

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".