



October 2, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

As Executive Director of the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), I write to express my deep concerns regarding your meeting to discuss tourism cooperation with Hu Heping, Chinese Minister of Culture and Tourism, during your recent visit to China. While we understand the importance of dialogue with Chinese government partners in certain circumstances, our own research has demonstrated how the government utilizes tourism in East Turkistan (Xinjiang) in order to conceal crimes against humanity and genocide.

We are especially concerned about your intention to co-host a “China-U.S. Tourism Leadership Summit,” seeking “to further revive and develop tourism cooperation between the two countries.” We would like to request a meeting with your team to review the high risks of such an initiative, in the context of U.S. foreign policy and the “whole-of-government” U.S. Strategy to Anticipate, Prevent, and Response to Atrocities, under the Elie Wiesel Atrocity Prevention Act of 2018.

UHRP’s August 2023 [briefing](#), *Genocide Tours: International Travel Companies in East Turkistan*, shows that international travel companies are currently offering guided tours to East Turkistan, and thereby implicitly supporting the normalization of genocidal Chinese government policies intended to destroy the Uyghur identity. The companies repeat and reinforce Chinese government narratives of an “exotic” people for the purpose of tourist consumption, while also providing perverse and problematic “experiences” for visitors, like visits to Uyghur homes. The report was released with an [exclusive](#) in *The Guardian* and covered by numerous media outlets.

As detailed in our report, prominent companies offering these tours since 2018 include Geographic Expeditions, Abercrombie & Kent, Intrepid Travel, and Goway Travel. Many of these tours provide perverse “experiences” for visitors, such as visits to Uyghur homes, which families are unable to refuse given the environment of securitization, state control, and surveillance. This constitutes a gross violation of privacy and perpetuates the surveillance programs that have been carried out in Uyghur homes. By bringing tourists to East Turkistan, travel companies are implicitly supporting the normalization of genocidal PRC government policies intended to destroy the Uyghur identity, and reinforce the complete denial of the Uyghur people to define “Uyghurness.”

The Chinese government also continues to make use of domestic tourism, among many other propaganda efforts, as a means of whitewashing abuses, and constructing a narrative in the Uyghur region that aligns closely with official policy. As you are well aware, U.S. policy recognizes and condemns that policy as ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity.

Any bilateral discussions have been and will be woefully incomplete, absent public condemnation and actions targeting the PRC's continued utilization of international tourism to whitewash and abet genocide and crimes against humanity. I am worried that the Department of Commerce's push to swing wide the doors to lucrative U.S.-China tourism will only further enable genocide in the PRC, through the amplification of false narratives and the succor of its perpetrators.

In line with U.S. policy on genocide accountability and response, we recommend the Department of Commerce issue guidance to American tourism corporations to stress the following imperatives:

- Cease all tours in the Uyghur homeland;
- Conduct thorough due diligence before offering tours and declare all local partners in tour literature. Companies run the risk of legitimizing tangible and intangible cultural erasure when working with Chinese state-owned partners;
- Seek consent for home visits from homeowners only and under conditions where families can freely deny or accept offers without the threat of state retribution. Consent cannot be given where there is no capacity or framework for it, as is the case in the Uyghur homeland; and
- Commit to the highest of international human rights standards for the travel industry (the Framework Convention on Tourism Ethics approved by the UN General Assembly in 2019) and adhere to its articles through an annual review of operations.

As noted, I would appreciate a meeting with your team to discuss in greater detail these concerns. We await your response and thank you in advance.

Sincerely,



Omer Kanat
Executive Director
Uyghur Human Rights Project