China: Uighur women reportedly sterilized in attempt to suppress population

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Several countries have this week condemned China over reports it systematically and forcibly sterilized Uighur minority women in Xinjiang province.

Investigations by German researcher Adrian Zenz and the Associated Press found that China is trying to slash the birth rate in the oppressed region through pregnancy checks, forced acceptance of intrauterine devices, compulsory sterilization and even abortion for hundreds of thousands of women.

The report found that Uighur women are threatened with mass detention and large fines, with many women imprisoned for the crime of having more than two children.

'Cut out our organs'

Zumret Dawut spent two months in a detention camp in Xinjiang where she was forcibly sterilized along with other Uighur women in her area.

"We lost a part of our body, we lost our identity as women. We will never be able to have children again," she told the Associated Press. "They cut out one of our organs. It's gone."

Gulnar Omirzakh avoided detention by paying a huge fine for having three children and accepting an IUD birth control implant.

"They give shots and remove fetuses forcefully. They won't ask the spouse's permission or anyone else," she said. "If they say it's illegal, they make you get an abortion. Those who didn't obey were sent to the camps. Now people are terrified of giving birth."

DW's Sandra Petersmann, who has reported extensively on the plight of the Uighurs, said the reports were credible.

"It is true that surveillance in Xinjiang is all encompassing. And it is also true that China certainly wants to reduce fertility rates by locking people up, especially the young sexually active generations and by birth control," Petersmann said.

"Most people in the camps have to repent for having 'too many children.' We have spoken to women who told us about sexual violence and birth control."

Falling birth rate

The population control measures led to a massive drop in birth rates in the mostly Uighur regions of Hotan and Kashgar, falling by more than 60% from 2015 to 2018, AP found, citing the latest available government statistics. Across the whole Xinjiang region, birth rates fell by nearly 24% in just 2019 compared to just 4.2% nationwide, it found.

Researcher Zenz said: "Populations that do not grow as quickly and rapidly are easier to control as part of Beijing's coercive social reengineering strategy in the area."

The birth suppression has been combined with an influx of Han Chinese migrants to the region, Zenz found.

AP found that Han Chinese people in the region were not subject to the same regime.

China denied the reports, with Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao Lijian saying "some institutions are bent on cooking up disinformation on Xinjiang-related issues. ... Their allegations are simply groundless and false."

"The media report is purely for ulterior motives and baseless. I also want to emphasize that ethnic minorities and Han people need to act in accordance with the law."

Global response

A group of politicians from Europe, Australia, North America and Japan called on the United Nations to launch an independent inquiry in relation to the claims.

The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China said in a statement: "The world cannot remain silent in the face of unfolding atrocities. Our countries are bound by solemn obligations to prevent and punish any effort to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group 'in whole or in part.'"

"Our governments must now support a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly to establish an international, impartial, independent investigation into the situation in the Xinjiang region; must act to ensure that the appropriate legal determinations regarding the nature of alleged atrocities can be made; and must spare no effort in pursuing rapid and decisive political action to prevent the further suffering of the Uyghur people and other minorities in China."

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom called for a joint UN and State Department investigation, saying the campaign "might meet the legal criteria for genocide."

US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo said in a statement: "We call on the Chinese Communist Party to immediately end these horrific practices."

The US Commerce Department on Wednesday warned US companies about maintaining supply chains associated with human rights abuses in China's western Xinjiang province.

Reinhard Bütikofer, Chair of the China-Delegation in the European Parliament and foreign affairs spokesperson for the Greens/EFA group said in a statement: "The European Parliament condemned the massive detention of Uyghurs in political 're-education camps' in Xinjiang in its resolution of 19 December 2019 in response to the revelation in the China-Cables. The new findings underline the urgent need of an independent investigation of the situation and the need of a sanction regime for human rights violations."