



ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP

Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ethics & Sustainability in Fashion Evidence Session: Uighur Crisis

Wednesday 17th March 2021 (2 PM - 4 PM)

Video Call with Zoom Dial-in

Co-Chairs: Catherine West MP and Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey

Speakers:

- Dr. Kate Ferguson - Co-Executive Director and Head of Research and Policy at Protection Approaches
- Louisa Greve - Director of Global Advocacy at Uyghur Human Rights Project
- Christina Hajagos-Clausen - Textile and Garment Industry Director at IndustriALL Global Union
- Penelope Kyritsis - Director of Strategic Research at Worker Rights Consortium
- Rahima Mahmut - UK Project Director at World Uyghur Congress

Overview of Session:

Fashion Roundtable is seeking evidence for their policy paper on "Cleaning Up Fashion." The session will focus on worker exploitation and human rights abuses in Xinjiang and what the international community, UK Government and the fashion and textiles industries can do to mitigate suffering in the region and minimise complicity.

Item	Length	Time
1. Introduction	5 mins	10:00
<i>Introduction by Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey (Co-Chair of the APPG for Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion).</i>		
2. Rahima Mahmut, UK Project Director at World Uyghur Congress	15 mins	10:05
What is happening in Xinjiang?: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ms. Mahmut offers some context on the current situation in East Turkestan and the work she has done in the United Kingdom.- Ms. Mahmut detailed first hand accounts of the suffering she heard from individuals when she was working as an interpreter or journalist.- The United Kingdom has made very little headway in addressing the issues in East Turkestan which have existed for much longer than the current media interest.		

- Many artists and creatives are targeted in the campaign and 500,000 Uyghurs are working in cotton fields and factories alongside the internment camps. There are also extensive reports of youths being moved away from their families to other parts of China.
- Explains that the Uyghurs in the UK do not feel safe and recounts how a student was recently summoned to the embassy.
- There is enough information to act - the question now is if the UK will.

3. Christina Hajagos-Clausen, Textile and Garment Industry Director at IndustriALL Global Union

15 mins

10:20

Xinjiang, Cotton, and the Global Textiles Industry:

- IndustriALL Global Union represents 50 million workers and has 600,000 sectoral federations. Within the textiles and garment industries, they have 190 affiliated trade unions. The foundation aims to amplify workers' voices, protect workers and institute change in industries.
- Legislation is necessary as brands continue to source from Xinjiang, with many claiming not to know where their materials originate. In this instance, the complexity of the supply chain and lack of transparency is not an excuse. That Xinjiang produces 80% of China's cotton is well documented and the USDA estimates that 75% of China's exports are likely from Xinjiang. China accounts for over 22% of the world's total cotton production, a vast majority of which was produced in Xinjiang.
 - In 2019-2020, roughly 70% of cotton spun to yarn in China originated in Xinjiang.
- China exports cotton fabric to over 120 countries, accounting for 1/3 of the global trade. This fabric ends up in key garment production states such as Bangladesh, Vietnam and the Philippines.
- Clearly, there is a large link between forced labour in Xinjiang and the global textile industry.

4. Louisa Greve, Director of Global Advocacy at Uyghur Human Rights Project

15 mins

10:35

An International Response: A Path Forward for the International Community:

- The Uyghur Human Rights project strives to amplify Uyghur voices from around the world.
- Highlights difficulties with the term "Xinjiang" and recommends using 'the Uyghur homeland' or East Turkestan.
- Whilst the number of people interned in the camps in China is unknown, it is estimated to be several million. Slides shown also reveal the extent of the camps and how much they have been developed in a short period of time. Particularly striking was the quick growth of the Dabancheng camp, which now has the capacity to hold an estimated 70,000 people.
- The destruction and desecration of religious and cultural sites was detailed, and an estimated 35% of mosques have been destroyed and 30% have been damaged since 2017.
- There is an advanced technological surveillance system in place which utilises facial recognition systems, cameras, police checkpoints and a sophisticated policing app called the Integrated Joint Operations Platform (IJOP)
 - The utilisation of phones and technology should be a consideration of the UK parliament as it amounts to complicity in genocide and forced labour.
- Measures that the US has taken:
 - Human Rights sanctions
 - Import and export bans
 - Visa bans on officials

- Supply Chain Business Advisory issued by US Departments containing risks and considerations for businesses with supply chain exposure to entities engaged in forced labour in Xinjiang.
- Determination of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity
- There are pending bills on Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention and Uyghur Human Rights Protection
- The U.S.A and Canada have initiated legislation but the UK are far behind.

5. Dr. Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director and Head of Research and Policy at Protection Approaches

15 mins

10:50

Domestic Action: Policies and Legislation the UK Government can Introduce to Mitigate Suffering in Xinjiang:

- Protection Approaches was formed to transform how identity based violence was seen and understood in order to transform how we seek to prevent it.
- Research interest looks into how states like the UK can predict, approach and better deal with mass atrocities.
- How the UK currently deals with mass atrocities:
 - The UK still has yet to properly replicate commitments it makes repeatedly on the international stage within national policy and civil service infrastructure. Part of why the U.S has done so is the creation of the Atrocities Early Warning Taskforce - a mechanism that brings together parts of the government that assesses how policy can be made to best protect those at risk of mass atrocities.
 - The UK has no formal policy on preventing genocide or combating identity based violence and widespread discrimination abroad. Dr. Ferguson believes that policy is informed by a poor understanding of where these manifestations of violence originate and how the UK can leverage its instruments to prevent atrocities.
 - Acknowledges that this Government is making a greater effort, and recognises the good in the publication of the National Approach to Mass Atrocities in 2019.
 - Dr. Ferguson believes it is "highly unlikely" that any officials in Beijing have had training in atrocity attention, nor have they been instructed on the UK's policy and position on the atrocities ongoing in Xinjiang.
 - This is not unique to China and atrocity prevention thinking and action is absent in UK's policy at almost all stages of prevention.
 - The Government argues that it doesn't need a policy on atrocity prevention as it's approach to conflict prevention includes that. Yet, mass atrocities occur side-by-side with conflict, in conflict and in "peace time".
 - Highlights that the pursuit of a trade deal with China is irreconcilable with mitigating suffering in Xinjiang.
 - In the case of Xinjiang, the UK Government failed. It should have responded much sooner and better.
- What the UK can do:
 - The Government should make a determination of genocide in Xinjiang
 - The UK should announce a package using the tools the UK already has at its disposal to get a sanctions regime going which we can implement after leaving the EU.
 - Halt deportations to China

- Announce an inquiry into how the profits from genocide and rights abuses in China are passed through the United Kingdom.
- Invite Uighur representatives to hold discussions with the UK Government.
- Give officials working on, with, and in China atrocity prevention training.
- The UK should announce an atrocity prevention policy.
- These remarks are primarily about the UK state but businesses can also elect to adopt atrocity prevention. It is essentially a system of protection which considers how to mitigate the risk to populations of facing human rights crimes.

6. Penelope Kyritsis, Director of Strategic Research at Worker Rights Consortium

15 mins

11:05

Are state-centric approaches enough?: Culpability and Responsibility in Private Enterprise:

- Worker Rights Consortium have been researching forced labour in Xinjiang since 2018 and have come to the conclusion that corporations must exit the region in all areas of their supply chains.
- This forced labour is systematic and state sponsored - carried out for economic profit and social and political control.
- Traditional labour rights due-diligence measures cannot be used in Xinjiang as it is very challenging to talk to labourers. Managers will not admit malpractice to auditors.
- In most countries, the worst risk that garment workers will face if they tell the truth about their labour conditions is that they will be unemployed. In Xinjiang, the risks involve incarceration, the separation of families and potentially torture and death.
- It is practically impossible for a corporation to source from Xinjiang without using forced labour. Every organisation who has stayed or continued to source from Xinjiang complicit in the crime of forced labour and violates the UNGP on business and human rights.
- Whilst the crimes in Xinjiang are visible, a vast number of global corporations continue to source goods from the region and the scope of the problem is large. This issue affects every corporation who produces cotton garments and the complicity is then extended to consumers.
- Actions for brands to undertake to cease complicity in rights abuses.
 - Cease sourcing from facilities in Xinjiang
 - Require suppliers and sub-suppliers to exclude cotton from Xinjiang at all levels of the supply chain.
 - Require suppliers in China to decline participation in the Government scheme to move workers from Xinjiang
 - Cut ties with any Chinese companies that are implicated in forced labour.
- The problem of corporate complicity and Xinjiang forced labour extends far beyond the garment and fashion industries.
- If companies will not end their complicity with forced labour, Government must utilise their policy and legislative tools to end that complicity. That these rules must be adequately enforced.
- The point is raised that there is a high risk that the UK could become a market utilised by corporations to circumvent stringent measures in other states. Highlighted that the Modern Slavery Act does not have enough teeth to prevent this.

- There is an urgent need for transparent customs data in the UK, as it is currently very difficult for civil society organisations to identify who sources from Xinjiang or from companies who are complicit in the crime of forced labour.

7. Questions and Comments chaired by Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey

30 mins

11:20

Q: How might the Modern Slavery Act be amended and utilised to mitigate suffering in Xinjiang?

Dr Kate Ferguson:

- A problem with any UK responses that have emerged is that they are not coordinated nor are they sufficiently resourced. The UK would do well to utilise this moment of the integrated review to synthesise sporadic responses which have emerged to provide more impetus behind proscriptions.
- The Modern Slavery does need reformed and strengthened, but maybe the bigger question is about political will and resources, which is where these agendas which sound good on paper have previously fallen short.

Penelope Kyritsis:

- There need to be clear consequences for those who profit from and benefit from forced labour and human rights abuses.

Christina Hajagos-Clausen;

- Highlights the importance of transparency and pushing industries toward public disclosure of supply chains. Whilst the Modern Slavery Act is a good start, it is important it is reviewed and strengthened.

Q: What do panelists think about the possible use of a mandatory Human Rights due diligence law, along the lines of the French model, in making businesses take action for these kinds of situations?

Christina Hajagos-Clausen:

- In favour of mandatory due diligence because there have been a lot of voluntary initiatives in this sector which have been insufficient.
- Highlights work she has done in the past to pool work of the brands, and the benefits that pooling resources to undertake due diligence could offer brands.

Dr Kate Ferguson:

- In principle the idea is sound however doubt is cast on the political willingness to enact such legislation
- Suggests that there are practical things that the Government can do. For example, providing better guidance for firms who hope to do businesses in states where there are human rights abuses.

Penelope Kyritsis:

- The reason that Government action is needed is, thus far, brands and retailers have not been upholding their codes of conduct nor acting in a morally responsible way. Left to their own devices, brands will not always voluntarily take the actions necessary to uphold human rights.

Q: What next steps should be made on behalf of the state and fashion industry to mitigate suffering in Xinjiang?

Louisa Greve:

- The private sector believe that they can ride out the bad publicity. Parliament should play a greater role in making sure that companies know that they are required to act on these issues.
- It is important to remember that due diligence by companies in place failed until watchdogs and activists highlighted what was happening in Xinjiang.

8. Closing by Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey

5 mins

11:50

Closing remarks and acknowledgements, end Zoom meeting by 16:00.

Closure of session by Baroness Lola Young of Hornsey, Co-Chairs of the APPG for Ethics and Sustainability In Fashion. Panellists are also invited to submit written evidence and feedback to the APPG.