that helped me to save my virtue. Then, the school, the union cell, and the principals intervened, and all the students were studying and studying with all their heart because we were going to take the university exam, and when we were preparing for it, they threatened us: 'If you don't remove your scarf, you won't take the exam.' … They accepted the terms that you should give up your opinion, in other words, it was a dictatorship for us, … We were not involved with anyone (*Note: politically*), we did not do terrorism, they played with our future plans to experience university life. Finally, they let us sign some documents, we obeyed the rules of the school, … We had the same terms that (*we*) either change the way we dress or leave the school. Finally, they said that we had not changed,

so all my friends left school. Some dropped out of school because of these incidents, even when they are very close to graduation."

Students were also exposed to arrest and harsh treatment, and probably to psychological torture, at least according to this IP, who reported: "For a while, I also had friends, and then I was talking to someone, and then after a while, the police surrounded me and took me somewhere. Then, I found out that the Security Bureau wanted to see me. They started asking me questions. I was surprised. I was asked to look at pictures of some people who(*m*) I didn't know. After talking to them for a long time, they put me in prison because I didn't take off my Uyghur scarf and because they judged me as having (*an*) ideology (*directed*) against (*the*) government … Furthermore, "When I saw that it was a women's prison, the women around me were heroin addicts, women who caused serious damage to society. I even got sick for several days. They interrogated me again and again, and when they found out that I had not committed a crime, they allowed me to go. I realized someone was following me, and they took me to the security office with a car, and the university was helping them. My feelings were hurt. I trusted this school, but some of the people in it, some of the people in charge of the dormitory, put someone onto me. Although I was not afraid, it just caused a kind of anger and hatred in me."

As also seen in other interviews, language was used as a tool to attack the use of the Uyghur traditional language, leading to distress: "During this phase, all the subjects, regardless what they were about, were instructed in Chinese. This applied even when our teachers were of Uyghur descent; they too taught their classes in the Chinese language. … After a year of preparation, the classes were mainly switched to Chinese, which upset us and was hard to accept."

A different form of reported discrimination was the selective access to foreign language teaching in schools: "Because, even though we needed to learn Chinese back in China, English was the true international language, and we were not taught English in schools, even though it was the most important language to learn. Yet, it was mandatory for the Han Chinese students to study English from the first grade of elementary school."

Another discrimination that IPs remembered was the selective access to higher education linked to ethnic and religious discrimination or persecution (Note: it might also be considered that for all students, at prestigious schools access is highly limited to a few study places, but the earlier discrimination can be seen as a barrier to achieving the necessary good grades: "The government decides which school we should attend. That means, those Uyghurs who excel academically and achieve higher scores do not have the opportunity to attend the schools they desire. The Chinese government perceives Uyghurs studying in prestigious schools as a potential threat to their authority. As a result, we are not allowed to enroll in these institutions. Consequently, I ended up pursuing my education in an oil industry institute that I was unfamiliar with, but I had no choice other than to comply with the circumstances."

Another participant reported on the link between

religious practices and educational discrimination: "Since primary school, observing fasting had not been allowed. I only have primary education. My mom took me out of school because school did not allow me to pray or fast. I didn't continue my education after primary school because of the Chinese oppression. I did not attend middle school or high school. I wanted to study and become a doctor. The Chinese restricted us, especially women, from observing fasting and praying. They would also restrict us from any activities that they considered religious, such as putting on headscarves. They would not allow us to study in school with headscarves on. Therefore, my mother advised me not to study further. I also thought it was reasonable and did not pursue higher education."

Students in Xinjiang protested, which was reportedly met with harsh restrictions:

"Urban students from Ürümchi, Qaramay, Altay, and Sanji were more proficient in Chinese than rural students. They faced fewer language barriers, while we (*students*) from rural areas grappled with Chinese. In addition, in December 1985, during the 9th or 12th month, a large-scale student protest occurred. It was a peaceful demonstration in Ürümqi. We participated in the protest to express our grievances to the government. At that time, tensions rose, and the situation escalated to the point where seven types of grievances were raised. During that period, the Chinese government implemented a repressive policy against Uyghurs, but we opposed this policy and demanded its withdrawal."

School practices were changing, reducing access to the children's native language (Uyghur): "... when she had started her first year in elementary school, they had already incorporated Chinese language classes into the curriculum. When she got to 5th school grade, they set into motion a 'Goal-Oriented Education' program. In this program, although they did not conduct the class in Chinese, the teacher would write the title 'Today's Goal' on the blackboard in Uyghur and then list all the different goals in Chinese. This 'Goal-Oriented Education' program continued all the way into middle school. When we started middle school, the Dual Language Policy came into effect. The students who excelled after the policy came into effect were selected one by one and then regrouped into classes called 'Experimental Classes,' which each middle school had; 60% to 70% of these kids' classes were conducted in Chinese, and the rest in Uyghur. So, when the kids who attended the [*Experimental*] Classes graduated, they would get to study in high schools in the Chinese inner cities."

At the University level, traveling to the universities became necessary and was at times accompanied by harassment: "On a different occasion, a young girl who studied with us at the International Islamic University of Malaysia, who was from Qumul, similar to the young man from before, was also stopped for questioning when she was returning home. Her entire luggage was emptied on the floor, then every item was carefully inspected. When all was done, she was just left

there to pack up the mess they had created for her. All this resulted in her being late and missing her flight. She had pleaded with them to release her because she would miss her flight, to which they responded that they had to wait for an office from Xinjiang to give her a clearance. … After this mental and emotional abuse, she told me how she then felt heavily discriminated against."

One participant also observed that those students studying in other countries experienced a difference from PRC: "30% of the Malaysian population is Chinese, but everyone lives with freedom of religion. For example, whenever it was Eid, there would be a national holiday. Whenever there was a Hindu festival, there would also be a national holiday. Same for Chinese New Year. No one interferes with each other's religious or cultural practices. But when we were studying in Malaysia, those Uyghurs wearing scarfs in Malaysia would be worried about getting into trouble when they were planning to go back to our homeland. So, they would take them off when they went back and put them back on when they were back in Malaysia. And we had to be concerned about things like this."

According to the memories of IP4, ethnic minority university students did not always experience discrimination, but at home: "The girls would pray with their scarfs on. We did not have any direct restrictions back then. As for now, I'm not sure if there are any rules or restrictions, because that was the early 2000s." This was in contrast to the situation in Xinjiang schools: "So, back then, when we could go to mosques and do prayers in LanZhou, in our homeland, those who were aged 18 to 40 were prohibited from practicing religion. And they would have to check your ID card before you entered the mosque. I even remember that one of our relatives' children, who was a 15- or 16-year-old studying in high school, would regularly go to the Friday prayer. His parents were warned by his teacher saying that he might be strictly monitored by the authorities, and even if he gets a single dot on his record, it will directly affect his pursuit of higher education!" One participant reported about even more severe consequences: "During this time, there were incidents of students who had participated in the protests being expelled from school. Some were not given their diplomas when they completed their schooling. All these incidents are imprinted on my memory."

> "The government decides which school we should attend."

Religion- or Ethnicity-Related Discrimination in the Workplace and in General Situations in Everyday Life

Reported discrimination extended to workplace and general situations in everyday life. In most interviews, it was mostly experienced, but it was also observed or reported from hearsay.

One IP remembered: "R. was an elderly lady. She told them that she wanted to retire, but the Chinese director refused to approve her application. She said that even if they worked there until they died, they would not get promoted and their salary would never increase. I do not know what happened to them later, alive or dead, fired or still working. I don't know."

Another said: "Since the time I grew up, got married, and had children, we have been labelled as an extremist family. Just because we are wearing headscarves and long dresses, it made us become an extremist family, and we would be thoroughly examined regularly. When we had our relatives came from the countryside for a visit, we were always asked, 'Who are they?' and then they would order, 'Don't come again,' and we had no choice but to say 'Okay.'" And during religious festivals: "I went outside with my headscarf on to sharpen the knife. The knife wasn't sharpened enough to sacrifice the lamb for Eid. I was interrogated by the police on the street. They said: 'Get in the car.' I asked: 'What for?' They replied: 'Because you covered your face.' Then, the police officer proceeded to look through my bag and exclaimed: 'You have a knife in your bag! What are you doing with the knife?' I explained: 'It is just a few days left for Qurban Eid. We are going to sacrifice a sheep, which is why I have a knife with me, to sharpen it.' Despite my explanation, I was taken to the police station. At the police station, they forced me to remove my headscarf. Four to five Chinese police officers were laughing at me and mocking my appearance

without the hijab. I cried and desperately tried to cover my face and my hair … It was an incredibly distressing and traumatic experience."

And as to places of worship: "Women are not allowed to enter the mosque, and there is no designated place to pray (*Note: under normal circumstances, traditional mosques have a designated space for women*). Men and those under the age of eighteen are prohibited from entering the mosque. There is no way that women are allowed in the mosque, and women don't have a place to pray." *And,* "In our homeland, we are not allowed to wear a hijab. We do not have any religious freedom; we don't have the freedom to fast and pray."

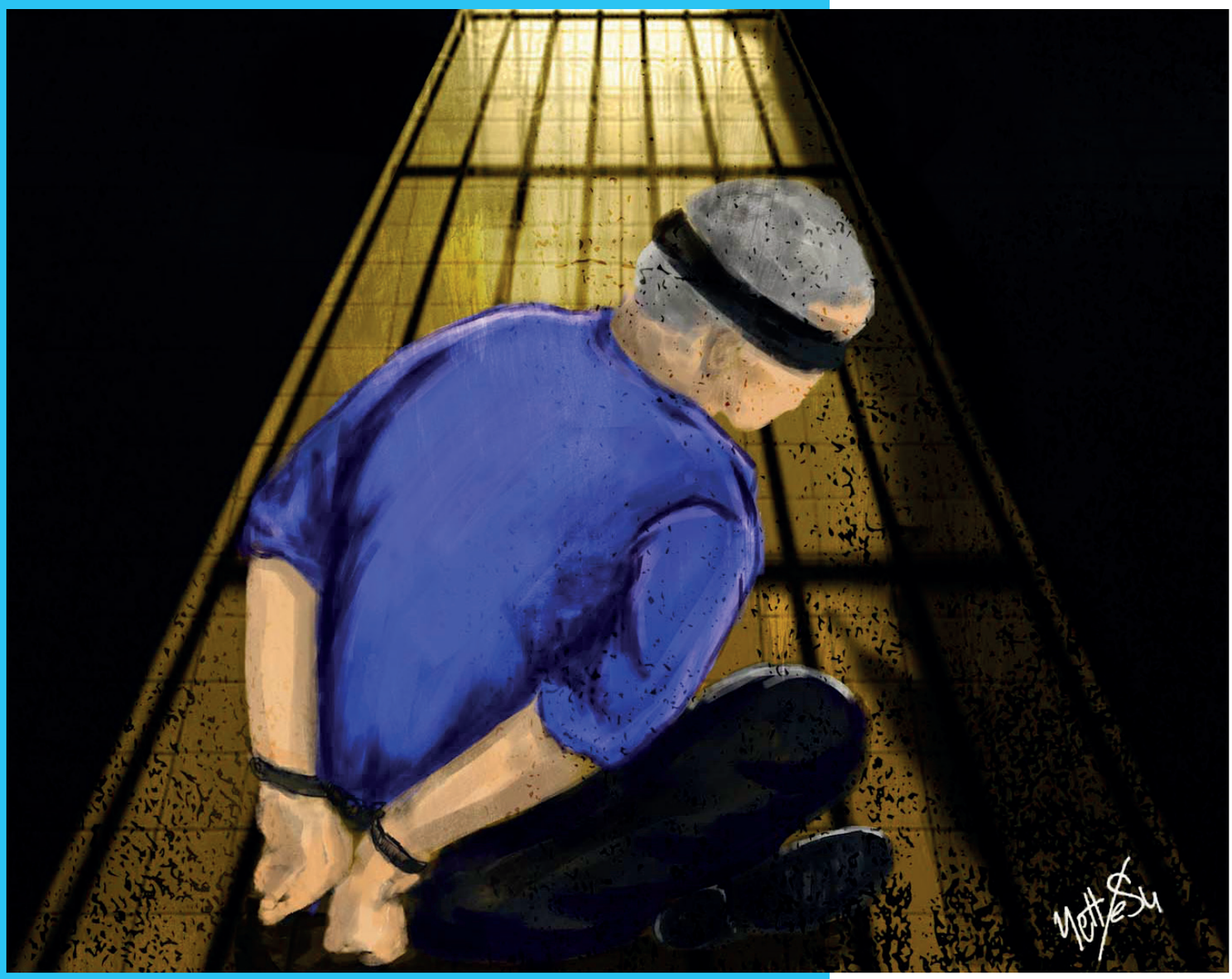
Another IP recounted: "In 2012, when I went to Guizhou (*Note: a province in the southwest region of China*), … guys told me that they could not rent a house or book a hotel room because they were Uyghurs, but they managed to rent an apartment somewhere. When I contacted them in 2015, they told me that I shouldn't go to Guizhou because it was impossible for Uyghurs to rent an apartment or book hotel rooms, and the local government started deporting Uyghurs to Xinjiang. So, I did not go to China in 2015. … When Uyghur businesspeople or shoppers entered Chinese shops, Chinese shop owners refused to sell them anything. I heard this situation started in 2015." *And,* "Uyghur could barely rent an apartment or book a hotel room, but those two men managed to. In 2015, they told me not to come to Chinese provinces because it was too difficult to rent an apartment and book (*a*) hotel room and Chinese police were searching house to house for Uyghurs."

Torture and Prison Conditions Forced Confessions Under Torture

Besides the above possible instances of psychological torture reported against students, some of the IPs were personally exposed to physical torture. If we focus on situations with acts of physical torture that fulfill the UN Convention Against Torture (CAT) definition, we can assume that in some cases, the torture was intended to force false confessions:

One IP reported: "They pushed me into a cell and made me sit on the iron chair called the tiger chair. ... And then they beat me, they asked me to answer yes to their all questions … They beat me again. … One of them had a notebook, he beat me on (*the*) head with the notebook. Another one threatened me with an electronic stick and said I should not talk back … I experienced lots of torture. … Chinese police fixed shackles to my feet; they were five kilos. When I walked with them, they hit my feet each time, my feet were injured at that time. … A chain was fixed to my foot and hand, so I could not walk normally, I had to bend over to walk. … I counted the days in the camp, until the 89th day they did not interrogate me, but on the 90th day, they interrogated me…" *And further,* "I was sitting on the tiger chair. My feet were squeezed by the shackles. My hands were placed in the metal ring, and each time when I refused to sign, the metal ring got tighter. Look here on my hand. I told them my hands were hurting. They said it would not cause me pain if I did not move my hand. When they were beating me, I was trying to defend myself by lifting my hands, and the metal ring hurt my hands. The pain became stronger; I fell down on the floor next to the tiger chair."

Another IP: "If they were simply to shoot me, I would consider that mercy; my fear, however, lies in the prospect of enduring torture followed by a slow, agonizing death." *And,* "… handcuffed me from behind, put a black hood over my head, and then tied my feet and hands with iron chains to an iron chair. Two police officers interrogated me. During the interrogation, (*they were*) holding a photo of my husband and my daughter with a blue flag, they called me a terrorist and the mother of a terrorist. They asserted that in the future, I should



inform the police about my husband's condition and my daughter's activities. They claimed that my failure to report to them was supporting them and providing them shelter."

And a third IP reported further about observing torture of other women: "When she was in the cell in (*the*) detention center, she was lying on the floor. The guard poured cold water on her body. She was beaten and then dragged into her cell; she was nearly dead. At that time, she was so powerless that she could hardly drink water. She

recovered gradually. Interrogation and beating had been going on for three months." *And,* "The thing that affected me most was when the guards took a girl from Ghulja (Note: famous for protests against discrimination [*"Ghulja incident"*], *located in the Xinjiang region*) out of the cell and brought her back after 72 hours. Her body was blue because of the beatings. We did not dare to ask what happened."

In some cases, prison conditions were described as so bad that they would count as either inhuman or degrading treatment, at the least, and would without question be a violation of the Minimum Standard Prison/Bangkok rules for women. An IP reported the following about another detainee: "She was allowed to come out of there after one week. She did not talk to us for two days. Then, she told us about the dark cell. It was one square meter with a tiny hole where she could see a little light coming through from outside when it was daytime. At night, she could not sleep, there were rats inside the cell, and they ran on her body. When she got the Chinese bread and water, she drank only the water and gave the bread to the rats to avoid them biting her body because of hunger. She said there was a small hole in the ground as a WC."

In our opinion, the Bangkok rules would also be violated by these reported experiences: "Yes, it was a jail. Day and night, my child was sick, she was only a seven- to eight-month-old baby." *Interviewer:* "Were you breastfeeding the baby that was with you in the jail?" *IP:* "Yes, my breastfeeding baby was with me in the jail. My child suffered from diarrhea for a month because the baby's body could not cope with the poor diet in there. They only fed us with Chinese buns, vegetables, and soup with only four pieces of noodles in it. After three months, they allowed me to go home, but I had to come back to the daytime camp. This is (*in*) the camp, too. I would go in the early morning, leaving my breastfeeding baby at home."

IP2: "The rooms were full of women with legs chained, 30 to 40 of us would sleep crammed in a bed meant for nine. I came when there were 50 to 60 women crowded together. Our food was a bun and rice water or cabbage soup, which we queued for every day, in the bitter cold of -20 degrees, a cold area, they would make us stand outside for hours. The indoor temperature of the camp was adjusted to the outdoor temperature with an air conditioner, making us shiver. When we returned inside, we did not feel well for several hours because of the shivering due to the cold. Our bodies would become numb from being chained, wearing thin slippers, and being immobilized. We would not be able to stand up, move around, or even talk." *And,* "They chained us to the bed. The hardest thing for me was going to the bathroom in front of everyone. I will never forget those times. The lack of sleep, the cold outside, the numbness in our bodies, and the time when they chained us to the bed were very hard for me. I will never forget."

Survivors of camps reported that sexual violence (sexual torture) was common, and they reported events that also might reflect the impact of adverse propaganda to reduce empathy as a precondition

to lower perpetrators' barriers to committing torture: "On the next day, I was again called for the interrogation. They put a black hood on my head. I was pulled along the corridor outside, and I felt that it was my turn. There were cells numbered 406 and 407. They brought me into 406. There was a bed next to the wall and a tiger chair in the middle of the cell. The camp guard did not pull me to the bed, but he sexually assaulted me. He was a 27-year-old man, and I know his name. All the camp detainees got bald heads in the first months they came in. We did not have a change of clothes, so my body was feeling uncomfortable. The 27-year-old guard asked me why I would not sign on the paper so I could be released from the camp. He was beating me. I was still refusing to sign. I shouted to him that I would never sign and that he could kill me. He said he had heard women talking to each other about death in place of being hurt, and I followed their idea of death. He asked me if I was the sister of Rabiye Kadeer, I said no, I did not know her. He shouted I should not lie, and I am like Rabiye Kadeer. He came close to me and began to take off his trousers. I asked him if he had a mother and sisters. He became angry and beat me. He said I was an animal, and he couldn't compare me with his mother and sister, (*he*) kept beating me. Finally, he sexually assaulted me. In the evening, he put me back in my cell. I was in the hospital for a total of around 40 days each time after I was sexually assaulted by him."

And she confirmed: "As I said, I was sexually assaulted, physically tortured during the interrogation, and I stayed in hospital. I remember everything precisely."

The first example again documents forced confessions under torture and further raises the question of whether doctors comply with their ethical and UN CAT/Istanbul Protocol obligations to report, stop, and document all acts of suspected torture and whether there were any investigations into the issue by Chinese authorities, as requested by the UN Istanbul protocol.

IP8 reported: "The Chinese authorities forcefully smashed and opened our door with steel and pincers. My father was taken away with his hands tied behind his back and in handcuffs. I was taken to the hotel room with my five children, we were kept in there for a week. Afterwards, we were taken to the airport with our heads covered in black bags and flown from Guangzhou to Urumqi. In Urumqi, we were kept in jail and later taken to Qeshqer with our heads covered in black bags."

Comment: Acts of violence during arrests that have a psychological impact on secondary victims, and also hooding, might constitute UN CAT violations.

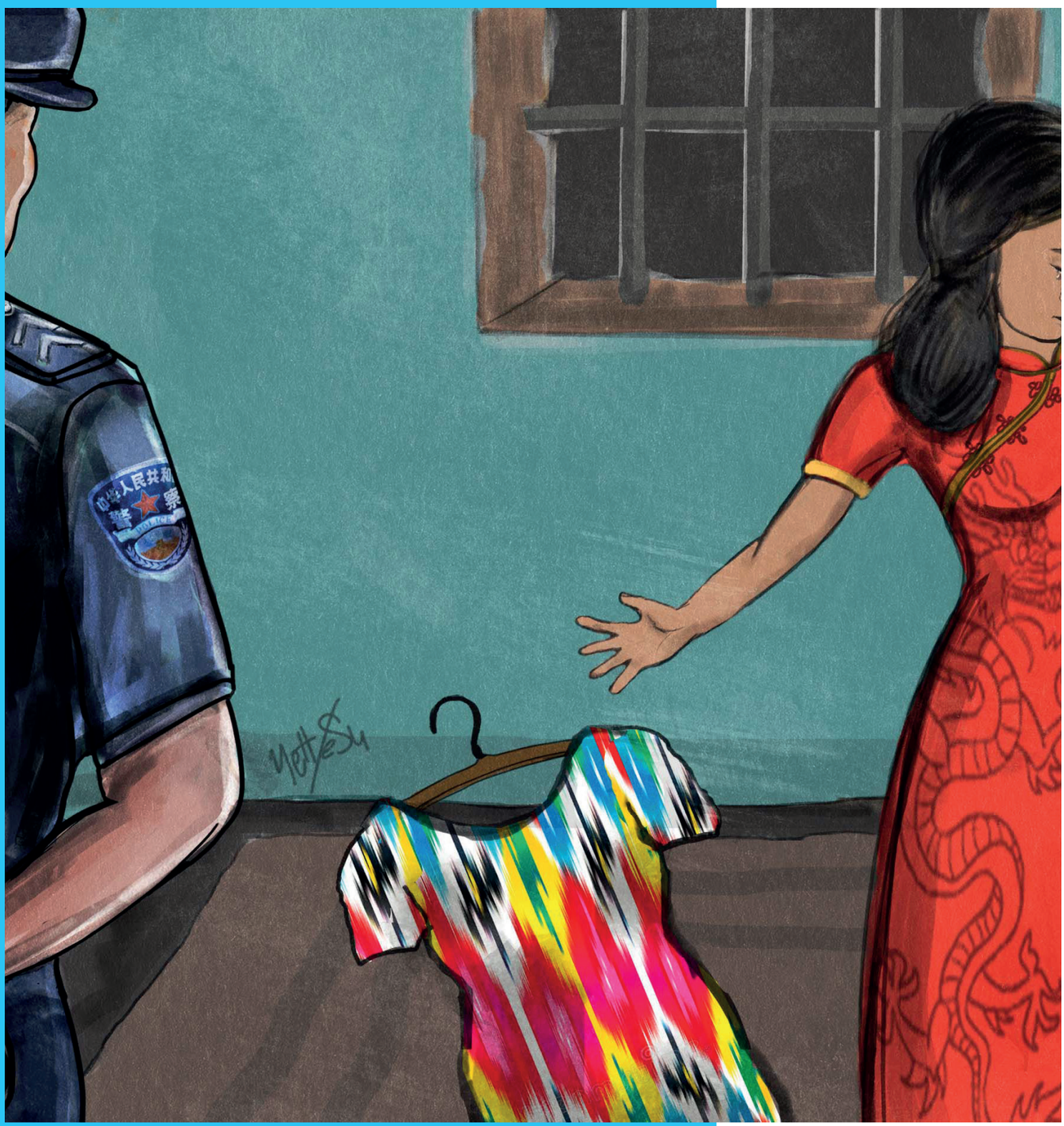
Flight, exile, and family separation, with all their consequences, can be seen as direct or indirect results of torture and create desperate situations: "We were fed up with the torture and had no choice but to leave my 11-month-old baby behind. I fled the country with my five other children and came to Turkey. My 11-month-old -baby is still there. My husband is still there. Now, he is in jail. My dad is also in jail, as well as my brother."

The Feeling of Unfairness and Suffering Created in Uyghurs Through a Negative Presentation of the Group in Government Propaganda

Being maligned and misrepresented in public and public media can cause severe suffering and was reported by several IPs: "At that time, the boy's name was Koresh, and they showed him on the TV again and again and said that he was against the government, but we heard differently that the boy was a Muslim, he was reading or studying something, and he was arrested for religious activities, and he cut his tongue during the interrogation."

This treatment started in childhood (as reported by two IPs):

"Because of our values, if you are a Uyghur, I realized that the simplest reason is that a person who is wearing a Uyghur scarf and does not get involved in anything will (*be*) titled a terrorist, described as being among the ranks of the separatists. We know that whether you are a teacher or a religious person or an intellectual or a rich person, you will do something for the community, which will tie you to the suspicion of being a terrorist, subversive, separatist, or traitor. At that time, I thought that when we were taught history at school, most of our stories were twisted, and we accepted what was taught in literature classes in elementary school, such as Lotpulla Mutallib, Karpalwan, etc., that some stories were less authentic, especially after I went out of China. I felt it was explained in a twisted way." *And later:* "Then, the mayor of the city, a man named Polat—I forgot his last name—came and said on the news that the city was in lockdown, prohibiting anyone from leaving, and that the people participating in the protest were separatists. . . . I helped a kid with translation in a police station. Although he knew Chinese, it was mandatory to have a translator. In the meantime, they portrayed us to Han Chinese



as 'Kebab maker' or 'Dancer,' as 'Thieves' and as 'Dangerous.'"

Another IP also tried to describe the impact of this propaganda on the Han majority: "The local Han Chinese who also saw this happen ended up developing deep in their psyche the stereotype and bias that Uyghurs were dangerous thieves. I started attending university in 2001. Already then, there were these children there, and even long before that, they would bring young (*Uyghur*) kids to commit these illegal activities. Through this process, they had already tainted our reputation as having a villainous character. So now, in the current day, the apathetic attitude of the Han Chinese towards the ethnic genocide committed against us could be traced back to that."

And, "I've come to learn of the perspectives and biases that the Chinese have against us. They (*the perspective and biases*) are that Uyghurs are dancers who dance without caring at all whether people are dying around them or not, that Uyghur girls are truly beautiful and are good singers and dancers on top of that. Around that time, Uyghurs had not yet settled and became locals in the Chinese inner cities. However, on the Chinese talent shows that you see on TV, you often see the shows that have Uyghur girls come on who sing and dance. Naturally, I would often have conflicts with my Chinese roommate because she would often say, 'All you guys do is dance, with no other qualities.' I would often tell them (*the Chinese*) that dancing and singing aren't the only things we have in our culture, and inform them that we have a rich culture tied together by a long history. I would educate them on things such as our way of life, customs, and traditions. I would go as far as saying that the perspective on Uyghurs, that the Chinese girls I shared a dorm with had, changed after they had lived with me. They would often hit a nerve with the questions they would ask, as if we were uneducated mountain people. 'Do you still go to school riding a donkey?' 'Do you have cars where you are from?' 'How are the schools, are all the walls in the classrooms standing?' These questions were very common. They can ask such things outright because they lack respect. But we who listen to that know that it isn't true, we live good and comfortable lives, we were chosen to study in the Chinese inner cities because we were good at school. When they say these things, it takes away our dignity, so it wasn't uncommon for us to get upset with each other or have arguments. However, after all the four years of sharing the same living space, we managed to reintroduce the Uyghurs to them."

Thus, the IPs might have experienced a change in the discriminating stereotypes promoted at a given time. The stereotype changed from folkloric, one-sided images, to that of thieves, and then to that of violent criminals and terrorists, which not only created the willingness of perpetrators in the Han community to commit violence and persecution but also led to suffering in those who were misrepresented.

A special problem was the reported ***displacement of children*** *as a sequel to the discrimination that contributed to negative stereotypes, an issue that*

might require further exploration and analysis:

"The Chinese government does not want their own Chinese (*Note: Han*) people to learn and know about how generous, genuine, and sophisticated we Uyghurs are. So, they let these kids be kidnapped and put into a life of crime, stealing, and pickpocketing, … since long before, they (*have*) been fanning the flames of these negative and engineered rumors of Uyghurs being thieves, criminals, and pickpockets."

And:

"The Chinese consider those who grow beards, observe fasting, and wear hijabs as terrorists. They label those who engage in such practices as extremists and incite hatred against them. They discourage people from associating with them, calling them dangerous individuals. They gather people together, hold meetings, and spread propaganda against them. Even on TV, they promote such propaganda, saying, 'do not associate yourself or come into close contact with these terrorists. Those who pray, observe fasting, wear hijabs, and grow beards are religious extremists and should not be trusted.'"

> "These questions were very common. They can ask such things outright due to lacking respect. While we who listen to that know that it isn't true, we live good and comfortable lives, it is because of us being good at school that we were chosen to study in the Chinese inner cities."

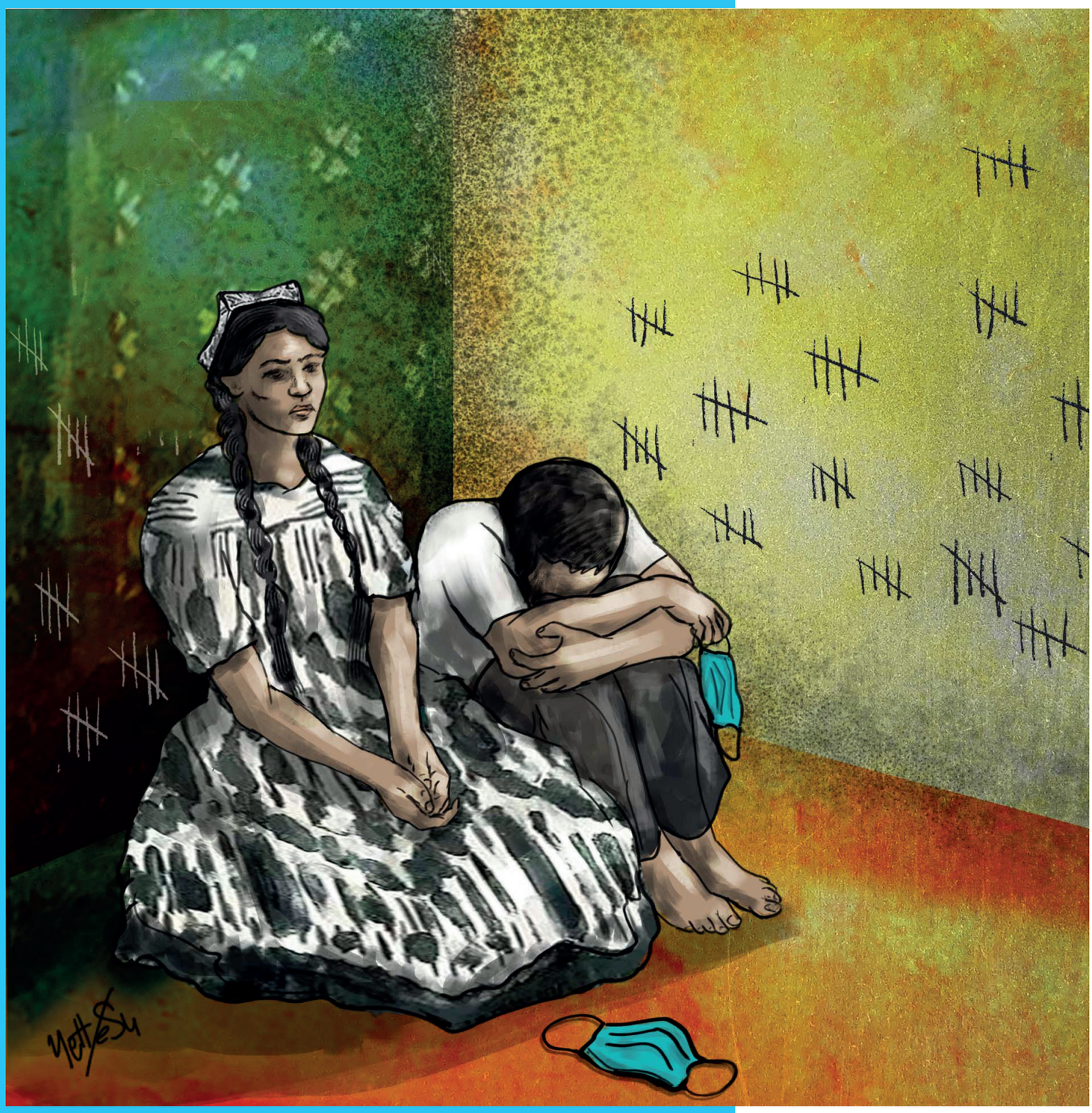
The Situation in Exile Related to Persecution During the Covid Lockdown Period and Bad News from Home Without the Option of Being Able to Provide Help

IP2: "I was not able to think clearly for 10 to 15 days. This kind of physical weakness impacts us severely, and economically it is even worse. Those working in government positions got their full salaries, but those who were self-employed suffered a complete financial collapse. The French government provided some economic assistance, allowing us to meet our basic needs and maintain a normal life. Now, whenever we go out, we are careful to keep our distance because of our fear of contracting the virus. This confinement at home during the pandemic did not hit us as hard as the news from our homeland. Hearing about our people confined at home, unable to go to the hospital, and pregnant women dying because they could not access medical care—these reports impacted us deeply. The fact that there was no financial aid for our people in our homeland and that people were dying from hunger was heart-wrenching. These news reports affected us deeply."

Exile can be seen as a consequence and part of the persecution and itself has a severe psychological impact. For example, one IP reported: "I live with my children, and my husband has not been with us for two years. He is living in another country, he is forced to travel for our family and safety and to use his skills" and "I lost my closest friends back home."

The situation in exile, especially in poorer economic countries such as Turkey, causes many problems, for example:

"Those Uyghur women who live in the diaspora are not only physically but also mentally



exhausted. If we ask anyone, the mental stress is very severe, and all of this, not being able to return to the homeland, and the connection with the homeland being cut off, and us hearing about the testimonies of the camp survivors, all these reasons contribute to the heavy mental burden. Some people are financially able to afford professional mental health support, but some are not. I think it's important to assist those who can't (*afford it*)."

Exile can be better than home, but separation from home and family causes suffering:

"So, we fell in love with Malaysia. We never intended to leave Malaysia in such a hurry. But in 2009, the July 5th incident took place in our homeland, and unarmed people were ruthlessly suppressed by the Chinese government. We saw some videos of the incident online, and we completely lost contact with our families back home."

Despite some difficult situations in the host countries, the greatest concern reported by most of the IPs was separation from family members and family members' insecure fate or detention, which could be interpreted also as a part of transnational persecution.

One IP reported: "I fled the country with my five other children and came to Turkey. My 11-month-old baby is still there. My husband is still there. Now he is in jail. My dad is also in jail, as well as my brother. I have no idea of the whereabouts of my 11-month-old -baby." *The forced separation has a severe negative psychological impact on all family members and the IP women:* "Yes, I feel lonely without my husband by my side. The children also feel very sad when something reminds them that their dad is not around. Sometimes, they came home and cried: 'Mom, other children's fathers came to pick them up. I don't have a dad to pick me up.' I try to comfort them and say: 'Allah will reunite us one day. Don't be sad my child. Allah will bring him back soon. Even though Dad is not here, at least I'm here.' These moments are the most heartbreaking for me, I can't help but cry. My heart sinks, and I feel sorry for the children. Because of the Chinese government, my five children became fatherless. That one child we left behind in our homeland became motherless. Because of Chinese oppression, our family has been torn apart." *And,* "Yes, the thought of her growing up without her mother saddens me the most. Where is she? Is she alive? If she is, where is she living? Is she in the camps? Or is she with one of our distant relatives? I do not know. It is the biggest pain in my heart. That is why I always feel pain, not knowing what has happened to her. When I look at my five children, it breaks my heart more, my poor kids are growing up without a father. "

Because, in general, the different strategies of discrimination in the country of origin and in exile are not the primary focus of this project, in the following subchapter we focus on transnational persecution (repression).

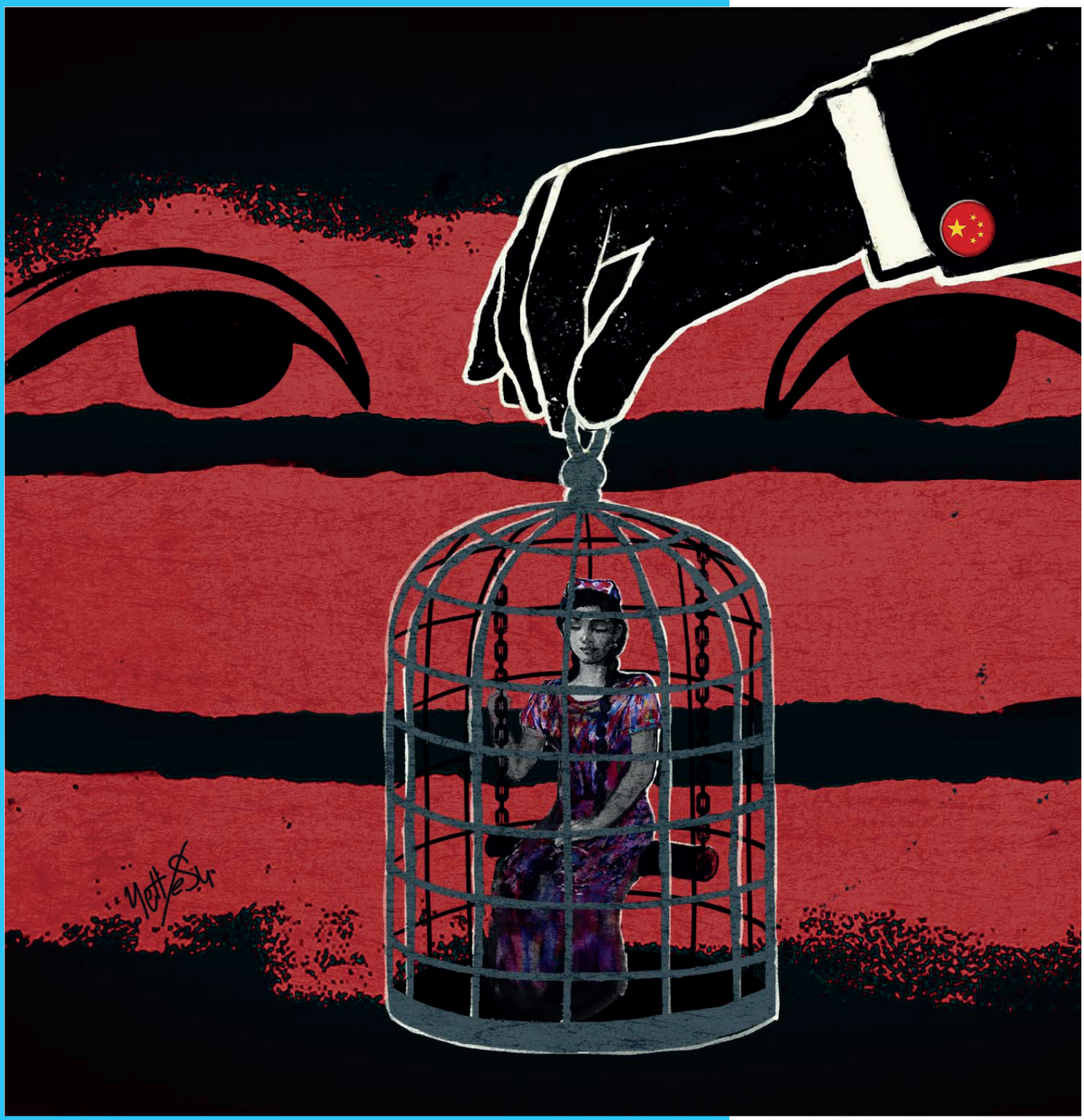
> “ Those Uyghur women who live in the diaspora are not only physically exhausted but also mentally. ”

Transnational Persecution

Different types of transnational persecution were reported. Transnational persecution creates an atmosphere of insecurity and a lack of trust.

One IP reported: "If I call or video chat, if they accept it, it will bring trouble to my relatives in my homeland." *And,* "My mother's condition. If something were to happen to her, like it did to my mother-in-law, I worry about not being informed. Regrettably, I will not be able to be by her side when she dies. If she were to pass away unexpectedly and I would find out about it after the fact, it would deeply distress me." *And,* "Of course, I communicated with them on WeChat until 2016, 2017. At that time, all my relatives, Uyghur friends, Kazakh friends, and cousins were on WeChat; after that, I disconnected from all of them. I am not in contact with anyone right now. The Chinese authority is still monitoring them just because of our previous communication. I learned this through a third party. The authorities came to them with my photo and asked who took care of this girl and where she is now. One of my uncles was arrested during the (*London*) Uyghur Tribunal. I think I was the reason for his arrest. There is no direct evidence, but that was what my family members said. He died four days after he was arrested; he died during (*the*) interrogation. He was a policeman. He was arrested for suspected connection with terrorists abroad. His daughter who lives abroad knows that my uncle died during the interrogation. When my uncle's daughter visited Norway, she came to our house. The next day, he was arrested. His wife was forced to testify that he honorably died at work, but his daughter abroad knows how he died. At first, her mother was afraid and would not allow her to speak out. Even the relatives in the motherland know nothing about it. His relatives were not allowed to see the body, not allowed to have a funeral for him. We had a memorial service for him in my aunt's house in Germany."

One IP reported: "One of my closest friends currently has severe psychological problems, which became worse recently. She is living alone abroad, while her father has been in prison for the last five years. She wanted to start a Social Media Campaign for her father, but because her mother is still free and not in prison, she did not dare. … She cannot tell anyone about her problems because she is afraid. … Many have abandoned their studies and do not leave home anymore."



Psychological Sequelae and Coping Strategies

Besides the emotional distress and suffering mentioned above as part of the experience of persecution, separation from family, and exile, several IPs gave detailed descriptions of their suffering, psychological needs, and coping strategies. The testimonies include examples of secondary trauma transmission to indirect victims.

"This issue mentally devastates us. Sometimes we cannot control ourselves, and we forget why we became afraid, and when we were in contact with our relatives and friends back home, we felt emotionally alive. Now, with the absence of such connections, there is a sense of emptiness within us, and we are haunted by continuous sadness. In such circumstances, we sometimes lose our composure at home, resorting to directing our unfulfilled vengeance towards China onto our loved ones." *And,* "Those Uyghur women who live in the diaspora are not only physically but also mentally exhausted. If we ask anyone, the mental stress is very severe, and all of this, not being able to return to the homeland, and the connection with the homeland being cut off, and us hearing about the testimonies of the camp survivors, all these reasons contribute to the heavy mental burden. Some people are financially able to afford professional mental health support, but some aren't. I think it's important to assist those who can't (*afford it*)."

IP7: "Well, they are only just alive, sleep, eat, and have no clear aims in life. Many smoke, although it is harmful to your health. Many have lost themselves."

Several IPs reported other aspects of suffering: "If you imagine a person who is tied up, suffering, tormented, and I am watching and I can't help, I feel like that."

IP7 also reported on stress management strategies: "A good trip makes me feel good, I usually do exercise as part of my life. I also feel comfortable writing. I feel good when I do something meaningful for others."

Shortly after being in the camp, one person described severe psychological suffering that was characteristic for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):

"At home, I was feeling like being in the camp again. Images of Chinese police officers were going around in my head. I could not immediately

go to the restroom because I felt like there were police around me. Then, I came back to reality and asked myself why I could not go to the restroom in my own home, I was at home, not in the camp."

They also described symptoms of severely depressed mood:

"I lost my hope, I was thinking that I did not want to live anymore because my life was totally changed. If a plate is broken, you can't return it to its original shape."

Further information about behavior to avoid memories and about shame (again characteristic for PTSD/complex PTSD symptoms), indicating potential severe suffering, was described in testimonies when IPs referred to sexual assault:

"I did not give testimony in Kazakhstan because I would feel shame when looking at the faces of my children and relatives if I would talk about the sexual assault by the camp guard."

And:

"Mostly, I visited the doctor and rested at home. The wounds on my body remained there for a longer time. People introduced me to the doctor. I did not mention to the doctor that I was wounded in the camp. Turkish doctors proposed better medicine. I had different medical checks and treatments. I was diagnosed with heart disease, high blood pressure, and lung tubercules. Here, in Paris, I was registered at the Jewish Medical Centre, and one year later, I got an appointment.

I was there in August. Every Friday, I go to the psychologist. Before, I cried most of the time. I got medicine from them. It worked, but it has side effects. I got stomachache. Generally, I am better than before in all aspects. But if I see Chinese people outside, I become angry."

The same IP statement also underlines the link between the strong feeling of lack of fairness and justice because the indiscriminate use of torture has led to psychological suffering:

"I always think about the past. I cannot take my mind off it. I think that I am not a Chinese national. I committed no crime. I was in the camp for no reason. I was innocent, like all the Uyghurs in the camp. There were people like my children in the camp, an 80-year-old woman, and a 14-year-old little girl with shackles on her feet and hands. These thoughts are painful. During the interviews, I told the journalists that I was in the cell with a 14-year-old girl. They hardly believed it. When the Xinjiang police files were published, they proved that a 13-year-old girl was in the camp. So, what I said was strongly supported later. I was also in the same cell with a 72-year-old woman called S.. That gives me pain. What is the crime of 14-year-old girl? It is really painful. I live with this pain all the time. I had more nightmares. The psychologist gave me a massage. Put me in the cold room and massaged my back, hands, and neck. She asked me if I had a cat at home. I said no. She asked me why my neck and arms were scratched. She asked how I slept at night. I told her that I did not tell her all the problems. I did not want her to think that I had become mad … (*nightmares*) like someone was grabbing my neck to kill me, and I fought with my hands to take his hands off my neck. She asked me whether this happened recently. I told her that it happened on the 2nd and 24th of May. I had a nightmare that I was in the cell, and I was crying in it. The next days, I got high blood pressure. I felt down at home on the 10th of May. The psychologist demanded that I tell her everything."

The IP also reported about the situation in exile and her coping and traumatic memories:

"Here, my life is not easy. I have costs every month. I prepare Uyghur food, such as Nan, Chuchure, and Samsa. I sell them. I earn some money from it, and I can distract myself from thoughts about the camp. But I am still thinking about it. I realized that I can't forget it. … There are a few camp survivors like me. I think they have the same issue as me. I think to try to erase all my memories, but I cannot."

Mistrust, as reported in the same interview, can be a reflection of realistic fear of transnational persecution, but also an indicator of complex psychological sequels:

"Because, you can't fully trust every person you come across, even if they are Uyghur. There are those who still work and cooperate with (*and for*) the Chinese. That is why it is important to proceed with caution in all aspects. This is embedded in all Uyghur minds, even I have people that I trust and people that I don't trust."

The same situation was also reported by another IP: "I couldn't trust them. I am unable to trust them. Based on what we have heard, there are

some people (*who*) would send messages to the Chinese authorities. So, I find it difficult to trust them. There are only a few people with whom we have close relationships. But it is hard to trust others."

And IP2: "It's hard to speak about this issue because I have people I trust and people I suspect. I am no longer 100% trusting of all people like I used to be. … After such incidents, your trust in others can be shaken. You become quite suspicious."

As in other interviews, a woman's psychological symptom-related interactions with her children might indicate a risk of indirect victimization of children and other family members and potential transgenerational transfer of trauma:

"… have all taken a heavy toll on my psyche. I'm a mother, I have three kids whom I must care for with lots of affection. But sometimes, over small stuff … kids being kids, it is in their nature to make all kinds of mistakes … even over small stuff, getting frustrated, yelling, and cursing was not uncommon. In reality, after some time, I know that I behaved wrongly. When I reconcile with my kids, telling them that I overreacted and asking for their forgiveness, I get very sad, which I hide from them. Me not being able to see my mother and her passing weigh heavily on my heart. Any talk about mothers … for example, whenever I am invited to speak as a witness [about what happened] to my sister, I tell myself that I will not cry when speaking, but each time, when I am about to talk about my mother, I am unable to hold myself. I get very upset, and overwhelmed with emotion. …. Me investing more time into these events and the abnormal state of my psyche have been a very heavy load for my life and my family. My kids even tell me 'You yell at us for small things or even for no reason,' and they are right. Whenever possible, I try to correct (*myself*). … I tell myself 'get a hold of yourself, get a hold of yourself …' Even when I see them making mistakes or breaking things, I act as if I didn't see (*or notice*) and try to control myself. But I don't know what complications this can bring to my health in the future. I would rarely get headaches, even before … others have habits (*or routines*) of taking medication for pain or headaches, but I did not have these habits. But now I regularly have headaches, and I am unsure of what health complications may come in the future. Because I am a mother, my motherly duties are to care for my children, to raise them properly and show them affection. In one way or another, I try to diligently keep myself stable to maintain some form of normalcy for my children."

The problem of trauma-related psychological problems such as increased irritability and stress response, which might lead to secondary trauma and trauma transmission in children, was also reported by another IP:

"I experience moments of losing control of my temper and having a nervous breakdown. I sometimes find myself shouting at my children for very little things, even for very small mistakes."

A further psychological problem reported by the IPs was sleep disorder, which was mentioned in the context of a cultural idiom of distress (Note: chronic sleep disorder in itself can severely damage psychological and physical health and significantly

reduce life expectancy):

"In terms of sleep, I don't sleep well. It's been a while since I have had good quality sleep. I would wake up two to three times a night. I would try to go to sleep before midnight, so I could have some sleep before waking up and not being able to go back to sleep. I never used to (*want to*) sleep in the morning; now, even when I'm exhausted both mentally and physically, I couldn't sleep at all in the morning. There will be this anxiety in my chest, we call it "Seprayi orlep" in Uyghur, you know, that prevents me from falling asleep. Like I said, I started to have headaches, I didn't have them before. And when I'm unable to finish or do something, I am so nervous that my hands start to shake and my mind gets scattered. … I don't dream. Well, I do dream, but not every day, because I don't go into a sleep that is deep enough to dream. I do not have those normal long dreams. I dream very little. I don't get to sleep throughout the night like most people, from laying down to waking up, and because I wake up frequently throughout the night, I don't dream much. When I do dream, it's very little, and I often don't remember them (*the dreams*)."

Treatment is seen as a desirable option by those IPs suffering from trauma related to their experiences, including psychosomatic symptoms, and also to avoid the aforementioned secondary trauma in children and trauma transmission; however, IPs may face economic and cultural barriers to receiving treatment:

"If presented with the opportunity, I will not say 'no.' Because for my children's sake, I have to take good care of my health, and I wish to be able to care for them with a healthy psyche" and "There is a need for events and conferences to be held on this topic. Personally, I would attend and support them for my children. Because we truly need psychological support and education."

Another IP reported: "My heart hurts, and I often feel a tingling sensation. It flutters when I walk, and I struggle to breathe. I miss my child, whom I left behind in my homeland, and my heart breaks every time I look at my children here. The thoughts of my husband, my dad, and my brother also weigh heavily on my heart. Because of the constant crying, my heart experiences a lot of pain. I frequently suffer from shortness of breath. There is a tumor on my neck, and I feel really weak. Sometimes, I worry that I might fall if I do not step firmly while walking. Overall, I think that I am in need of serious physical, psychological, and emotional treatment now."

Therefore, IPs use simple strategies for to cope in their everyday lives; however, the strategies do not lead to sufficient improvement or healing:

"I watch movies. I do some reading. With my friends … if I have lost contact with some of my friends in the process of doing these things (the events), I have made new friends. I chat with my friends. I have people that I am close with whom I meet and talk with. I feel a bit relaxed when I get to talk a bit. But most often, the one thing that I can freely do at home is watch movies. I try to improve my mood by watching movies that I like."

And, in the same context:

"Well, I don't know how others deal with their

trauma, but I would talk about it with people around me, we would discuss the events happening in our homeland, we would collectively grieve, and we would tell ourselves 'This too shall pass.' Let's say one of us received bad news about our families, when we call someone to share our grief, even though they will get as sad as we are, they would still try to hold themselves together and condole us by saying, 'Oh, these days shall pass, there will be better days to come, we shall reunite one day,' etc. Personally, when I receive such messages, I cry as much as I need, when my children aren't nearby. I don't cry in front of them because I don't want to affect their psyche. They still find out sometimes, but I try my best to not let them know. I either cry or listen to loud music while doing house chores, to calm myself down. Another one is, I watch movies to calm down and control my mood."

Nevertheless, the psychological suffering is severe, and it can be expressed by cultural idioms of distress (such as "I do not have little on my mind" [see below for explanation]) and by IPs seeing that they need help:

"No matter how normal or strong we try to present ourselves, in reality we have all gone through enormous trauma, and our souls (*are*) wounded. We have been under heavy pressure in terms of the psyche as well. So far, many reports have been written on the topic of the Uyghurs, and witness testimonials have been collected. However, there has not yet been any concrete or comprehensive work pertaining to the Uyghur psyche (*mental health*). I am not alone in saying that I am very happy that you guys are doing this work. All Uyghur women, Uyghur children, and Uyghur men—because the man carries the load of the family. The man must support the family, be a father figure for the children, and be a partner for the wife. So, they are not under a little pressure or stress, but a lot. When implying that we have a lot on our minds in Uyghur we say 'I do not have little on my mind.'" (*Interviewer: double negative implying the positive*).

Another IP states: "No, I never thought about seeking mental health treatment in my homeland. However, after coming here, I started considering it."

And she reported feeling somewhat better after a short online psychological treatment: "It was helpful. Thanks to Allah. I felt a little bit lighter after talking to the psychologist. The constant crying has also decreased. I used to cry every day. Before that, I can say I didn't have days without crying." *Many of her friends might use other strategies:* "Others? Yes, I heard that they would pray, read the Qur'an, and worship. Sometimes, when they feel down or in a bad mood, they prefer to go to a quiet place, where they can find peace and calmness. Others may seek social support by visiting friends and having a chat with them to help themselves. I do not want to visit someone and chat, I prefer to find somewhere quiet. I'm always seeking quietness." However, she concluded: "To improve my current situation, I need to talk to a psychologist, see a doctor for treatment. I believe this will be helpful for my mental and physical health."

Giving Testimony, and Transnational Persecution

Another IP reported the psychological importance of giving testimony and the obligation to do so:

"She told me that if I were released, I should not be silent but should tell the public what was happening in the camp. In 2018, the girls in the camp told me before I was released that I should share their horrible life experience with the public. … I thought about the women's expectation of me that I share their story. … I did not give testimony in Kazakhstan because I would feel shame when looking at the faces of my children and relatives if I would talk about the sexual assault by the camp guard. I thought always about (*giving*) testimony."

And also:

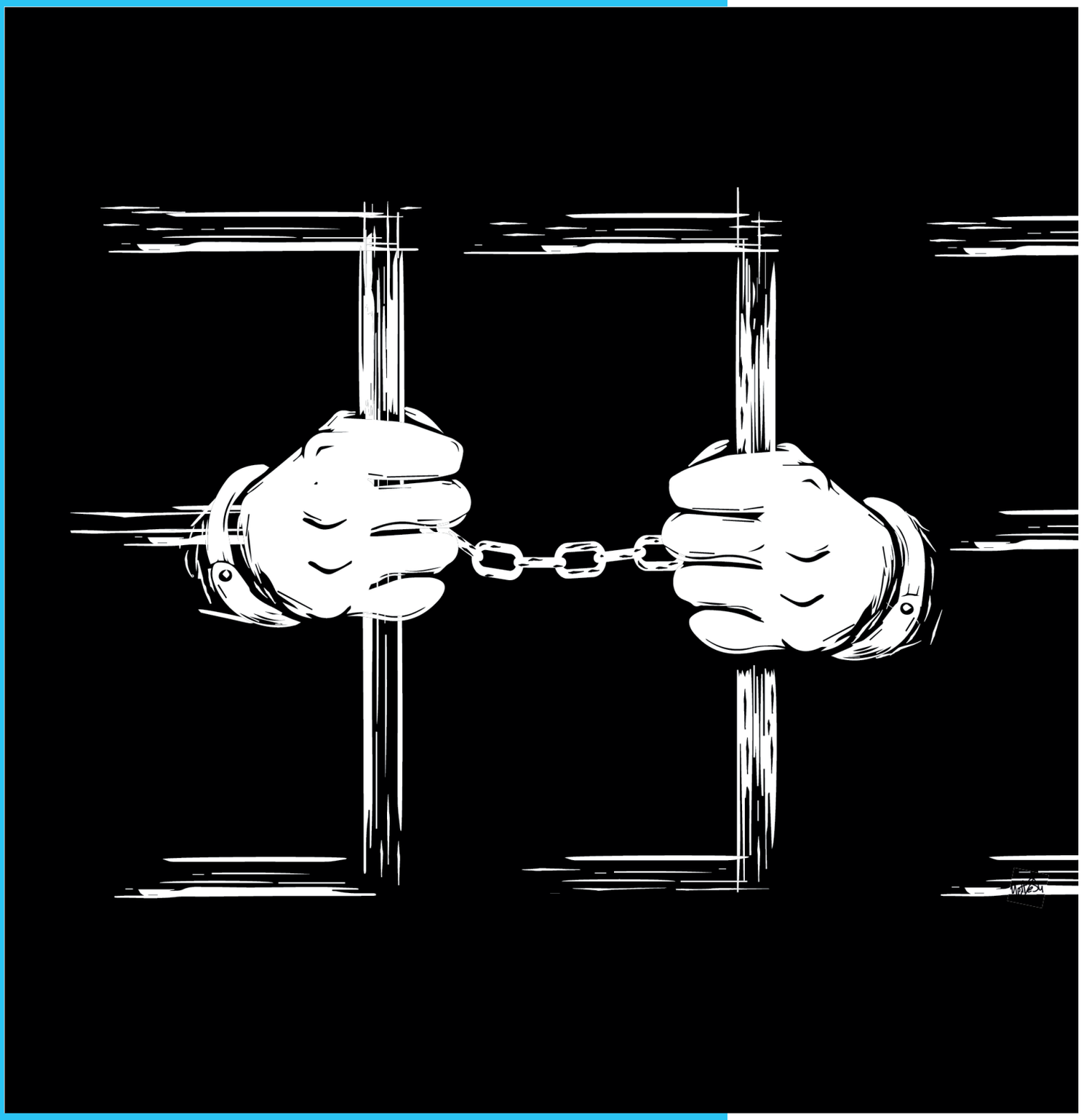
"I just want to give as much testimony as I can. By doing so, I feel better. I thought about the girls expecting me to share their names with the world. There are Uyghurs from Kazakhstan in France. They invited me once to an event party. I told them not to waste food and water because people in the camp don't have good food to eat. Later, they have never invited me to gatherings or events. I heard they were saying that they had gathered for fun, not for listening to the sad thing." *And,* "It can work and benefit Uyghur people. For five years, I have been talking about the tragedy on as many occasions as I could. I was eager to give testimony because I hoped that our work could close the camp. Today, we see that camps are still open. I have no hope."

However, she concluded:

"Now, I'm an activist, fighting for my sister's rights. … To protect my own and my sister's rights and to oppose the Chinese government's injustice is why I am now making my voice heard, which also is my most basic human right."

This can again lead to transnational persecution, as also noted before:

"The different events that I have held and hosted have all been targets of the Chinese government's pressure. I have even received some phone calls from the Chinese embassy. I was open with them as well: 'How is it that they arrested my little sister, (*if you want me to stop*) then let go of my innocent sister.' My sister has no criminal record or previous convictions, but she was still detained and jailed, which resulted in my mother passing away and not being able to handle the severe grief. My mother was not even that old yet, she had just



turned 60 years old. I didn‘t get to see my mother; my nephew was born and has already grown up, and I never got to hold him in my lap.” *And,* “On the one hand, to protect and save my sister, and on the other hand, being a Uyghur, I have to keep sharing these stories and make my voice heard to the world. It is clear that if I should ever return, they would arrest me.” *As well as:* “I have to fight for my sister, I have to be her voice. My sister’s situation saddens me, but I grieve more for her daughter (*Aishe*). She’s an innocent girl living with my father and brother. I have complete faith in my father, that he would nurture her better than he did us, but she needs her mother’s love and care. That’s why I say I won’t stop being her voice. While we are fighting for our families, others should fulfill humans’ responsibility and obligations to help us in any shape or form, whether through social media or newspapers.”

But one IP reported:

“I did not physically go to the tribunal in London. I testified via video link, and other than the Chinese making this public in the court, they did not launch any direct attacks against me. They only publicized videos from when I was in the country, but there were no other attacks.”

Testimony took different forms, even though the suffering had been experienced a short time beforehand:

“After arriving in France, I initially provided my testimony about the atrocities in secret. I authored a book to disclose the repression in that camp, which was published on January 13, 2021.”

The positive experience (and potential opportunities for posttraumatic growth) was often diminished if there was no public acknowledgment or impact of the testimony and was followed by exhaustion, depression, and a feeling of hopelessness, as described for example by one IP:

“If I live or die, I do not care anymore so much. My only wish is to explain to the whole world what is happening to the Uyghurs in East Turkestan. I do not think that there are any other people in the world who must suffer as much as the Uyghurs. We have such a rich culture, a very beautiful language, delicious food, and an impressive civilization. No one knows about that. But then I think, no, I absolutely have to be strong and be the voice of those without a voice. I have managed to stay alive until today. I always think about my siblings and cousins. Because we do not have that much evidence, the world does not listen. I have spoken up for three years. I have no hope anymore. I have spoken up a lot, but there is no hope. I have not spoken about it in the media for three months. I tried, but it did not work. And because nothing changes, I assume that we will always live in that way. If we Uyghurs were eradicated, it would not matter … it would not matter … But being alive and at the same time still dead ...” *and* “For example, recently there were many interviews and news about the Uyghurs in the BBC, that gave me a lot of hope. But in the last months, I did not feel well because there were almost no reports on the Uyghurs in the media. If the world would just report a little bit about the Uyghurs, we would feel better. But now, we feel left alone.”

Giving testimony has a positive impact on many

levels, as described by another IP:

"After the reports were published, there could be hope for women like me, who suffer under these circumstances or whose husbands have been arrested. Even when we cannot provide help in our home country, our reports might result in NGOs abroad coming together and collaborating. The Uyghurs at home alone do not have the resources to fight against the Chinese government."

> "I have to fight for my sister, I have to be her voice. The situation of my sister saddens me, but I grieve more for her daughter (Aishe), she's an innocent girl living with my father and brother."

In Preliminary Conclusion

The different forms of discrimination against members of the Uyghur group are widespread and can lead to severe suffering, as our interviews and other investigations confirm. They are described as affecting all areas of life, even among Uyghurs in exile, and also affecting protection for women as human rights defenders. Further independent investigation and research, probably by both the Chinese government and the international community, is needed to follow up on our findings.

Limitations, Conclusions, and Future Perspectives

Limitations

Our qualitative testimony-based approach, which included a limited number of survivors living in exile, may require further verification and research and may not reflect the situation and experiences of all Uyghurs; however, it gives a good illustration of traumatic events, persecution, and human rights violations and the suffering that they may cause in members of the Uyghur community. Testimonies were collected by open interviews, which were designed and analyzed by a scientific approach and conducted by trusted members of the same community in the participants' mother language.

The main forms of those experiences, as reported include:

- Discrimination in the education system related to ethnic or religious persecution
- Discrimination in everyday life related to ethnic or religious persecution
- Discrimination in the work environment related to ethnic or religious persecution
- Probable denial of adequate medical help, including the failure of healthcare professionals in places of detention to follow their ethical obligation to report and stop acts of torture and other violations of standards
- Collective memories of earlier persecution transmitted through oral reports
- Possible situations where traumatic events have been or may be perpetuated by transgenerational transmission
- Sex-specific acts of persecution and human rights violations
- The experience of adverse and hate propaganda targeting and leading to suffering in members of the Uyghur minority group and at the same time creating disdain and hate in the Han majority group; the propaganda developed over time and had the potential of leading to further violence and persecution
- Forced exile to escape discrimination, persecution, and torture
- Difficult situations in host countries as part of forced exile
- Separation from family members and destruction of family cohesion, especially among those in exile
- Unclear fate or massive persecution of family members experienced by those in exile
- Translational repression and persecution
- Long-term trauma spectrum posttraumatic symptoms leading to suffering in exile
- Coping strategies, especially the strategy of giving testimony, play a positive role in fighting trauma sequelae

> “The testimonies collected in this study confirm and are in line with those in other reports and research on the persecution and general situation of Uyghurs living in Xinjiang or in exile, such as the testimonies in the London Uyghur Tribunal. They indicate a need for further investigation and research.”

Additional Reflections and Final Conclusions

In the opinion of our specialized lawyers, several categories of reported events and human rights violations, including but not limited to those prohibited by, for example, the UN CAT and the Minimum Standard Rules for Prisoners, especially for Women (Bangkok rules), require further investigation by Chinese and international independent authorities to protect China's outstanding reputation for fairness and to protect the Uyghur ethnic group.

Final Summary and Conclusions

The interviews describe a wide range of traumatic and severely stressful events from everyday discrimination to torture, disappearances, rape/sexual abuse, and detention in concentration camps, either experienced or observed. Together, they indicate possible severe human rights violations and genocidal acts that target the culture, professional development, reproductive health, and other aspects of the Uyghur community. One must consider that these conclusions are based on a small, limited, and selected sample of witness statements, similar to those in the London Uyghur Tribunal, and therefore may require additional approaches to collect evidence to verify the statements and observations. Also noteworthy is that several of the witnesses identified situations, such as university studies in Minzu (ethnic) universities, where they usually experienced no direct discrimination or persecution, at least on a subjective level. These reports may be seen also as an indicator of a willingness to provide true witness statements, despite the distress, to avoid the risk of one-sided propaganda.

According to their preliminary assessment, the legal team considers the reported experiences to be in accordance with other witness statements, such as those in the London Uyghur Tribunal, OHCHR, and Xinjiang police files mentioned in the Introduction and, if confirmed, may indicate severe violations of not only national Chinese laws and publicly stated policies of the country, but also international standards such as the Bangkok rules and UN Conventions, including those against discrimination, and the UN CAT, as outlined in the previously cited submissions of international universities together with the above-mentioned World Uyghur Congress and the OHCHR country report of 2022 (with the PRC's response).

Conclusions and Future Perspectives

The team members specialized in human rights also believe that the witness statements, especially if confirmed, would indicate violations of a number of international accepted standards,

as summarized above. Nevertheless, future research is needed and should use all available sources, including possible statements by the PRC government on their position. As the next step of the project, we intend to explore some of the issues reported in the interviews, such as the mental health impact and the issue of transnational persecution (the latter issue has already been mentioned by other researchers). A further, optional step would be to compare the interviews with other sources, such as witness statements from the London Uyghur Tribunal (which are available in an open access database on the respective website) and to perform a secondary analysis of the interviews by triangulating them with other sources. The legal team may also recommend further steps, including examining health sequels by using the UN Istanbul Protocol and performing independent prison visits to confirm that all places of detention comply with international standards, such as the Mandela and Bangkok rules, and the UN CAT and enabling free access by independent experts to confirm or disprove the IPs' observations and information from other sources.

Finally, we intend to take up the need that most IPs mentioned in their interviews, i.e., to offer treatment and support for Uyghur survivors of persecution. As a first step, Prof. Adorjan of the Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, Germany, has offered to adapt to the Uyghur language and group an existing online applet that can be used to identify the most urgent psychological needs. Furthermore, to guide such projects, the WPA section project partner has developed and published a guideline for conducting interviews and collecting testimony (3).

As a final conclusion, and to address the key project questions, we conclude that even though giving testimony and having a positive experience of participating in interviews may give some meaning to life and earlier experiences and may potentially provide for posttraumatic growth, most IPs still see psychological and other support and treatment as necessary and helpful.

Core conclusion

In all countries of exile, Uyghur women human rights defenders and victims of direct, indirect, and in particular transnational persecution should receive more support, including psychological treatment, protection, and information about the fate of family members.

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