



World Uyghur Congress

WUC STATEMENT AT 6TH SESSION OF THE UN FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

Thank you Mr/Ms President/Chairperson,

The World Uyghur Congress (WUC) welcomes the list of recommendations presented by the Independent Expert for this Session of the Forum on Minority Issues. The recommendations reflect the hard work undertaken by the Independent Expert to ensure that the needs of religious minorities are suitably addressed through a broad, holistic approach, affording better understanding of this issue not only to States, but also to civil society and non-state actors too.

This thematic could not have come at a more pertinent time in view of the situation facing Uyghurs in China. Based upon this experience, we believe our following concrete, pragmatic and achievable suggestions will improve, complement and consolidate the existing recommendations.

We recommend:

1. That States establish a specially-mandated, independent ombudsman who can receive complaints of, and initiate investigations into, violations of the rights of religious minorities by both state and non-state actors. The ombudsman could hold an active role in developing and overseeing implementation of policy, programme, and legislation, and in identifying target areas, in collaboration with the local, regional and national governments, as well as with UN Special Procedures and Treaty Bodies. Religious minorities themselves could democratically elect the mandate holder so as to inspire confidence among them in the mandate. The WUC believes that this recommendation will ensure the realisation of the recommendations made in their entirety and the Declaration itself;
2. That States establish a special fund for religious minorities so they can establish and maintain, *inter alia*, their religious practices, education, travel within and outside the state to holy locations, and their places of worship;
3. That States establish a cohesive and complete set of guidelines and legislation for law enforcement officials and the judiciary respectively to ensure that human rights activists' work is not curtailed due to, *inter alia*, anti-terror legislation. Human rights defenders are vitally important for raising awareness and protecting religious minorities, yet there is no mention in the recommendations;
4. That States should permit and remove barriers on religious education conducted privately and in the home;
5. That religious minorities be able to appoint their own religious leaders, rather than those appointed by the state, which would help foster better confidence in inter-faith dialogue;
6. That the recommendations better reflect the link between religious minorities and other intersectional groups. It is important that such links are recognised as, for example, the

ethnic tensions during the past year in Xinjiang often contain elements resulting from a lack of religious freedom, which is interdependent upon the preservation of Uyghur culture, language, history and identity. All these violations can create a tinderbox of tensions which can erupt into both state and non-state violence;

7. That the recommendations make an explicit mention of the responsibility of the state to ensure that religious minorities are not subjected to state sponsored violence.

We look forward to working further with the Independent Expert on this issue, and indeed others, in the future, and again congratulate her on her great work.

Thank you.