

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 27, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 25000

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to express concern about reports that your administration is delaying the imposition of targeted sanctions against Chinese officials involved in human rights abuses against the Uyghur and central Asian Muslim population in Xinjiang in order to allow for the conclusion of bilateral trade negotiations.

On June 21, 2019, the *South China Morning Post* reported that Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin is delaying action on sanctions against Chinese officials due to concerns that sanctions would disrupt trade talks. According to the report, multiple agencies have come to an agreement on the sanctions package, and Uyghur advocacy organizations briefed on the matter have said sanctions are forthcoming.¹ However, despite broad agreement in the administration, senior State Department officials have noted that “the problem [of proceeding with the sanctions] is with Treasury.”² The *New York Times* similarly reported on May 4, 2019 that, according to three American officials, the United States “was on the verge of imposing sanctions on top Chinese individuals and companies but pulled back after some administration officials said doing so would jeopardize trade talks with Beijing.”³

When asked about these reports and whether the United States would raise human rights issues in the trade negotiations, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo responded by saying, “No. Human rights are going to be addressed, and we’ve done so. I’ve raised it in multiple conversations with my counterpart, their foreign minister, and with others.”⁴ Neither the Secretary’s comments nor any other statement from your administration has confirmed or denied

¹ Nectar Gan and Owen Churchill, *US sanctions over Xinjiang’s Uyghur internment camps are ‘ready to go’ except for Treasury hold-up due to trade war, sources say*, *South China Morning Post* (June 21, 2019), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3015441/us-sanctions-over-xinjiang-internment-camps-are-ready-go>

² Nectar Gan and Owen Churchill, *US sanctions over Xinjiang’s Uyghur internment camps are ‘ready to go’ except for Treasury hold-up due to trade war, sources say*, *South China Morning Post* (June 21, 2019), <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3015441/us-sanctions-over-xinjiang-internment-camps-are-ready-go>

³ Alan Rappeport and Edward Wong, *In Push for Trade Deal, Trump Administration Shelves Sanctions Over China’s Crackdown on Uighurs*, *N.Y. Times* (May 4, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/world/asia/trump-china-uighurs-trade-deal.html>.

⁴ *Interview With Margaret Brennan of CBS Face the Nation*, U.S. Department of State website (May 5, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2019/05/291495.htm>.

the recent report. In fact, *Bloomberg News* reported on June 21, 2019 that you had twice asked Vice President Pence to postpone a speech that was going to criticize China's ongoing abuses. You were reportedly concerned that criticism of the government's human rights record would have jeopardized trade talks and a G-20 summit meeting between you and Chinese President Xi Jinping.⁵

If accurate, the press reports are deeply troubling given the gravity of the situation. The State Department's most recent Country Reports on Human Rights characterized Beijing's treatment of the Uyghurs as arbitrary detention "in internment camps designed to erase religious and ethnic identities,"⁶ which prompted Secretary Pompeo to describe China as "in a league of its own when it comes to human rights violations."⁷ Human Rights Watch and other organizations have documented the Chinese government's use of surveillance technology, artificial intelligence, and mobile apps to closely monitor Uyghur and Central Asian minorities.⁸ Uyghur activist Rushan Abbas, who testified before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy on April 9, 2019 about her family's imprisonment in Xinjiang, has called for the United States to address the human rights abuses committed by Chinese officials.⁹ To make matters worse, the United Nations and other international observers have not been permitted to visit Xinjiang to gain additional information about these human rights abuses.¹⁰

Failing to address these egregious human rights violations weakens American moral leadership. Further, the lack of action by the U.S. government sends a signal to authoritarian governments throughout the region — and beyond — that they can operate with impunity and face no consequences from the United States. We strongly urge your administration to uphold fundamental human rights by moving expeditiously — and independently — to hold violators accountable.

Sincerely,

⁵ Jennifer Jacobs and Shawn Donnan, *Pence to Delay China Human-Rights Speech Ahead of Trump-Xi Talks*, Bloomberg Government (June 21, 2019).

⁶ *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: China (includes Tibet, Hong Kong, and Macau) – China*, U.S. Department of State website (March 13, 2019), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/china-includes-tibet-hong-kong-and-macau-china/>.

⁷ *Remarks on the Release of the 2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, U.S. Department of State website (March 13, 2019), <https://usoas.usmission.gov/remarks-on-the-release-of-the-2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

⁸ *China's Algorithms of Repression*, Human Rights Watch (May 1, 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/05/01/chinas-algorithms-repression/reverse-engineering-xinjiang-police-mass-surveillance>.

⁹ Alan Rappeport and Edward Wong, *In Push for Trade Deal, Trump Administration Shelves Sanctions Over China's Crackdown on Uighurs*, N.Y. Times (May 4, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/04/world/asia/trump-china-uighurs-trade-deal.html>.

¹⁰ Stephanie Nebehay, *Bachelet presses China for U.N. access to Xinjiang's Uighurs*, Reuters (Mar. 6, 2019), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-xinjiang-un/bachelet-presses-china-for-un-access-to-xinjiangs-uighurs-idUSKCN1QN12B>.

Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand

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United States Senator

Bernard Sanders

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Bob Casey, Jr.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator