

Disney Faces Heat for Co-Signing a Genocide

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Disney's live-action remake of *Mulan* has drawn yet another wave of criticism, this time for being partly filmed in Xinjiang, the region in China where an estimated 1 million Uighur (alt. spelling: Uighurs, Uyghur) Muslims have been detained in labor camps by the Chinese government.

Calls to boycott the film were already circulating after a tweet by the film's star, Liu Yifei, resurfaced in which she appeared to endorse police brutality in Hong Kong. Those calls have been bolstered after audiences noticed that in the film's closing credits, Disney thanked eight government entities in Xinjiang.

There is growing evidence that in these concentration camps, Uighurs are being subjected to human rights abuses, including torture, forced sterilization, and brainwashing. What's more, the coalition of human rights groups has found that many of the world's leading clothing brands get their cotton and yarn from the forced labor of 1.8 million Uighur and other Turkic and Muslim people in prison camps, factories, farms, and internment camps in Xinjiang.

If this news is new to you, here's a brief explainer of the situation.

Firstly, who are the Uighurs?

Uighurs are ethnically Turkic Muslims, and there are about 11 million of them in western China. In recent decades, there has been a mass migration of Han Chinese (China's ethnic majority) to Xinjiang, and the Uighurs feel their culture and livelihoods are under threat.

What's happening in Xinjiang?

The government crackdown on the Uighur people is largely believed to be part of a larger campaign by Chinese leader Xi Jinping to promote Han nationalism as a unifying force. The Han are China's ethnic majority.

Since 2017, over 1 million Uyghurs have been detained in “re-education” camps (labor camps) in Xinjiang, China, and are forced to work in factories that are said to mainly supply the apparel and textile sector.

The government insists that the camps are necessary for preventing religious extremism and terrorism, however, leaked Chinese government documents reveal that people can be sent to a detention facility for simply “wearing a veil” or growing “a long beard.”

What does China say?

China continues to deny the existence of internment camps. Instead, officials say people in Xinjiang are receiving “vocational training” to combat the “three evil forces” in the region — terrorism, extremism, and separatism.

Is it a genocide?

Two recent events indicate that what is happening in Xinjiang is genocide.

The first is an authoritative report documenting the systematic sterilization of Uighur women. The second took place in July this year when the U.S. Customs and Border Protection seized 13 tons worth of products made from human hair that was suspected of being forcibly removed from Uighurs imprisoned in concentration camps.

These latest reports, alongside survivor testimonies, detail the use of electrocution, waterboarding, repeated beatings, stress positions, and injections of unknown substances, and draw chilling parallels to tactics used by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

The testimonies serve as evidence of the Chinese government's deliberate and systematic attempt to eliminate the Uighur people, which falls within the definition of genocide according to the Genocide Convention (of which China is a signatory).

How culpable is the fashion industry?

In a report published by [The Guardian](#) in July, Chloe Cranston, business and human rights manager at Anti-Slavery International, said, “There is a high likelihood that every high street and luxury brand runs the risk of being linked to what is happening to the Uighur people.”

However, it’s difficult for brands to do due diligence (in terms of tracking labor practices behind the materials sourced in the region, for example) and thus be transparent because Uighur people face danger if they speak out.

“Forced laborers in the Uighur region face vicious retaliation if they tell the truth about their circumstances,” said Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium, in the same report. He added, “An apparel brand that claims to know, with confidence, that all the farms and factories it uses in the region are free of forced labor is either deeply cynical or misinformed.”

In April, [a report](#) found that brands including Muji, Uniqlo, H&M, and IKEA were selling products in the UK containing cotton and yarn from the [Xinjiang region](#). H&M and IKEA have since said that they [would stop buying cotton from the region](#), however, H&M later admitted that it had an indirect relationship with one yarn producer operating in the region but said it was reviewing the relationship.

Muji confirmed that it continues to use cotton yarn from Xinjiang but denies that its cotton and yarn are connected to forced labor. A Uniqlo spokesperson said that none of its products are manufactured in the region.

What can you do?

The Uighur Human Rights Project has outlined seven ways you can help the situation in Xinjiang. This list includes contact details for Senators and representatives who can co-sponsor the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act; outlines a range of campaigns urging brands to end complicity in the forced labor; links to petitions and donation sites; and even humanitarian volunteer opportunities. You can find all that information and more [here](#).

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