

“I ESCAPED, BUT NOT TO FREEDOM”

Failure to Protect Uyghur Refugees

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“I Escaped, But Not to Freedom”: *Failure to Protect Uyghur Refugees* demonstrates how the UN’s global refugee agency has failed to fulfill its mandate to safeguard Uyghurs outside their homeland. Chinese government pressure on host states, and institutional shortcomings on the part of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), has left Uyghurs without meaningful protection under the international refugee regime.

Key Takeaways

- Uyghur and other Turkic refugees are living under threat of deportation because of influence from China on governments and immigration authorities in host countries;
- UNHCR is unable to provide meaningful protection to Uyghur refugees, partly as a consequence of Chinese interference, partly as a consequence of UNHCR shortcomings;
- Uyghur refugees are facing harassment and intimidation in the form of transnational repression, rendering Uyghur refugees as potentially the most at-risk refugee population in the world in a non-militarized context;
- The number of at-risk Uyghur refugees around the world is much smaller than other crises receiving international assistance, numbering in the low hundreds in some cases, making the prospect of de-escalating the crisis a very real possibility.

Recommendations

- **Governments** should design and implement resettlement programs;
- **Governments** should prioritize policies and diplomatic efforts to counter third-country governments’ complicity in China’s transitional repression;
- **Governments** should expedite Uyghur political asylum and refugee resettlement applications;
- The **United States Refugee Admissions Program** should ensure capacity to process more Uyghur refugees entering the program with priority access;
- **UNHCR** should convene governments to assist in negotiating with states to ensure protection of Uyghurs;
- **UNHCR Thailand** should renew efforts to register and resettle the group of Uyghur men held indefinitely in immigration detention in Thailand;
- **Civil society organizations** should make resources available for the resettlement of Uyghur refugees in the U.S. through the Welcome Corps initiative and other programs.

Full report:
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