

No, the UN Did Not Report China Has ‘Massive Internment Camps’ for Uighur Muslims

By [Ben Norton](#) and [Ajit Singh](#)

Global Research, August 30, 2018

[Grayzone Project](#) 23 August 2018

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [United Nations](#)

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above

Media outlets from Reuters to The Intercept falsely claimed the UN had condemned China for holding a million Uighurs in camps. The claim is based on unsourced allegations by two independent commission members, US-funded outfits and a shadowy opposition group.

Numerous major media outlets, from Reuters to The Intercept, have claimed that the United Nations has reports that the Chinese government is holding as many as 1 million Uighur Muslims in “internment camps.” But a close examination of these news stories, and of the evidence behind them — or the lack thereof — demonstrates that the extraordinary claim is simply not true.

A spokesperson from the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) confirmed in a statement to the Grayzone that the allegation of Chinese “camps” was not made by the United Nations, but rather by a member of an independent committee that does not speak for the UN as a whole. That member happened to be the only American on the committee, and one with no background of scholarship or research on China.

Moreover, this accusation is based on the thinly sourced reports of a Chinese opposition group that receives funding from foreign governments and is closely tied to exiled pro-US activists. While there have been many [on-the-ground reports](#) highlighting discrimination that Uighur Muslims have faced at the hands of the Chinese authorities, information about camps containing one million prisoners has originated almost exclusively from media outlets and organizations funded and weaponized by the American government to turn up the heat on Beijing.

A blatant falsehood introduced by Reuters and echoed across mainstream media

On August 10, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination conducted its regular review of China’s compliance with the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The review, which is conducted periodically for all 179 parties to the Convention, has generated a frenzied response by the Western corporate press — one which is uniformly misleading.

On the day of the review, [Reuters](#) published a report with an explosive headline: “U.N. says it has credible reports that China holds million Uighurs in secret camps.”

GENEVA (Reuters) - A United Nations human rights panel said on Friday that it had received many credible reports that 1 million ethnic Uighurs in China are held in what resembles a "massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy."

Gay McDougall, a member of the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, cited estimates that 2 million Uighurs and Muslim minorities were forced into "political camps for indoctrination" in the western Xinjiang autonomous region.

"We are deeply concerned at the many numerous and credible reports that we have received that in the name of combating religious extremism and maintaining social stability (China) has changed the Uighur autonomous region into something that resembles a massive internment camp that is shrouded in secrecy, a sort of 'no rights zone'," she told the start of a two-day regular review of China's record, including Hong Kong and Macao.

Screengrab from Reuters

The claim was feverishly reproduced by outlets such as The New York Times and The Washington Post to denounce China and call for international action. Even [The Intercept's](#) Mehdi Hasan belted out the breathless headline, "One Million Muslim Uighurs Have Been Detained by China, the U.N. Says. Where's the Global Outrage?" The impression readers were given was that the UN had conducted an investigation and had formally and collectively made such charges against China. In fact, the UN had done no such thing.

The headline of Reuters' report attributed its explosive claim to the UN; yet the body of the article ascribed it simply to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. And this committee's official website makes it clear that it is "a body of [independent experts](#)," not UN officials.

What's more, a look at the [OHCHR's official news release](#) on the committee's presentation of the report showed that the only mention of alleged re-education "camps" in China was made by its sole American member, Gay McDougall. This claim was then echoed by a Mauritanian member, Yemhelhe Mint Mohamed.

During the committee's regular review of China, McDougall commented that she was "deeply concerned" about "credible reports" alleging mass detentions of millions of Uighurs Muslim minorities in "internment camps." The [Associated Press](#) reported that McDougall "did not specify a source for that information in her remarks at the hearing." (Note that the headline of the AP news wire is much weaker than that of Reuters: "UN panel concerned at reported Chinese detention of Uighurs.")

Video of the session confirms that McDougall provided no sourcing to back up her remarkable claim.

This is to say, one American member of an independent UN body made a provocative claim that China was interning 1 million Muslims, but failed to provide a single named source. And Reuters and the Western corporate media ran with it anyway, attributing the unsubstantiated allegations of one US individual to the UN as a whole.

In an email to the Grayzone Project, OHCHR spokesperson Julia Gronnevet confirmed that the CERD was not representative of the UN as a whole.

“You are correct that the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is an independent body,” Gronnevet wrote. “Quoted comments were made during public sessions of the Committee when members were reviewing State parties.”

Thus the OHCHR implicitly acknowledged that the comments by McDougall, the lone American member of an independent committee, were not representative of any finding by the UN as a whole. The report by Reuters is simply false.

“Credible reports” from a government-funded opposition group with zero transparency

In addition to this irresponsible misreporting, Reuters and other Western outlets have attempted to fill in the gaps left by McDougall, referring to reports made by so-called “activist group” the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD). Conveniently left out of the story is that this organization is headquartered in Washington, DC.

CHRD, which receives hundreds of thousands of dollars in funding from unnamed governments, advocates full-time against the Chinese government and has spent years campaigning on behalf of extreme right-wing opposition figures.

CHRD is not at all transparent about its funding or personnel. Its [annual reports](#) contain notes stating, “This report has been produced with the financial support of generous donors.” But the donors are never named.

Publicly available 990 IRS filing forms reviewed by the Grayzone show that the organization is substantially funded by government grants. In fact, in 2015 virtually all of the organization’s revenue came from government grants.



CHRD’s [2015 form 990](#) discloses that \$819,553 of its \$820,023 revenue that year (99.94 percent) came from government grants. A measly \$395 came from investments, with another \$75 from other sources. According to its [2016 form 990](#), CHRD received \$859,091 in government grants in that year.



Which government provided these grants is not clear. The Grayzone did not receive a response to several emailed interview requests sent to the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders.

However, it appears likely that CHRD could be receiving funding from the US government-backed National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

A search of the [NED’s grants database](#) shows funding from 2014 and 2015 totaling approximately half a million dollars to “support the work of Chinese human rights defenders.” It is not clear if this is a reference to the organization specifically, but the description accompanying the grants matches that of CHRD.



CHRD has used its generous funding to provide [grants](#) to opposition activists inside China, bankrolling dozens upon dozens of [projects in the country](#).

On its tax forms, CHRD lists its [address](#) as the Washington, DC office of [Human Rights Watch](#). HRW has long been [criticized](#) for its [revolving door with the US government](#) and its excessively [disproportionate focus](#) on designated enemies of Washington like China, [Venezuela](#), Syria, and Russia.

Human Rights Watch did not respond to an email from the Grayzone inquiring about its relationship with CHRD.

CHRD's forms 990 also reveal that the board of the organization is a Who's Who of exiled Chinese anti-government activists.

The chair of the group is the US-based activist [Su Xiaokang](#), who proclaimed that the Chinese public supposedly "wants the U.S. to watch over activists, and is disappointed when Washington fails." Fellow US-based dissident [Teng Biao](#) is a CHRD director who has sarcastically boasted of how the Chinese communist party dubbed him a "[reactionary](#)."

CHRD's secretary is the American academic Perry Link, who has [built his public reputation](#) on winding up on the Chinese government's academic "[blacklist](#)." Link testified for the US [House Committee on Foreign Affairs](#) in 2014, claiming that the Chinese government is threatening academic freedom in the US.

In his congressional testimony, CHRD secretary Link insisted the US government should crack down on the Chinese government's Confucius Institute organization and instead fund its own pro-US Chinese-language programs. Link characterized Chinese-language programs as a potential American weapon against the Chinese communist party, arguing they could "very arguably do more to blunt the CPC's advance than the [B-2 Spirit Bomber] airplane could."

These are some of the pro-US, anti-Chinese government figures who lead the Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders.

Otherwise, there is very little publicly available information about CHRD. It appears to largely be the brainchild of its international director, Renee Xia, an opposition activist who has publicly called for the US government to impose [sanctions](#) on Chinese officials under the Magnitsky Act.

Support for the "non violence advocate" who loves America's wars

CHRD's founder, Xia, was a [strong supporter](#) of the imprisoned hard-right neoconservative Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, and she campaigned years for his release.

An archived version of the group's website shows that as far back as [2010](#), CHRD was vociferously advocating on behalf of Liu, while likening the Chinese government to Nazi Germany.

While Liu Xiaobo became a cause celebre of the Western liberal intelligensia, he was a [staunch supporter of colonialism](#), a fan of the most blood-soaked US military campaigns,

and a hardcore libertarian.

As writers Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong reported in *The Guardian* in 2010, Liu led numerous US government-funded right-wing organizations that advocated mass privatization and the Westernization of China. He also expressed openly racist views against the Chinese.

“To choose Westernisation is to choose to be human,” Liu insisted, lamenting that traditional Chinese culture had made its population “wimpy, spineless, and fucked up.”

While CHRD described Liu as an “advocate of non-violence,” he practically worshiped President George W. Bush and strongly supported the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq, as well as the war in Afghanistan. “Non-violence advocate” Liu was even a fan of America’s wars in Korea and Vietnam, which [killed millions of civilians](#).

CHRD’s [most recent China report](#) — the one cited by Reuters and other outlets to give credence to the allegations of Uyghur re-education camps — further highlights the organization’s links to Washington and compromised impartiality.

Most sources on the Uyghur “camps” story are US government-linked

The most-cited source in the CHRD report, accounting for more than one-fifth of the 101 references, is Radio Free Asia (RFA), a news agency created by the US government. Along with Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio y Televisión Martí, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Radio Free Asia is operated by the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), a federal agency of the US government under the supervision of the State Department. [Describing its work](#) as “vital to U.S. national interests,” BBG’s [primary broadcasting standard](#) is to be “consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States.”

The near-total reliance on Washington-linked sources is characteristic of Western reporting on Uyghurs Muslims in China, and the country in general, which regularly features sensational headlines and allegations. In addition to CHRD and RFA, it is common for reports to cite the [World Uyghur Congress](#), an organization [funded by the NED](#). At a recent NED event, Grayzone editor [Max Blumenthal interviewed](#) World Uyghur Congress chairman Omer Kanat, who took credit for furnishing many of the claims of internment camps to Western media.

Another favorite congressional and mainstream media source for information about China is the [Jamestown Foundation](#), a neoconservative think tank founded during the height of the Cold War by Reagan administration personnel with the support of then-CIA Director William J. Casey. Former Jamestown board members include Dick Cheney and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The latest incident of misreporting by Reuters is part of a trend of increasingly hostile, Cold War-like coverage of China by the Western press that coincides with Washington’s push for conflict with Beijing. In a series of policy statements, the Trump administration has repeatedly identified the “threat” posed by “economic and military ascendance” of China, with Defense Secretary James Mattis declaring that “[Great Power competition](#), not terrorism, is now the primary focus of U.S. national security.”

Growing anxious about its diminishing global dominance, the United States seeks to forestall the rise of of an alternative node of international power. A longstanding component of US imperialism is the use of ostensibly impartial “civil society groups” and “think tanks” to promote narratives in the media supportive of US foreign policy goals. Often under the guise of “humanitarian concern,” such stories aim to stir up public outrage and weaponize it to advance imperial ambitions.

This time-tested program is at the heart of the intensifying campaign against China, and as the latest raft of bogus stories demonstrated, the corporate media is eager to play along.

*

Ajit Singh is a Canada-based writer, lawyer and activist. He tweets at @ajitxsingh.

Featured image is from the authors.

The original source of this article is [Grayzone Project](#)
Copyright © [Ben Norton](#) and [Ajit Singh](#), [Grayzone Project](#), 2018

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Ben Norton](#) and
[Ajit Singh](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca