



WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS
Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.
Dunya Uyghur Qurultiyi

Registration No: VR 18781

**World Uyghur Congress Condemns 15-year Sentence Handed Down to Uyghur Journalist
and Website Editor Gheyret Niyaz**

For immediate release

July 24, 2010

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The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) condemns in strongest possible terms the 15-year sentence handed down to prominent Uyghur journalist Gheyret Niyaz by a court in East Turkestan (also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China) on July 23, 2010. After a one-day trial, the court convicted and sentenced Mr. Niyaz to 15 years in prison on charges of “endangering state security” for giving interviews to media about the aspects of Uyghurs’ situation that he perceived to be the root causes of the July 2009 ethnic unrest in Urumchi (the regional capital) and for peacefully exercising his freedom of speech in other ways with regard to problems faced by the Uyghur people. According to reports, prosecutors relied on interviews Mr. Niyaz gave to Hong Kong media after the unrest and essays he had written and posted online prior to the July 2009 events that discussed unemployment, discrimination, and other problems faced by Uyghurs in East Turkestan. [1]

Mr. Niyaz was detained in October 2009 [2] in the midst of the detention of many other Uyghur journalists, bloggers, and webmasters in the aftermath of the July 2009 protest and ethnic unrest [3], as well as in the midst of a state-imposed information blackout that deprived residents of internet and e-mail access and text messaging and international phone calling capabilities [4].

Mr. Niyaz was sentenced after a one-day trial that only one member of his family -- his wife --was permitted to attend. [5] He was denied legal representation of his choosing [6] and due process, and his trial was conducted against a background of intense politicization [7]. The charge on which he was prosecuted and convicted – “endangering state security” – is regularly used by the Chinese authorities to criminalize Uyghurs’ peaceful exercise of their human rights. The use of this vague and arbitrary provision in China’s Criminal Code to prosecute and imprison Uyghur dissidents has drastically increased in recent years. [8]

WUC proclaims that the sentencing of Mr. Niyaz for peacefully exercising his human rights is the latest attempt by the Chinese authorities to stifle freedom of expression and freedom of the press in East Turkestan, instill fear in the Uyghur people to deter them from sharing information about human rights violations that they have experienced and witnessed, and cover up the truth of what occurred during and in the aftermath of the July 2009 protest and ethnic unrest in Urumchi. WUC calls on the Chinese authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Niyaz, as he has committed no discernible crime under either international or domestic law.

“Gheyret Niyaz has been condemned to spend the next 15 years of his life behind bars for simply expressing his opinions,” said Rebiya Kadeer, President of the World Uyghur Congress and multiple-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee. “The prosecution and conviction of Mr. Niyaz on charges of ‘endangering state security’ is the most recent example of the Chinese authorities’ misuse of this vague and arbitrary provision in China’s Criminal Code to criminalize Uyghurs’ peaceful expression.

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WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS

Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.

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‘Endangering state security’ has basically become a ‘catch-all’ for virtually any speech that reflects negatively on the Chinese authorities.”

In a press release dated July 23, 2010, Amnesty International, which has taken steps to protect Mr. Niyaz since he was detained in October 2009, condemned the sentence and noted that he was a prisoner of conscience. [9] On October 30, 2009, soon after Mr. Niyaz was detained, Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action to its members worldwide, as well as the general public, calling on them to send appeals to various officials in the XUAR government requesting, among other things, that Mr. Niyaz be immediately and unconditionally released unless he is charged with an internationally recognizable criminal offense, which he has not been. AI warned that he was at grave risk of torture. [10] Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom and the Committee to Protect Journalists also expressed grave concern over the arrest and prosecution of Mr. Niyaz. [11]

The Uyghur American Association issued a press release on July 23, 2010 [12] condemning the 15-year sentence as well as a press release on July 21, 2010 expressing concern about Mr. Niyaz’ impending trial [13], which was cited by several media outlets [14].

Further Background on Gheyret Niyaz and the Conditions Under Which He Was Prosecuted and Convicted

Mr. Niyaz is a well-known journalist in East Turkestan. He graduated from Beijing Nationalities University in 1982 and over the years, he has worked for several publications and has intentionally done reporting in the Chinese language on the culture and the situation of the Uyghurs in East Turkestan in order to educate Chinese-speaking domestic and overseas audiences. [15] He was an editor of Uyghurbiz.cn, a bilingual forum about Uyghur culture and life [16] that has been repeatedly shut down and censored by the authorities including after the July 2009 unrest [17] and was blamed by the authorities for helping to foment the unrest (along with Uyghur websites Salkin and Diyarim) [18]. Mr. Niyaz also maintained his own blog, which he updated frequently. [19] In interviews with the media in the aftermath of the unrest, he discussed what he perceived to be the root causes of the unrest, including mounting grievances among Uyghurs over the implementation of the so-called “bilingual” education policy that has resulted in many Uyghur teachers being laid off and a government program that sends young Uyghurs, mainly women, to work in factories in mainland China. [20] He warned the local authorities on July 4th that unrest was possible. They disregarded his warning, but later used it to place him under investigation. [21]

Mr. Niyaz was taken from his home in Urumchi on October 1, 2009. On October 4, 2009, police delivered a notice to his family stating that he had be arrested for “endangering state security” and told his family that he had been detained because he had “given too many media interviews”. [22]

The arrest of Mr. Niyaz occurred in the midst of the detention of other Uyghur bloggers, journalists, and website editors in the aftermath of and in connection with the July 2009 incidents, including but not limited to: Gulmire Imin, a regular contributor to the Uyghur website Salkin, who was sentenced to life in prison in April 2010 [23]; Dilshat Parhat, the editor and co-founder of the Uyghur website Diyarim who in addition to being arrested after July 5, 2009, has been disappeared [24]; Obulkasim, a contributor to Diyarim [25]; Nurali, the founder, owner, and main administrator of Salkin [26];



WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS

Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.

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Memet Turghun Abdulla, a photographer who published an article online about attacks against Uyghurs that took place in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province, on June 26, 2009 [27]; Muhemmet, a website supervisor [28]; Tursunjan Hezim, a middle school history teacher and owner and a main administrator for Uyghur website Orkun, who in addition to being arrested after July 5th has been disappeared. Furthermore, Ilham Tohti, a well-known Uyghur academic, economist, and founder and editor of uyghurbiz.net, for which Mr. Niyaz had been an editor, was detained incommunicado for six weeks from July to August 2009 in the aftermath of the July 2009 incidents in Urumchi, and has since been harassed by the authorities, for simply exercising his freedom of expression. [29] He was barred earlier this year by the Chinese authorities from travelling to Turkey to attend an academic conference. [30]

Although the Chinese authorities' persecution of Uyghur journalists, webmasters, and bloggers intensified after the July 2009 incidents, it certainly preceded the events. Uyghur journalists, webmasters, and bloggers who have been detained since before July 5th have included: Mr. Memtimin Alyar, a middle school teacher and main administrator for www.bilik.cn, who was first sentenced to 6 years in prison in 2007 for an undisclosed crime but whose sentence was increased to 11 years one week later; and Ms. Mehbube Ablesh who was fired from her job in the advertising department at the Xinjiang People's Radio Station in August 2008 and later detained and disappeared in apparent connection to her writings for the Internet that were critical of government policies, including 'bilingual' education". [31]

Mr. Niyaz' detention also occurred in the midst of a state-imposed information blackout that deprived East Turkestan residents of internet and e-mail access and text messaging and international phone calling capabilities for many months in the aftermath of the July 2009 protest and ethnic unrest in Urumchi. [32] In September 2009, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region adopted a regulation that went into effect on December 1, 2009 and that includes provisions that prohibit the use of the internet to incite ethnic separatism, threaten state security, or spread false information, among other acts. The regulation specifies penalties for violating the provisions. [33] On May 14, 2010, the regional government announced that full internet service was being restored to the region, after ten months of blocked or limited access. [34] It had been the longest-running case of government censorship of this kind. [35] The government's announcement included a warning that web users "should not do anything that hurts the internet environment or harms ethnic unity, social stability, and national interests." [36] In addition, internet users in the XUAR are subject to filtering by the Great Electronic Wall of China, which blocks access to websites and content regarded as subversive by the authorities. Websites and blogs about Uyghurs and the issues they face continue to be prime targets for the censors. The vast majority of the websites dedicated to the Uyghur community, including sites in Uyghur language, Mandarin, and English, remain blocked, censored, or otherwise unreachable. [37] The list of forbidden keywords and terms include "Rebiya Kadeer", "World Uyghur Congress", "Uyghur Human Rights Project", and "East Turkestan Independence". [38]

As stated above, Mr. Niyaz was given a one-day trial on July 23, 2010 after many months in detention. In addition to being denied the right to a lawyer of his choosing, he was tried under the conditions of lack of due process created by the authorities for defendants prosecuted in connection with the July 2009 events. These conditions have included the authorities: giving judges and prosecutors special instructions on how to handle the July 5th cases; hand-picking the judicial personnel assigned to the trials according to political criteria; warning human rights lawyers against

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WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS
Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.
Dunya Uyghur Qurultiyi

Registration No: VR 18781

taking protest-related cases; and making public statements that have put political pressure on courts to mete out death sentences and other severe sentences. [39] As stated above, the vague provision in China's Criminal Law under which Mr. Niyaz was prosecuted and convicted has regularly been used by the authorities criminalize Uyghurs' peaceful exercise of their human rights and prosecute and imprison them. The authorities use of this charge against Uyghurs has drastically increased in recent years. The U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China noted that in 2008, the number of trials in XUAR courts involving ESS crimes and the number of indictments involving ESS crimes issued by the XUAR procuratorate offices approached the nationwide totals from 2007. [40]

Endnotes

[1] See Alexa Oleson, "China Sentences Uighur Writer to 15 Years in Jail" (www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gSjMTGA_93sjHUt2y3ACal8ak7vQD9H4P8FG0), Associated Press (AP) (published on Google), July 24, 2010; Amnesty International (AI) (online), "China Sentences Uighur Journalist to 15-Year Prison Term" (www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/china-sentences-uyghur-journalist-15-year-prison-term-2010-07-23), July 23, 2010. See generally, AI (online), "China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture" (Urgent Action) (www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/060/2009/en/ea19e87f-a9c2-444b-b42e-2ba7eda59e30/asa170602009en.html), Oct. 30, 2009.

[2] See AI (online), "China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture" (Urgent Action) (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009.

[3] See endnotes 23-30 for citation to sources.

[4] See endnotes 33-39 for citation to sources.

[5] See AI (online), "China Sentences Uighur Journalist to 15-Year Prison Term" (see endnote 1 for website link), July 23, 2010.

[6] See *id.*

[7] See endnote 40 for citation to sources.

[8] See Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) (online), "Annual Report 2009" (www.cecc.gov/pages/annualRpt/annualRpt09/CECCannRpt2009.pdf), Oct. 10, 2009, pp. 66, 244, 253-254; CECC (online), "Annual Report 2008" (http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_house_hearings&docid=f:45233.pdf), Oct. 31, 2008, p. 168.

[9] See AI (online), "China Sentences Uighur Journalist to 15-Year Prison Term" (see endnote 1 for website link), July 23, 2010.

[10] See AI (online), "China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture" (Urgent Action) (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009.

[11] See Committee to Protect Journalists (online), "Uighur journalist goes on trial in China a year after unrest" (<http://cpj.org/2010/07/uyghur-journalist-goes-on-trial-in-china-a-year-af.php>), July



WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS

Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.

Dunya Uyghur Qurultiyi

Registration No: VR 18781

22, 2010; Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General of Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom, "Open Letter to the Xinjiang's party secretary," (<http://en.rsf.org/china-open-letter-to-the-xinjiang-s-20-05-2010,37527.html>), **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), May 20, 2010; **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), "Survey of blocked Uighur websites show Xinjiang still cut off from the world" (<http://en.rsf.org/china-survey-of-blocked-uyghur-websites-29-10-2009,34859.html>), Oct. 29, 2009.

[12] See **Uyghur American Association (UAA)** (online), "Uyghur Journalist and Webmaster Gheyret Niyaz Sentenced to 15 Years" (press release) (www.uyghuramerican.org/articles/4824/1/Uyghur-journalist-and-webmaster-Gheyret-Niyaz-to-be-tried-next-week-on-charges-of-quotendangering-state-securityquot/index.html) (press release), July 23, 2010.

[13] See **UAA** (online), "Uyghur Journalist and Webmaster Gheyret Niyaz to be Tried Next Week on Charges of 'Endangering State Security'" (press release) (www.uyghuramerican.org/articles/4824/1/Uyghur-journalist-and-webmaster-Gheyret-Niyaz-to-be-tried-next-week-on-charges-of-quotendangering-state-securityquot/index.html), July 21, 2010.

[14] See "Chinese court 'jails Uighur journalist'" (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-10744133), **BBC** (online), July 23, 2010; "China to try Uighur journalist on 'security – report'" (<http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-50314020100722>), **Reuters** (online), July 22, 2010. "Report says Uighur journalist jailed in China for 15 years" (<http://au.news.yahoo.com/a/-/world/7639447/report-says-uyghur-journalist-jailed-in-china-for-15-years>), **AFP** (published on Yahoo!), July 22, 2010.

[15] See **AI** (online), "China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture" (Urgent Action) (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009.

[16] See *id.*

[17] See *id.*; Alexa Oleson, "China Sentences Uighur Writer to 15 Years in Jail" (see endnote 1 for website link), **Associated Press (AP)** (published on Google), July 24, 2010.

[18] See Alexa Oleson, "China Sentences Uighur Writer to 15 Years in Jail" (see endnote 1 for website link), **Associated Press (AP)** (published on Google), July 24, 2010; **UAA** (online), "Uyghur Journalist and Webmaster Gheyret Niyaz Sentenced to 15 Years" (press release) (see endnote 12 for website link), July 23, 2010; **AI** (online), "China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture" (Urgent Action) (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009; **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), "Concern about harsh crackdown following Xinjiang rioting" (<http://en.rsf.org/china-concern-about-harsh-crackdown-08-07-2009,33757.html>), July 8, 2010.

[19] See Alexa Oleson, "China Sentences Uighur Writer to 15 Years in Jail" (see endnote 1 for website link), **Associated Press (AP)** (published on Google), July 24, 2010.

[20] See **AI** (online), "China Sentences Uighur Journalist to 15-Year Prison Term" (see endnote 1 for website link), July 23, 2010.



WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS
Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.
Dunya Uyghur Qurultiyi

Registration No: VR 18781

[21] *See id.*

[22] *See AI* (online), “China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture” (Urgent Action) (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009.

[23] *See AI* (online), “Justice, Justice: The July 2009 Protests in Xinjiang, China” (www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/027/2010/en/425679a8-6fde-40b5-a38b-83699e5ac1bc/asa170272010en.pdf), July 2010, p. 25.

[24] *See* Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General, **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), “Open Letter to the Xinjiang’s party secretary,” (see endnote 11 for website link), May 20, 2010; “Call for Uyghurs’ Release” (www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/uyghurrelease-12152009110742.html), **Radio Free Asia (RFA)** (online), Dec. 15, 2009; “China: Uighur Journalist Detained, Risks Torture” (Urgent Action) (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009; **AI** (online), “China: Uighur Website Editor At Risk of Torture” (Urgent Action) (www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/056/2009/en/c4679695-04f7-49c5-a067-f33346e7458e/asa170562009en.html), Sept. 30, 2009.

[25] *See* Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General, **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), “Open Letter to the Xinjiang’s party secretary,” (see endnote 11 for website link), May 20, 2010; “Call for Uyghurs’ Release” (see endnote 24 for website link), **RFA** (online), Dec. 15, 2009.

[26] *See id.*

[27] *See UAA* (online), “Uyghur Journalist and Webmaster Gheyret Niyaz Sentenced to 15 Years” (press release) (see endnote 12 for website link), July 23, 2010;

[28] *See* Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General, **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), “Open Letter to the Xinjiang’s party secretary,” (see endnote 11 for website link), May 20, 2010; “Call for Uyghurs’ Release” (see endnote 24 for website link), **RFA** (online), Dec. 15, 2009.

[29] *See* Kathrin Hille, “Silence An Ominous Sign for Uyghur Activist” (www.uyghuramerican.org/articles/4399/1/Silence-an-ominous-sign-for-Uyghur-activist/index.html), **The Financial Times** (posted on the Uyghur American Association’s website), Feb. 17, 2010; **AI** (online), “Risk of Torture for 17-year old in China” (Urgent Action) (www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA17/071/2009/en/a1aea8ae-1fa9-4f48-97c0-35aeb89caa99/asa170712009en.html), Dec. 15, 2009; **AI** (online), “China: Uighur journalist detained, risks torture” (see endnote 1 for website link), Oct. 30, 2009; **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), “Uyghur blogger freed after six weeks incommunicado, but under close watch” (<http://en.rsf.org/china-uyghur-blogger-freed-after-six-25-08-2009,34301.html>), Aug. 25, 2009; **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom**, “A month without word of detained blogger Ilham Tohti” (<http://en.rsf.org/china-a-month-without-word-of-detained-07-08-2009,34121.html>), Aug. 7, 2009.



WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS
Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.
Dunya Uyghur Qurultiyi

Registration No: VR 18781

[30] See "Travel Ban for Uyghur Scholar" (www.rfa.org/english/news/china/ilham-tohti-05202010101652.html), RFA (online), May 20, 2010; "Uyghur Scholar Slams Exit Ban" (www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/ban-04282010124306.html), RFA (online), Apr. 28, 2010.

[31] See CECC (online), "Annual Report 2009" (www.cecc.gov/pages/annualRpt/annualRpt09/CECCannRpt2009.pdf), Oct. 10, 2009, p. 257 (citing sources); CECC (online), "Annual Report 2008" (http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_house_hearings&docid=f:45233.pdf), Oct. 31, 2008, p. 172.

[32] See **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), "How censorship can affect the peaceful solution of the crisis in Xinjiang" (http://en.rsf.org/IMG/pdf/100705-Xinjiang_speech.pdf), July 5, 2010; Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General of Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom, "Open Letter to the Xinjiang's party secretary," (<http://en.rsf.org/china-open-letter-to-the-xinjiang-s-20-05-2010,37527.html>), **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), May 20, 2010; Chris Hogg, "China restores Xinjiang internet" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8682145.stm>), **BBC News** (online), May 14, 2010; Edward Wong, "After Long Ban, Western China Is Back Online" (www.nytimes.com/2010/05/15/world/asia/15china.html), **The New York Times** (online), May 14, 2010; "China Restores Internet to Xinjiang" (www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/14/china-restores-internet-access-xinjiang), **Reuters** [published on *The Guardian* (UK) (online)], May 14, 2010); CECC (online), "Xinjiang Government Issues Internet Regulation, Keeps Strict Control on Information" (Commission Analysis) (www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=130352), posted on Dec. 8, 2009 (citing sources).

[33] See CECC (online), "Xinjiang Government Issues Internet Regulation, Keeps Strict Control on Information" (Commission Analysis) (www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd?showsingle=130352), posted on Dec. 8, 2009 (citing sources).

[34] See Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General of Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom, "Open Letter to the Xinjiang's party secretary," (see endnote 11 for website link), **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), May 20, 2010; Chris Hogg, "China restores Xinjiang internet" (see endnote 33 for website link), **BBC News** (online), May 14, 2010; Edward Wong, "After Long Ban, Western China Is Back Online" (see endnote 33 for website link), **The New York Times** (online), May 14, 2010; "China Restores Internet to Xinjiang" (see endnote 33 for website link), **Reuters** [published on *The Guardian* (UK) (online)], May 14, 2010.

[35] See Jean-François Julliard, Secretary-General of Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom, "Open Letter to the Xinjiang's party secretary," (see endnote 11 for website link), **Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom** (online), May 20, 2010.

[36] See "China Restores Internet to Xinjiang" (see endnote 33 for website link), **Reuters** [published on *The Guardian* (UK) (online)], May 14, 2010). See generally, Chris Hogg, "China restores Xinjiang internet" (see endnote 33 for website link), **BBC News** (online), May 14, 2010.



WORLD UYGHUR CONGRESS
Weltkongress der Uiguren.e.V.
Dunya Uyghur Qurultiyi

Registration No: VR 18781

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(published on Google), July 5, 2010.

[38] See *id.*

[39] See **Human Rights Watch (HRW)** (online), “China: ‘We Are Afraid to Even Look for Them’: Enforced Disappearances in the Wake of Xinjiang’s Protests”

(www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/10/22/we-are-afraid-even-look-them), Oct. 2009, pp. 19-20, 24 (citing sources); **CECC** (online) “Annual Report 2009” (see endnote 8 for website link), Oct. 10, 2009, pp.105, 251 (citing sources).

[40] See **CECC** (online), “Annual Report 2009” (see endnote 8 for website link), Oct. 10, 2009, pp. 244, 253-254.