

China hails human rights progress amid calls to close detention camps

China has pledged to eradicate poverty in rural areas by 2020 during a scheduled United Nations review of the country's human rights record, amid concerns over the alleged arbitrary detention of religious and ethnic minorities there.

At the session in Geneva on Monday, which is part of the [UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review](#) process of all UN Member States, China's head of delegation and Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Le Yucheng, said that "four decades of economic reform and opening up" had brought about "remarkable progress" in human rights.

Mr. Le's words are spoken by an interpreter:

"Nearly 1.4 billion people have shaken off poverty and are now enjoying a moderately prosperous life...we established the largest education, social security and healthcare systems in the world, moreover, we are promoting ecological conservation and taking firm steps to control pollution...By 2020 all the rural population living below the current poverty line are expected to escape poverty."

Under the review system, all UN Member States can participate in the dialogue with the country under review.

No less than 150 did so – the highest number to date in this latest [UPR cycle](#).

They included Australia, which welcomed progress in "some economic and social rights" in China, before calling for an end to the detention of Uighurs in Xinjiang, "and other Muslim groups".

In addition, Australia urged to allow the UN and journalists into the western province to investigate the rights of minorities.

The status of the Uighurs and other minorities was a theme picked up by more than a dozen other States including France, Germany, Switzerland, in addition to the United States, which recommended the abolition of all internment camps and the immediate release of "hundreds and thousands – possibly millions" of people.

In response, China's delegation explained that the Xianjiang centres in question offered alternatives to terrorism and extremism.



UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferre

A general view of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council in session.

Vocational training is offered free of charge there, along with help learning languages and combating extremism for those “who have been lured into terrorist activities”, China’s representative insisted, adding that the approach “is nothing to do with religion”.

Potential threats to individual liberties in China were also highlighted by Austria, which asked the People’s Republic for clarification that organ removal was carried out with the “free, informed and specific consent of the donor, without exception”.

The United Kingdom, meanwhile, after welcoming progress on economic rights and reductions in death penalty offences – an issue raised by at least seven Member States – warned that political and civil rights had deteriorated, including freedoms of assembly, expression and religious belief, including in Hong Kong.

In further remarks, China’s head of delegation Mr. Le insisted that his country had successfully promoted human rights and had accepted 204 out of 252 recommendations made at its last country review at the UN in 2013.

Mr. Le also said that an invitation had been extended to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet to visit China, as well as to other independent experts that report back to the Human Rights Council, including the Special Rapporteur for people with disabilities.

On the issue of religious and personal expression in Tibet, Member States heard that the autonomous region and its 46,000 nuns and monks experienced no restrictions, while the autonomous region also had television and radio in Tibetan and Mandarin.

Rejecting what it described as attempts to politicize human rights and

question its territorial integrity, Mr. Le insisted that China's achievements showed there is "more than just one path towards modernization and every country may choose its own path of development and model of human rights protection in the context of its national circumstances and its people's needs".

Caravan of Mothers of Missing Migrants kick off a global migration search movement

For the first time ever, the so-called Caravan of Mothers of Missing Migrants – who, since 2005, have crossed Mexican territory each year to raise awareness and search for lost loved ones – was joined by mothers from other continents, building a transnational movement to underscore that one death or one disappearance is one too many.

Over 40 mothers and other family members from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, Senegal, Mauritania, Tunisia and Algeria shared their stories, built ties and exchanged experiences on searching for the whereabouts of their children.

Rosa Idalia Jiménez has been looking for her son since 2013, fleeing poverty and violence in his home country at age 14 for a safer, better life.

Rosa shared her story at the first-ever Global Summit of Mothers of Missing Migrants, which took place in Mexico City from 2 to 4 November.

The disappearance of a loved one, no matter the context, leaves a family mourning, or waiting for news. Caught between grief and hope, their search for information can take years or a lifetime, pointed out IOM.

"Coming together around such tragic circumstances, the mothers can share their stories of pain, grief, and, above all, endless love for their missing children," IOM said.

Along with mothers, sisters, brothers, fathers and grandmothers participated, each wearing around their necks photos of their missing relative. Each hoping that someone will recognize their loved one and be able to help find them.



IOM Photo

Nonetheless, they persist.

By Sunday, participants had mapped out a plan to globalize the struggle of families searching for missing migrants, collaboratively drafting a manifesto that sets out the mothers' demands for truth and justice for their missing children.

They agreed on a list of actions, which include joint advocacy campaigns, regional initiatives and an online coordination platform – marking the beginning of a global movement.

The summit was convened by the *Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano* and the *Italian Carovani Migranti*, two non-governmental organization that assist mothers and families of missing migrants in Central America and Italy, respectively.

[‘Time is of the essence’ for refugees on Greek islands – UN agency](#)

Authorities in Greece must take urgent steps to address the [“abhorrent”](#) humanitarian situation for around 11,000 asylum-seekers on the islands of Samos and Lesbos, the UN refugee agency warned on Tuesday.

With winter approaching and more refugees arriving, the agency is reiterating its call for emergency measures to alleviate the strain on local shelters.

In Samos, the Reception and Identification Centre (RIC) currently hosts around 4,000 people, six times its capacity of 650. Some 2,000 asylum-seekers on Lesbos have resorted to sheltering in a nearby olive grove as the island's RIC is overcrowding with 6,500 people – three times its design.

New arrivals have been forced to buy flimsy tents from local stores, which offer little protection from cold weather without basic services like electricity, running water or toilets, according to the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights \(UNHCR\)](#).

The number of broken facilities has resulted in open sewage near people's tents, and a rat population that is thriving amid uncollected waste.

Urging that transfers to the mainland be speeded up for the 4,000 people eligible to go, the agency noted that though the Government has planned an additional 6,000 mainland accommodations, more than 11,000 people have arrived on the islands in the last three months – outpacing departures.

Many come in need of urgent medical assistance, shelter and information, but the reception services and procedures are falling short of demands. A single doctor per shift provides medical attention to the entire population, leaving less urgent cases unattended, the agency reported.

Deteriorating weather is likely to exacerbate the need for shelter, already at a premium, as asylum-seekers will more urgently need space within RIC borders to avoid freezing temperatures, like the ones that killed a number of refugees and migrants [last winter](#).

Conditions on neighboring islands like Chios and Kos are only marginally better, with centres at double their capacity. Only at Lepida RIC, on Leros Island, is the facility working within capacity.

UNHCR has assisted 5,300 asylum-seekers transfer to the mainland since the beginning of September, and is providing some 400 containers to boost Greece's hosting capacity, as well as delivering some 19,000 relief items to the islands, including winter kits, sleeping bags and hygiene items.

The agency is calling on the European Commission and Member States to continue preparations for emergency support and relocation measures at the request of the Greek Government.

[Taliban-led violence during recent](#)

[Afghan polls leaves record high numbers of civilians dead – UN](#)

The Taliban's campaign of violence and intimidation during last month's parliamentary elections in Afghanistan was the deadliest for civilians in years, a [report](#) by the United Nations mission in the country, [UNAMA](#), revealed on Tuesday.

The report, titled *2018 Elections Violence*, shows that on 20 October and over the following days when delayed polling took place, the UN recorded 435 civilian casualties – 56 killed and 379 injured.

Almost nine in 10 casualties happened on 20 October itself, making it the election day with the highest number of civilians killed and injured since the UN began its systematic documentation of civilian casualties in 2009.

Shortly before polling centres opened on that day, the Taliban stated on Twitter that all election sites in the country would be under attack, cautioning citizens not to get involved in the elections process. Following the opening of the polling centres, UNAMA began receiving reports of attacks targeting polling centres, with the intensity of the attacks increasing throughout the day.

The report notes that, according to the Independent Election Commission, of the approximately 8.8 million Afghans registered to vote, only 4.2 million cast a ballot, showing that large numbers were unwilling or unable to do so.

“Those who made efforts to vote,” the report reads, “did so in defiance of an orchestrated campaign of abductions, threats, intimidation and harassment of voters and election workers carried out by the Taliban in the weeks and months leading up to the elections”.

“These incidents, taken together with a series of public statements made by the Taliban on the elections, reveal a deliberate campaign intended to disrupt and undermine the electoral process, and deprive Afghan citizens of their right to freely participate in the political process without fear.”

The report documents the numerous attacks by non-State armed groups, mainly the Taliban, in populated civilian areas, including attacks against schools, clinics and mosques used as polling centres. These attacks were mainly carried out using rockets, grenades and mortars, as well as improvised explosive devices. Shooting during ground fighting also occurred.

More than 100 children and over 50 women were killed or injured in the violence.

Overall, this is the highest level of election-related civilian harm compared to the four previous elections held in the country, especially when factoring in the casualties counted in the earlier months, since voter registration in

April and throughout the campaigning period.

“The Taliban’s actions forced many ordinary Afghans to choose between exercising their right to participate in the political process and risking their own safety,” UNAMA said, noting that unreasonably restricting someone’s right to take part in public affairs is a human rights violation.

[ISIL’s ‘legacy of terror’ in Iraq: UN verifies over 200 mass graves](#)

Investigators have uncovered more than 200 mass graves containing thousands of bodies in areas of Iraq formerly controlled by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), according to a United Nations human rights report out on Tuesday.

The [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR) and the [UN Assistance Mission in Iraq](#) (UNAMI) [said](#) the 202 mass grave sites were found in governorates of Nineveh, Kirkuk, Salahuddin and Anbar in the north and western parts of the country – but there may be many more.

In the joint report, *Unearthing Atrocities*, the UN entities said the evidence gathered from the sites “will be central to ensuring credible investigations, prosecutions and convictions” in accordance with international due process standards.

Ján Kubiš, the top UN official in Iraq and the head of UNAMI, [said](#) that the mass grave sites “are a testament to harrowing human loss, profound suffering and shocking cruelty.”

“Determining the circumstances surrounding the significant loss of life will be an important step in the mourning process for families and their journey to secure their rights to truth and justice,” he added.

These graves contain the remains of those mercilessly killed for not conforming to ISIL’s twisted ideology and rule, including ethnic and religious minorities – *UN rights chief Bachelet*

Between June 2014 and December 2017, ISIL seized large areas of Iraq, leading a campaign of widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, “acts that may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and possible genocide,” the report states.

Traumatized families have the 'right to know'

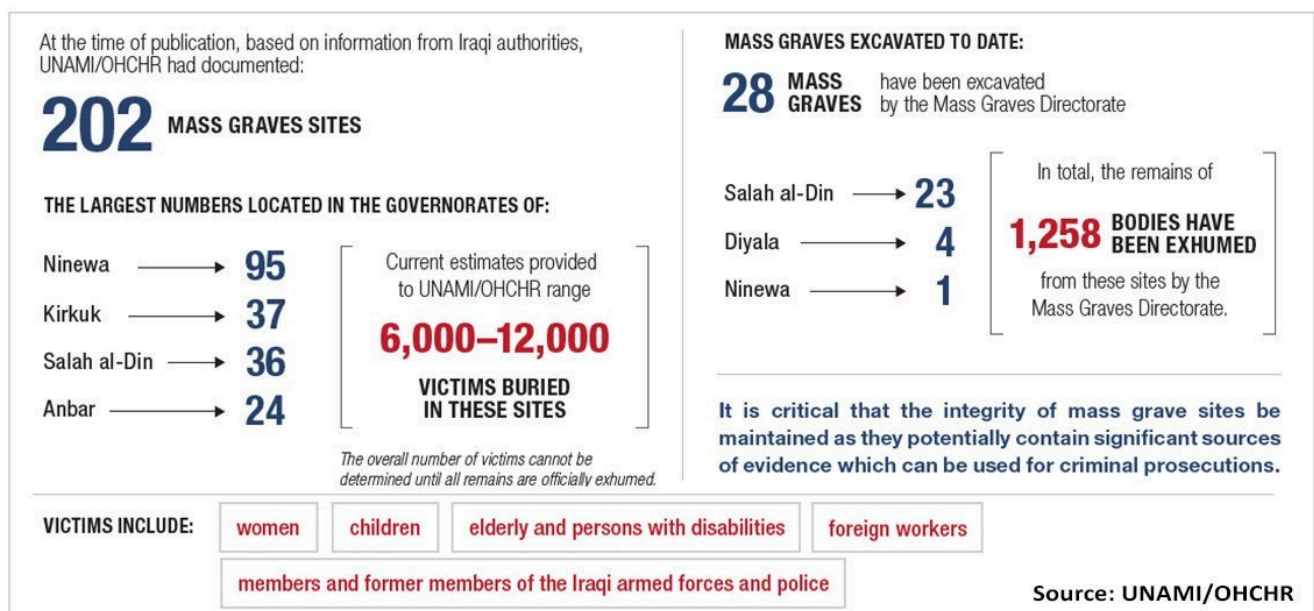
The UNAMI-OHCHR report also documents the “significant challenges” families of the missing face in trying to find the fate of their loved ones.

At present, they must report to more than five separate authorities, a process that is both time-consuming and frustrating for traumatized families.

Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [underscored](#) that the families “have the right to know.”

“ISIL’s horrific crimes in Iraq have left the headlines but the trauma of the victims’ families endures, with thousands of women, men and children still unaccounted for,” she said.

“Their families have the right to know what happened to their loved ones. Truth, justice and reparations are critical to ensuring a full reckoning for the atrocities committed by ISIL.”



Source: UNAMI-OHCHR report

The report documents 202 mass grave sites across Iraq, amid fears that there could be more.

Victim-centred approach needed

Among its recommendations, the report calls for a victim-centred approach and a transitional justice process that is established in consultation with, and accepted by, Iraqis, particularly those from affected communities.

It also urges a multidisciplinary approach to the recovery operations, with the participation of experienced specialists, including weapons contamination and explosives experts and crime scene investigators.

Alongside, it also calls on the international community to provide resources

and technical support to efforts related to the exhumation, collection, transportation, storage and return of human remains to families, as well as their identification, particularly by helping strengthen the national Mass Graves Directorate.