

Human Dignity
Eleven Defenders of Human Rights
at Close Range

Arne Peter Braaksma



Dedication

To those who dream of a better life in a better world.

To those who, understanding such dreams, speak truth to power.

To those in power, entrusted to make such dreams come true.

About the author

Arne Peter Braaksma, author of *Nine Lives: Making the Impossible Possible*, has worked as an editor in Britain and as a communication adviser and corporate journalist in the Netherlands. From Asian countries he contributed to various public and corporate magazines. This caused him to focus on human rights, the environment and (corporate) social responsibility. *Human Dignity* is a sequel to *Nine Lives* and presents stories of people whose lives reflect Gandhi's notion 'you must be the change you wish to see in the world.'



Table of Contents

Taking the plunge	7
 ASIA / EURASIA	
Rebiya Kadeer, East Turkestan Defending Uyghurs against Chinese oppression	15
Soe Myint, Burma Highlighting the struggle of the people	41
Martin Macwan, India Advocating the rights of the Untouchables	75
Khassan Baiev, Chechnya Operating on friends and enemies while under fire	107
 AFRICA	
Aminatou Haidar, Western Sahara Fighting superpowers for independence and recognition	139
Samuel Kofi Woods, Liberia Building up a scarred country as an activist and reformer	177
Vuyiseka Dubula, South Africa Serving health to the disadvantaged in the fight against Aids	205
 THE AMERICAS	
Maria Gunnoe, United States Taking a stand against environmental destruction	233

Pablo Fajardo, Ecuador	267
Fighting for justice against an oil giant in the Amazon jungle	
Liliana Ortega, Venezuela	299
Providing legal aid and education in a land of impunity	
Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Nunavut	325
Safeguarding the future of the Arctic and its people	
Sources and further reading	357
Colophon	370

Taking the plunge

‘In reading the history of nations, we find that, like individuals, they have their whims and their peculiarities; their seasons of excitement and recklessness, when they care not what they do. We find that whole communities suddenly fix their minds upon one object, and go mad in its pursuit; that millions of people become simultaneously impressed with one delusion, and run after it, till their attention is caught by some new folly more captivating than the first. We see one nation suddenly seized, from its highest to its lowest members, with a fierce desire for military glory; another as suddenly becoming crazed upon a religious scruple; and neither of them recovering its senses until it has shed rivers of blood and sowed a harvest of groans and tears, to be reaped by its posterity.’

Charles Mackay in his Preface to *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (first published in 1841; edition of 1852).

Throw a stone into a lake – into the history of any nation. Splash! The moment it plunges through the surface and disappears from sight, only the ripples speak of its passage. The cause is gone, but the effects are still lapping onto the shore. Now, what would happen if you could reverse this? Push back the ripples, forcing the stone out of the water. You would be holding the cause of the ripples in the palm of your hand again. By analogy, the contributors to this book are experiencing ripple effects, often acutely aware of the stone that caused them, but seeking to cause waves that move in the opposite direction.

Rather than piecing their perspectives together from afar, I decided to collect them first-hand, because these remarkable men and women are the living library of events that are unfolding as we speak. Obtaining stories straight from the horse’s mouth offers greater insights than breaking news.

The causes of most people in this volume however are obscured by those who have opposing interests and spin facts into fable. But in the end, the truth will out, because it is more robust and enduring. Robust are also the endeavors of the contributors. Confronted with great challenges, they speak truth to power and tackle head-on what stands in their path. In this book, not fame, but the nobility of the cause is the determining factor. The advocates of these causes present us with testimonies that are authentic, constructive and significant beyond the borders of their own region. Where truth is suppressed, they speak up. Where all hope seems lost, they persevere, sometimes finding the last straw is nothing other than themselves.

Together, these testimonies form an uncommon odyssey across four continents. It offers rare, unpolished impressions of current affairs and the status quo with regard to human rights. Some chapters dive straight into regional issues, while others have a decidedly global focus. Not being eyewitnesses ourselves, how are we to grasp world events in these 11, let alone 217 countries and territories around the world? Who could? One thing however applies to all these stories: the local illustrates the global. The Inuit story illustrates global warming. The Sahrawi story illustrates that totalitarianism is alive and well. The Ecuadorian story illustrates why corporate social responsibility must be taken seriously – all the way to the courthouse.

Each of the contributors demonstrates bravery in the face of issues bigger than themselves. Thus, these chapters offer uplifting examples of staying true to one's beliefs and a feeling of hope and shared humanity. Last but not least, they reflect that an ordinary person can accomplish extraordinary things and can succeed against all odds in struggles that could have been yours or mine. The immediacy and the inside-out telling take you beyond the threshold of mere facts to the relevance of these struggles for all world citizens.

On my way to one of the contributors, an American customs officer asked:

‘Business?’

‘Yes.’

‘What kind of business?’

‘I’m a writer on human rights issues.’

‘Human rights? In the US?’

‘Yes.’

‘Why don’t you go to Chad?’

‘Chad?’

‘Or Sierra Leone. To write about blood diamonds and child labor.’

‘Well, I might, one day.’

‘Or China. So many human rights violations.’

‘Yes, plenty of opportunity.’

‘So, what brings you to the US?’

‘Writing about human rights.’

‘Human rights? In the US?’

‘I’m here for the convention of Appalachia Rising this weekend and the march on the White House on Monday.’

‘Appalachia?’

‘Yes, Appalachia. There are serious pollution issues there as a consequence of mountaintop removal mining. The waterways, the groundwater and the ground itself are polluted and the people there are paying a heavy price for the way the coal is mined.’

‘And that’s a human rights issue?’

‘Yes, it is.’

A pause and a frown.

‘Well, welcome to the US.’

‘Thank you.’

The fact that environmental pollution is not seen as a human rights issue is quite a universal misconception, as three of the chapters on the Americas demonstrate. Perhaps it only hits home when your husband dies from leukemia due to ChevronTexaco’s oil spills in the Amazon, when your child suffers asthma in the Appalachian coalfields or when you cannot breastfeed your baby in Nunavut due to the toxins that blew over from industries thousands of miles away. More tangible than that the impact cannot be. Why is it so easy to

grasp the connectivity of the internet and not that of the wind and the water? 'What you do to the land,' says Inuit elder Mariano Aupilaarjuk, 'the land will do to you.'

Aware or not, we always do something to the land and to each other. But this sense of connectivity is losing ground and so is the nobility of spirit that should go hand in hand with it. In 2010, the North Korean navy killed two South Koreans. Within a week, the issue was brought before the Security Council. Demonstrations in Egypt during the Arab Spring triggered responses from around the world almost daily. Contrast this with two stories in this volume: the Sahrawis, who have been suffering at the hands of the Moroccans and the Uyghurs, who have been suffering at the hands of the Chinese. For decades. Who heeds their voices?

This inaction may be due to the fact that news goes through a sieve. Spin doctors or 'perception managers' present the catastrophe in Iraq as a 'liberation' or appoint a man co-responsible for two wars in the Middle East as a 'peace envoy'. Language itself suffers so much 'collateral damage' that it wears out the key for the inverted comma. At the receiving end of such delusions, Iraqis, Sahrawis and Uyghurs experience real damage. There is nothing 'collateral' about it. As Mackay says: 'Popular delusions began so early, spread so widely, and have lasted so long, that instead of two or three volumes, fifty would scarcely suffice to detail their history.' Indeed. In other words: We get the news, but we don't get it. We dip in and out of a world that blurs the distinction between true and false. 'We should always be disposed to believe that that which appears white is really black, if the hierarchy of the Church so decides,' said Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century founder of the Jesuit Order. He clearly didn't intend his words as a warning, but as an admonition to follow the precepts of the Church. A warning it is nonetheless. Four centuries later, George Orwell merged Ignatius' black and white:

'The keyword here is blackwhite. Like so many Newspeak words, this word has two mutually contradictory meanings. Applied to an opponent, it means the habit of impudently claiming that black is white, in contradiction of the plain

facts. Applied to a Party member, it means a loyal willingness to say that black is white when Party discipline demands this. But it means also the ability to believe that black is white, and more, to know that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary. This demands a continuous alteration of the past, made possible by the system of thought which really embraces all the rest, and which is known in Newspeak as doublethink. Doublethink is basically the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.'

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

One moment we're aware, another we're immersed in it. The last one to know it is in the water is the goldfish. During Germany's Nazi era, a man called Martin Niemöller realized that he had become immersed in perilous waters. He saw through the 'doublethink'. Having first supported the Nazis as a U-boat commander, he later denounced them as a pastor. After his release from Dachau concentration camp, in 1946 he addressed the inactivity of intellectuals and the purging of German society during the Nazi regime:

'They came first for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for me and by that time no one was left to speak up.'

Martin Niemöller (1892-1984).

He connected the dots – the ripples. But what if you can't? 'The ideal citizen of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist,' said political theorist Hannah Arendt, 'but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, and the distinction between true and false, no longer exists.' The 11 men and women in

this book speak up, some of them under life-threatening circumstances. Their causes prompt us to think for ourselves, to speak truth to power and to see the connections between the local and the global.

In a classic tale of adventure from the 1920s, the hero Tros of Samothrace writes in his log: 'Though I know not whither I go, nor what I shall be, I shall go to no home of idleness. I shall be no gray ghost lamenting what I might have done, but did not.' Ripple effects occur in all waters – in any society. Where they are safe to navigate, most likely someone who was not idle spoke up before us. So, where shall I go? What shall I do?

Arne Peter Braaksma

ASIA/EURASIA

‘Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.’

William Hutchison Murray in *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* (1951).



Michael Ward with William Hutchison Murray during the 1951 reconnaissance expedition route over the Khumbu.

Rebiya Kadeer - East Turkestan

Defending Uyghurs against Chinese oppression

'You can see people's dreams and wishes just by looking into their eyes,' Rebiya Kadeer knows. The 'mother of the Uyghurs' is determined that the Chinese Government should be brought before an international tribunal for its human rights abuses in East Turkestan. Starting off poor, uneducated, and divorced, her initial prospects were bleak. Remarkably, she became a businesswoman, social activist, and member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The Chinese Government, however, imprisoned her for highlighting the plight of the Uyghurs. In exile in the United States she became the leader of the World Uyghur Congress. For a long time she was looking for a Uyghur leader, but her patience ran out. 'I then decided that I had to find that person within myself.'



Rebiya Kadeer in Geneva, 2011.

Photo Eric Bridiers / UN / Wikimedia Commons.

Context

Yining, Xinjiang, is the place of a little-known massacre. It took place in 1997, just eight years after the drama that shook the world on Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China. Yining is the Chinese name for the city of Ghulja in East Turkestan, known to the Chinese as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This landlocked Central Asian country is generally peaceful. So why did these terrible events unfold here?

Similar to the Tibetan Autonomous Region, its southern neighbor, East Turkestan is as vast as Alaska, constituting one-sixth of the area under the control of the People's Republic of China. But despite its official name, this new 'living space' for Han Chinese is in no way 'autonomous'. Fundamental freedoms and human rights are violated on a daily basis. This includes such extremes as coercive birth control – a Chinese form of ethnic cleansing – and reducing the native Uyghur nationality to a minority in their own country by a massive influx of Chinese settlers.

According to Amnesty International, more than 3,000 Uyghurs have been arrested since 11 September 2001. Among them are scholars, writers and journalists, who are labeled 'separatists', 'ethnic splittist', 'religious extremists' or 'terrorists'. China's 'Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure' campaign has little consideration for human rights or the preservation of the Uyghur national identity. Some believe that China's hardened attitude stems from their concern that since the breakdown of the Soviet Union there are seven nations with a Turkic-speaking population. As far back as 1962, when the Chinese Government spoke about the four plagues, it meant Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Uyghurs. But since glasnost (openness) and perestroika (reform or restructuring) these nations have all joined the UN, representing a power to be reckoned with.

Since the early 1990s, there have indeed been various small-scale attacks on Chinese targets in East Turkestan's cities. These were blamed on violent Uyghur separatist groups. More recently, Beijing claims that these attacks are fuelled by radical Islam. Now that China

supports the US-led 'war on terrorism', it has linked the regional practice of Islam to al-Qaeda, creating a convenient cover for its own human rights violations. But Uyghur activists say that the attacks come from only a tiny minority and that most Uyghurs simply want to have the right to practice their own customs and live in peace.

In its '2004 Annual Human Rights Report', even the US State Department asserted that the Chinese Government 'used the international war on terror as a pretext for cracking down harshly on suspected Uyghur separatists expressing peaceful political dissent and on independent Muslim religious leaders'. The Chinese repression of the Uyghurs has simply been repackaged as a 'war on terror' that has the appearance – and no more than that – of worldwide acceptance, obscuring the difference between peaceful protests, civil unrest and violence. In the wake of violent attacks in 2008, the Olympic year of 'peace, friendship and solidarity', China has accused western countries of instigating terrorism, separatism and extremism in East Turkestan. It did the same in 2009, when riots between migrant Uyghur workers and Chinese in eastern Chinese cities cost the lives of several thousands of Uyghurs.

Earlier Chinese historians referred to East Turkestan as inhabited by barbarians. But these 'barbarians' were civilized enough to connect the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) with the Roman Empire by the famous Silk Road – or Roads in the case of East Turkestan. The region also welcomed Buddhism first, and then Islam, only losing its function as a Eurasian crossroads due to the advances of ocean travel since the fifteenth century.

Archaeological evidence shows that East and West were already linked three thousand years ago, and the famous Tarim Mummies unearthed in the early 20th century are distinctly Caucasoid in appearance. But those ancient links are gone. Shortly after the Second World War, East Turkestan was a poor nation, but with a great wealth of natural resources. Eyed by both Russia and China, it was eventually traded as a 'semi-colony'. Some Uyghurs believe their country was 'sacrificed' or 'sold for the peace of the world' when Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt met during the Yalta Conference in

1945. The country passed hands, first from Stalin to Chiang Kai-shek, and then to Mao Zedong. Until the 19th century, China had never been in control of East Turkestan. What's in a name? The term Xinjiang was only first used in 1884 when the Manchus stationed troops there as a buffer against Russian encroachment. It means 'New Territory' or 'New Frontier', understandably a name that Uyghurs resent.

Whenever Rebiya Kadeer, the foremost champion of the Uyghur cause, entered the White House, she felt eager to talk about these things, but there never was time to do so. Jailed by China for 'passing on state secrets' and exiled to the United States in 2005, Rebiya was once so successful in business, that she was locally known as 'the millionairess'. As writer James Millward says, she is 'not an average woman'. She is also a fashion designer, philanthropist, anti-drugs crusader and a mother of eleven children. But it was the combination of being a staunch defender of Uyghur human rights and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference that made her a liability to the Chinese Government. She has accused China of committing 'cultural genocide' against the Uyghur people, while it seeks to develop the rich energy and mineral resources (oil, gas, iron ore and uranium) of East Turkestan. The Chinese monopolize this 'second Arabia', while the Uyghurs continue to live on the threshold of poverty.

According to its 2015 World Report, Human Rights Watch claims that the political persecution across China is currently worse than it has been in the previous decade. Chinese authorities continue to detain, harass, and torture members of the Uyghur population. Human rights reforms were anticipated when President Xi Jinping took over in 2012. However, the situation has worsened, and persecution targets activists and their family members with unusual brutality. China refuses engagement with UN human rights mechanisms, and usually calls for 'political solutions', which never materialize. UN special envoys are not allowed to visit. Journalists have to sign an agreement stating they will not release unpublished information without prior approval. Thus, there is no news on East Turkestan or

the Uyghur Autonomous Region. For the Uyghur population, that is bad news.

Although tears do not show on these pages, Rebiya had to suppress them while speaking of the fate of her country, her home and her family. One moment she speaks on Radio Free Asia, the next she addresses questions from an Australian journalist, easily picking up the thread of her narrative when she returns. Considered to be 'Public Enemy Number One' by the Chinese Government, she has recently published her autobiography *Dragon Fighter*. Her husband, literature professor Sidik Rozi, hands me a copy of Jung Chang's and Jon Halliday's *Mao: The Unknown Story*, in which he has marked passages relating to East Turkestan. It is 1 October, the day on which Uyghurs gather each year in front of the Chinese embassy in Washington to protest the occupation of their country. Waving the blue flag with a crescent moon mirroring Turkey's red flag, they call for the recognition of human rights and freedom.

Personal narrative — Rebiya Kadeer

After I left East Turkestan for the United States in 2005, the Chinese Government confiscated my remaining children's passports. It turned them effectively into hostages of the Chinese, and a pawn to exert pressure on me. I may never see my children again, but I believe I had no other choice. My son Ablikim is being shadowed and harassed on an ongoing basis. The Chinese police have even established a special unit called 'Office 307'. Its only purpose is to monitor my family members.

When I was a child, growing up in the north of East Turkestan, my family was not very rich and it was a very common family. My childhood was very peaceful and very happy, and courtesy and respect were most important in our household. The neighborhood was quiet and the people looked upon each other and their children in a very loving way. There was a feeling of great interconnectedness between the people and nature. Our city Altay was close to the mountains, surrounded by hills and rivers, trees and forest. It was heaven to me.

The things that impressed me very much then are the things that I miss very much now. In our neighborhood there were a lot of animals. The birds, from sparrows to nightingales, used to sing in the morning, just like a musical concert. There were also a lot of geese, ducks and chickens. Almost every garden and orchard had an abundance of flowers and the whole neighborhood was full of color. The grown-ups always smiled at each other. These things made the whole community pleasant, supportive and united. But later, I would be deprived of all three: the animals, the flowers and the smiles of our neighborhood.

Everyone enjoyed living in this peaceful environment. But an incredible change took place when the Chinese Communist regime came. Since the 1950s they forced our people into submission. They had a policy of banishing people to different places. Chinese soldiers came to our houses and rounded people up to gather their things and get onto big trucks. They deported people from our neighborhood to different areas of East Turkestan. We were spread out without knowing where we had ended up and without knowing each other's whereabouts.

The Banishment of Uyghurs – and the Settlement of Chinese

Who would doubt that 'population transfer' is taking place in East Turkestan? Over the last fifty years, the minority Han Chinese population there has shot up from 8 to 41 per cent, pushing the Uyghurs from the cities into the rural areas. And into poverty and ignorance.

Before 1949 there were only 300,000 Chinese settlers in East Turkestan. According to the official Chinese census of 2005, their number has risen to more than 7 million, while observers claim the figure is even higher. Annually, an estimated 250,000 Chinese settlers are moving into East Turkestan, and some sources claim that the Chinese authorities plan to settle 40 to 50 million Chinese in the

region. Both 'banishment' and 'population transfer' sound deceptively friendly. The hard reality is painful: forced out of one's home, one's native country, and having one's social and cultural life disrupted and marginalized by newcomers.

Native Uyghurs are pushed out of the way by Han Chinese settlers. The steady flow of these 'immigrants' reduces the Uyghurs to outcasts in their own country, while their cultural identity and heritage are trivialized, their dignity denied and discounted. The fact that this is happening in broad daylight and on such a wide scale – it extends to Tibet and Inner Mongolia – without anyone sounding the alarm, is astounding.

But before the humans, they had already attacked the animals. The Chinese had a 'kill dogs policy' that also applied to cats. They took all domestic animals and killed them. Not long after this, they demanded that each household kill 10 sparrows a day. We had to hand over their legs as evidence. If we failed to kill ten, we had to pay a fine to the officials. Because of those policies, all the cats and dogs disappeared, the birds disappeared, and even the frogs in the creeks disappeared. The cows, horses, sheep and goats were all taken by the Chinese Government. 'You're not allowed to own any of these,' they said. 'They're evidence of your capitalistic views!' But after taking them from us, they simply passed them on to Chinese migrants. They trampled the flowers and plants underfoot and cut down the trees in our yards.

Occupied and banished

Wherever the Chinese central government officials spotted a house that they liked, they occupied it. People that used to be part of Chiang Kaishek's Kuomintang that had surrendered, and retired soldiers of the communist Red Army could then move in. Their main purpose for doing so was to control us. Our whole neighborhood lost the ease that had existed before and people became more and more bewildered about what was going on. One day a classmate of mine was gone, the next day another. Due to the 'banishment policy', families disintegrated and became disconnected from each other.

The faces of people became grim. Some said: 'We'll soon have to put up a fight!'

My parents started to speak in low voices, especially in the presence of strangers and outsiders. So much anxiety in their hearts! 'Don't let these words out of the house!' they would say, worried that my brothers and sisters overheard their conversation. All of a sudden, we had to be on tiptoes and live with secrecy. The Uyghur people used to be so hospitable, invite each other into their homes, and gather once a month to have music, folk dances, and merry-making. With the arrival of the Chinese, it all disappeared.

'You don't just belong to yourself, you belong to the people,' my parents used to say. 'Never forget to help others!' I thought of that even at school. When someone needed help, I would offer something. And there were a lot of people that needed help, for entire families were starving. 'Don't use the word *Khitay*, or in Russian *Khitayski*, in the presence of the Chinese,' my parents warned me. 'It may insult them. Use 'Hanzou' – that's the polite way. And if you see Hanzou on the streets, don't look at them. Cast your eyes down and go past them without speaking. If someone asks whether you are happy with the Chinese people that live near us, or what you think about the policies of the Chinese Government, keep silent. Never say a word!'

Each day there were trucks, and each day yet another family disappeared. My father and mother prayed for them to come back, not knowing that at some stage we too would have to leave. Our situation became very harsh, and my parents no longer allowed me and my brothers and sisters to go to school. I was too young to understand the Chinese 'banishment policy'. Their reason was simply to obtain fertile land for the Han Chinese immigrants. Their main target was city residents, because they are usually more educated than those in the rural areas. They 'banished' the local people to remote areas like the Taklamakan desert, so that they would not bother the Han Chinese immigrants.

One day, a truck stopped in front of our door. I was 13 then. 'I don't want to leave from here,' my dad said. He escaped to the Altay Mountains. The Chinese soldiers took my mother and all my brothers, sisters and other family members. For fifteen days we were on this truck that brought us to a village in Aksu Old Town County. Alternatingly, my brothers and sisters would sit in front next to the driver. 'Why are we hiding ourselves?' he said at one point. 'We should fight the Chinese!' While being deported, we still thought that they might bring us to some kind of home. But they unloaded us in the middle of the street, handing us a one-page document that stated 'these people are banished to Aksu Old Town County'. That was all. We had no idea what to do. My mother was extremely upset and went up to the driver. 'They asked me to bring you here,' he said. 'I'm just doing my job.'

The truck left. We were still in the middle of the street when it started raining. Fortunately, the villagers were very kind. They gathered around us and others who had also been 'banished' here. Without exception, they were poor and starving, and desperate for a piece of bread. Despite their own hardship, many villagers gave us whatever they had to spare. My mother gave them something in return, a shirt or a picture. One man who had arrived on his bicycle stepped forward: 'If you need a room, we have some space.' He led us to their yard and showed us two rooms. 'Do you have money for the rent?' he asked. 'Yes,' my mother said. She had hidden a little bit of money. The Government had requisitioned the house from the previous owner, so we had to pay rent to a government official.

A sacrificial marriage

My older sister, who had graduated from college, was assigned to the Aksu County school as a teacher. They simply informed her and her husband that the rest of the family had been taken away. As they had some help from other people, they escaped the harshest conditions. My other sisters and I started going to school again. The schoolteacher repeatedly told us about Mao's simple upbringing. 'Maybe he doesn't have the understanding to rule a country properly,' I concluded, 'as he was only a simple farmer?' But what we

earned was not enough for the whole family. 'If you allow Rebiya to marry my son Abdirim,' our neighbor said, 'that would help your family and mine, because he is working at the bank.' But I was only 16! I loved going to school, and I wasn't thinking of marrying and starting a family! However, I saw how much my mother was struggling to make ends meet. After resisting the idea for a few months, I decided that I had to make a sacrifice. 'My father is in the Altay Mountains and normally he would support us. But he can't. So if I can help by marrying this boy, I will.'

Both for arranging the paperwork and the marriage celebration, Abidirim gave me a lift on his bicycle. So now I was 'banished' to a new place and married! I had been really angry about the killing of all the dogs. But when my classmates started disappearing and my neighborhood fell apart, I became aware that something was really wrong. While my father was still there, I had asked: 'Why did these other people come to East Turkestan and do whatever they want?' But for the rest we never talked about it. It was just like a big man hitting a smaller man. 'We came to make you happier and more peaceful,' the Chinese said. But of course, it was completely the opposite. They just took our land, with no concern whatsoever for our lives. What could I do? How could I help my family and our people? I became absorbed in reading novels. At that time, the Chinese had translated many Russian novels, and many people knew Russian. There were also books from Soviet Central Asia, the Middle East and even a few western novels. But I especially enjoyed novels that aroused a sense of patriotism. Why didn't the heroes from these novels come to our land and liberate us!? There should be somebody that stands up and says: 'Let us be!'

Reading awakened a great love in me for our people and the desire to liberate them. It burned inside me like a fire. As I was still young, I imagined myself falling in love with the handsome heroes in the novels, and walking together for the liberation of our people. But what was it that I wanted to achieve? East Turkestan has its own rich and distinct history, its own language and its own literature. We are an independent state with every right to our freedom and independence, and our culture has even spread to other Turkic-

speaking nations. But due to the oppression by the Chinese, we are lagging behind and we are losing some of our characteristic features. I can't stand that. Our people are very hospitable and kind-hearted and we love the arts. Therefore to me it's intolerable that people from another nation invaded our land to suppress us. Of course I know that the Chinese are humans just like us. But I wouldn't have been in the situation I find myself now, if they had dealt with us on an equal basis.

But let's return to my love for the liberation of my people. I realized that if I wanted to achieve anything, I needed a job and a position of authority to enable me to talk with the Chinese on an equal footing. 'You're not educated,' I heard wherever I went. 'You have six children. You don't speak Chinese. How could we possibly provide employment for someone like you?' Indeed, how would anyone listen to an uneducated woman that is raising her children in her own home? Even when I explained the Chinese oppression to my own people, they didn't understand. For a long time I was looking for someone, a Uyghur leader who would speak out loud the kind of things I was thinking about. But by the time I was 29, I realized I was wasting my time. My patience had run out. I then decided that I had to find that person within myself.

My first marriage failed. I openly criticized the Government in Beijing, and my husband could not handle the pressure. And as I would be outside making money on my own, according to our Islamic culture I would be under a curse. Therefore I felt I needed someone who thinks and feels the same as me, who understands and respects my dreams and wishes, and who has a strong patriotic feeling about our country. I wrote a list of 10 conditions, the criteria for my new husband-to-be. Again, my friends just laughed: 'Who on earth would marry you? You think about nothing but 'country, country, country'. Look at us: we're all under the control of the Chinese. You're just one person. What could you possibly do about it?' Many Uyghurs feel strongly about their country, but they are afraid to expose themselves, even when they meet me face-to-face. And as I am the voice that articulates their plight, they respect me. The words I speak are other people's wishes; they cannot speak for themselves. On the

other hand, none of them has ever betrayed me, nor have I ever betrayed them. That's why I have earned their trust and their respect. When I went hungry and had nothing, people provided me with meals and helped me. And because of the respect between us, people expect something from me, while I feel it is my duty to do something for them. At first I didn't know the cause I would be fighting for. It developed over time.

Businesswoman, congresswoman

When I started as a businesswoman, I was still a young girl. Then, it was no more than making hand-made shoes, sewing and selling clothes, to provide for my children. In the eyes of the Chinese, even that was illegal! Next, I took up selling rabbit and lambskin hats. This was before the Chinese Cultural Revolution that started in 1966. After that, I changed again. I made trips to the eastern Chinese provinces to buy silk scarves, shirts and cassette players. Sometimes they caught me, confiscated the goods and fined me. The law came to my aid however. In the early 1980s, the new motto for China's future launched by Deng Xiaoping was 'to get rich is glorious', and the Chinese Government allowed people to start private businesses.

My first attempt was offering laundry services, next serving noodle dishes, at first only for a hundred people. My business grew to 140 stalls in Urumchi, a leather factory in Kazakhstan, trade with several Central Asian countries, and even with Turkey. But I didn't forget about my country and had become aware of maintaining goodwill and public relations. I was young and attractive, and it was hard to be the only woman among all those businessmen. Many of them stared at me disrespectfully. Regardless, my sense of being a 'mother of the Uyghurs' was formed at that time.

I know my people through and through, and that once upon a time they flourished, while now their condition is deteriorating. Yes, the Chinese Government can brainwash young Uyghurs, and lie to the rest of the world. But our people are aware of their corruption and deception. On the street they refer to the Chinese politicians as kikes, 'political stutterers'. Nothing can beat the fact that I have experienced and witnessed everything with my own eyes. This is why

I have been working so hard over the last 10 years to let Chinese people know that we have to be able to live as equals, and treat the Uyghurs like the Chinese would treat their own people. In my offices and factories I employed Uyghurs who were in financial difficulty, and destitute farmers decorated the offices. There was a lot of drug and alcohol abuse. Uyghur youths were even abusing substances in my own building and the market stalls, so I decided to start a campaign against heroin. We used white-on-red slogans in the style the Chinese Government also uses. And to promote women's rights and economic security, I established the Thousand Mothers Movement. All along, the Chinese Communist Party was suspicious, always keeping a close eye on every non-governmental organization.

Knowingly or unknowingly, people started to listen to me. They witnessed the increase in my income, the respect I earned, and my greater authority in business affairs. Privately, I had plans for intervening in the Government, even though no one thought I could possibly do so as a woman, or as a businesswoman. But doing business in a very strategic way got me there. I became the director of the Xinjiang Chamber of Commerce and in 1992 I was chosen to become a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Now the second of my goals, a position of authority, was achieved. That's when I started talking to the Government about Uyghur people. I came this close to the Government, at which time I respected its policies. I encouraged the Uyghur people: 'The harassment that you suffered in the past was because of the top leaders at that time. Let's try to leave those things in the past, and try to live in harmony with the Chinese people in the future. Then things will get better.'

The cultural genocide was still going on, but I was looking for ways to resolve things in a different way. I thought that if I could win the hearts and minds of the Chinese, it would prevent them from forcing their cultural ideas upon our people. So at every party meeting, I stressed the same. 'Stability and harmony can only be accomplished by equality,' I said. 'The Han Chinese immigrants don't need more stability and harmony. It's the poor Uyghur people that are living under harassment that need it.' Thus I spoke for five years in East

Turkestan before reaching Beijing. There, I thought, they can help solve the problem. I got the opportunity to speak my mind in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. But not long after I was fired for doing so. I got a lot of money and the Chinese allowed me to continue doing my business, although they wished they could control it. But I was being deceived. After 10 years, I realized that my two terms of serving the Chinese Government had been wasted. In that year, 1997, the Ghulja Massacre happened. The problem wasn't that the Chinese Government didn't know us. It was exactly because they knew us so well that they wanted to wipe us out.

'Is he Uyghur or Chinese?'

The Ghulja or Xinjiang Massacre, 5 February 1997

When Rebiya Kadeer heard rumors of a massacre in the city of Ghulja, she could not believe her own ears. Could a peaceful demonstration of hundreds of young Uyghurs holding banners and shouting slogans for equal treatment indeed be cracked down in such an extreme manner? She decided – as a Uyghur and as a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference – that she had to go and see for herself.

'I arrived in Ghulja City in the morning of 7 or 8 February. Although most Uyghurs were too scared to talk, I managed to speak to dozens of families, almost a hundred people. An Uzbek elderly lady said that she had seen numerous Chinese military trucks piled high with dead or beaten Uyghurs going into the local Yengi Hayat – 'New Life' – Prison but had not seen people leaving. She said she was certain that nearly 1,000 Uyghurs had been taken into the prison, but that the prison could only accommodate 500 prisoners. Furthermore, she said she saw many military trucks leaving the prison that were filled with dirt. Many others I spoke with had also witnessed this. Many suspected that dead bodies were buried in the dirt and were being taken out to be disposed of.'

‘The Ghulja Prefectural Police told me twice to leave and detained me. But I did not leave Ghulja. I simply felt it was my responsibility to bear witness to the events there and to gather information. I was eventually detained a third time. When I arrived at the police station they said: ‘We’ve told you repeatedly to leave but you are still here. OK then, if you are so interested to know what happened here, look at this.’ They then showed me footage they had filmed of the military crackdown in Ghulja in the preceding days. I believe their intention was to terrify me and to intimidate me into silence. I watched the footage in the police station with several other people, including the prefectural police chief.

‘Chinese soldiers could be heard shouting: ‘Kill them! Kill them!’ One officer shouted to a soldier: ‘Is he Uyghur or Chinese? Don’t touch the Chinese but kill the Uyghur.’ Later, eyewitnesses described how people were packed onto trucks so tightly that they had to lie on top of each other. Police officers reportedly sat on top of detainees beating them with sticks. Some of those lying on the bottom died of suffocation.’

‘I have never seen such viciousness in my life and it is difficult for me to adequately describe the horror... Dozens of military dogs were attacking – lunging and biting at peaceful demonstrators, including women and children. Chinese PLA soldiers were bludgeoning the demonstrators – thrashing at their legs until they buckled and fell to the ground. Those on the ground – some alive, others dead, were then dragged across the ground and dumped all together into dozens of army trucks.’

The Ghulja Massacre has been a well-kept secret for almost a decade, but as the true story has emerged, it appears that these events were even worse than those on Tiananmen Square in 1989. According to Amnesty International, hundreds if not thousands of people were killed or seriously

injured; others were beaten, tortured or disappeared without a trace. The Chinese authorities have not accounted for the lives lost and those missing.

Addressing the Government

The authority the Chinese Government had given to me was by intent only temporary. After they had finished off all these peaceful demonstrators, I believed they would finish us off too. Following the massacre, I wrote a report about all their hard-handed and unheard-of policies toward the Uyghur people. The Chinese all know these policies, but you'll find nobody that admits to it. Someone who dares to speak about it will simply lose their head. However, I was invited to come to Beijing and to speak with President Jiang Zemin. After meeting with the President, I put my concerns before the assembled representatives at the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. 'The Chinese Government has no interest in peace,' I said. 'You say there are only 9 million Uyghurs. There are almost 20 million of them. Why do you want to wipe those people out? Our country has a lot of natural resources. Why, if you want those, do you not respect the people that live there? What did they ever ask from you? They only want peace. And they have a right to their own ethnic identity, so why don't you allow them to have it? Just give them the right that God gave them. Let them speak freely and practice any religion they want. I am Rebiya Kadeer. I'm not your enemy, I'm your friend. I wrote this report because I want peace.'

I meant every word of it. But to them it was like a declaration of war. 'Please read this report carefully and follow up with the relevant actions immediately. There is no way you will succeed in wiping out our ethnic identity by killing us. I will await your decision, whatever my destiny will be.' At that moment, their response was very friendly. 'You're a heroic woman!' they said. 'You're an adventurous woman. You're a very good woman. You're so honest. We love you!' One however said something more worrying: 'We will await your changing hour, because your people love you too much.' I asked them: 'What kind of change are you waiting for? I'm doing a great job for you!' They made a promise: 'We will do as you say, read the report very carefully and solve the things you have addressed in it.'

The meeting finished, after which I flew straight back to Urumchi. As I got off the plane, the Chinese equivalent of the FBI was waiting for me. They took me straight to the local party building, stripped me of all my titles – Member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, director of the Chamber of Commerce – and put me under house arrest.

I still had another copy of the report. It described in detail the situation in the villages, the fate of the peasants, the people that live in the Lop Nur region that is used for nuclear testing, including pictures. It should have been published outside of East Turkestan and outside of China, but I wasn’t successful. In 1999, after two years of house arrest, a US congressional delegation investigating human rights issues came to Urumchi. I decided to meet them after government approval. But I was prevented from doing so, when PRC security forces detained me. They accused me of revealing state secrets to the outside world by sending magazines and newspaper clippings to my husband in the United States. The security officer questioned me.

‘None of this concerns state secrets,’ I responded. ‘These newspapers are freely available. It only describes the suffering of the Uyghur people.’

‘Name all the people that you spoke with about these sensitive topics.’

‘I’m doing this by myself. There is nobody else.’

‘Who are your closest friends?’

‘Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, Li Peng...’ I gave them a long list of Chinese officials that live in the Zhong Nan Hai district of Beijing that is adjacent to the Forbidden City, most of whom I had met as a party official.

‘Who are your real friends?’

During a mock trial that was set up as an extravagant event with doctors, state attorneys, defense lawyers and some 30 police officers, a Uyghur judge insisted that I presented my defense. There was no audience and no legal representation. ‘We will crush you like a snake,’ the chief of police said to me. ‘And I will emerge from prison like an eagle,’ I replied. Like other Uyghurs, he had taken off

his pride and dignity like an old coat. I was however under the impression that they would execute me, so I had to concentrate really hard. 'I have left behind all my wealth,' I said.' The violations of human rights that the people have suffered, I too have suffered. I have wanted to support my people, but in the end I've not been able to help myself.' In my view, the Chinese Government should wish that there were more citizens like me. I had helped maintain the stability of this province; I had supported the poor and orphans; and my international business had brought desperately needed goods, even benefiting the Chinese themselves. Instead of the death penalty, the court sentenced me to eight years. They led me away handcuffed and shackled.

I have never been tortured. But they did something horrifying. They brought in young Uyghur people and tortured them in front of me. It was extremely hard. Perhaps if I had been tortured at the same time, I would have been able to handle it. I also spent two years in solitary confinement, and what's worse, in total darkness. Only two years later there was light again. Once a month, or sometimes once in 45 days, all the inmates were brought into a public bathing area, and everyone had to rush washing themselves within half an hour. That included washing your clothes. Even when I was ill or my body was swollen, they never offered me help or medication. They give you water, but they don't care about your sanity.

My new room, where there was light, was called a 'labor cell', from where they take you outside to do labor. I spent long days sewing clothes. Next to me were other prisoners that fainted. After their recovery they were forced to continue working as if nothing had happened. This was in Baijiahu Prison, about 30 kilometers from Urumchi. I was not allowed to speak, to look at anyone, or even to smile. Other prisoners were not even allowed to communicate with me in any way. If they did, their prison term would be increased or they would get tortured. Unless they require you to write something and give you pen and paper, you are prohibited from reading, writing, listening to the radio or watching television. They make life for political prisoners as hard as possible. It's all psychological torture.

'We're sure we'll kill you!' they used to say. I really thought they would. But at a certain moment I felt that the attitude of the guards was changing, and the war of words started decreasing. When I received a white comforter to keep me warm at night, I was sure something was happening. Next, I got a cleaner room. And then my children were allowed to visit me. They noticed I had become very quiet and morose. The changes were due to the fact that Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Dui Hua Foundation had started intervening in my case. 'You seem to have a lot of owners,' the guards said. By that they meant people who were concerned about me. 'What is your relationship with the United States?' 'None,' I could honestly say. 'I just hope that the world will learn of the fate of the Uyghur people.'

Uniting Uyghur voices

My only wish was to escape, and get help from the United States for the Uyghur people. Human rights organizations kept track of my situation, I was awarded Norway's Rafto Memorial Prize in 2004, and finally, three years early, I was released in 2005. I immediately flew to the United States to be reunited with my husband and five of my children. Later, I became president of the Uyghur American Association and founded the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation. It's still very small and we don't have a lot of financial means. But the voices of the Uyghur people outside of East Turkestan are uniting and the concern of the international community is increasing. Ultimately I believe that one nationality cannot wipe out another from the face of the earth.

For many Uyghurs, escaping is made even harder by the fact that the Chinese confiscate the passports of Uyghurs. Some however who were tortured in Chinese prisons managed to do so. They settled in western countries, each with enough stories to fill an entire book. Even while they had a hard life, it is difficult for Uyghurs to leave their home and country behind. But had they stayed, they would have died. Fifteen years ago there were hardly any Uyghurs living in the West, but now there are more than 10,000 all over Europe, America and Canada, and another 20,000 in Turkey. In Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan together however, there are more than a

million. After their independence from the Soviet Union, a lot of trade relations developed with China, and many Uyghurs came to Kazakhstan. West Turkestan became the independent nations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. But East Turkestan, where the Uyghurs live, is still not free.

People around the world should know that the Uyghurs are a unique ethnic nationality and that they are prevented from letting their voices be heard. The world knows about most other conflict areas, but the tragedy of the Uyghur people is that they are being buried under Chinese propaganda of 'security' and 'peace'. 'The suffering of the Uyghur people is even worse than that of the Tibetans,' the Dalai Lama once said. This is due to our geographic location, the fact that we are a predominantly Islamic nation, and because of China's strict control and persecution.

There is no instant solution. We are struggling for UN intervention to stop the Chinese from violating our rights. The first priority therefore is to get the UN and the western world to pay attention to our cause. We're working hard to collect documentation and writing reports that reveal the real situation – and not the fake stories that the Chinese are telling. The ultimate goal is to solve the problem with the Chinese in a peaceful, non-violent way. We will try everything in our power to sit around the table with the Chinese regime to solve the problem. If the Uyghur people are not allowed the freedom they long for, the Chinese people can also not be at peace. Even the Chinese people that live in East Turkestan long for peace.

'The mouse that crosses the road will get hit by everybody until it's dead,' Chinese newspapers said recently, reporting about a party meeting. 'We will do the same with Mrs. Rebiya Kadeer.' You'll understand that contact with Chinese officials is impossible. Since 2007 they are brainwashing the Uyghurs about my life and their feelings for a free and peaceful East Turkestan. They distributed brochures to every household, forcing people to study them. People who don't participate in this kind of 'study' are considered as suspect in their ideology, and lose their jobs. Whether Uyghur or Chinese,

everyone had to write a statement about me. Whoever didn't do so or didn't curse me, will be arrested. The party meeting reported in the newspaper vilified me, claiming that I didn't raise my children well. They are very patriotic. That may not be good in the eyes of the Chinese regime, but it is very good for our people. Ever since I was 9, I have been patient in dealing with the Chinese. It will last until I sit down with them to talk about the future of East Turkestan.

Demolition of a culture

Until then, they are continuing to demolish our culture. First of all, they are letting our people become poorer and poorer. Secondly, they are systematically lowering the level of education. Thirdly, they arrest educated people and those who have money under all kinds of pretexts and lock them up in prison. Fourthly, they are instilling a slave mentality in the remaining people. While I was still a member of the Chinese Government, an earthquake happened near Kashgar in Payziwat County in 1997. I organized a rescue mission of seven or eight trucks to bring food and medical supplies and help them to distribute these to the needy people one by one. When I arrived, there were only Uyghurs except for one person, the local Chinese leader. 'Sit over there!' he shouted at them. Even though there was plenty of dry space available, he ordered them to sit in a place where there was nothing but mud and water. I knew why. He was aware of my reputation as someone with a strong sense of our national identity. 'Stand up!' I shouted to the Uyghurs. It frightened them, but they all stood up. 'Stand or sit, but go over to the dry area.' I turned my face and cried. I was so angry at the Chinese leader that I said: 'You! Sit over there in the mud!' I let him sit there all day.

Telephone communications followed, and a lot of policemen and leaders arrived from Kashgar City. 'Why did you let this man sit in the mud?' I paid no attention to them. But this illustrates how Chinese ideology is turning the Uyghurs into slaves. Even back in 1954, when the Chinese found that the Uyghurs had bathrooms in their homes, they said: 'You're on your way to become capitalists, so we have to destroy your bathroom.' The Communists considered hygiene to be 'unproletarian'. Today, when Uyghurs from rural areas come into a bathroom, they don't even know how to take a shower. When you

destroy a nation's educational system, their intellectual and business people, the next thing is to deprive them of their religious beliefs and ceremonies and their native language. 'Ignorance guarantees obedience' – that is the motto of the Chinese Government. They are systematically removing words that are 'not favorable to the socialist construction' or 'national unity', and replacing them with Chinese words. Our ancient language has contributed so much to Central Asian civilization. Now it is being threatened with extinction. The consequence of losing all those things is that it undermines your moral consciousness. Nothing is left to remind you of that.

On top of that, the Chinese are restraining the natural growth of the Uyghur population by coercive birth control: forced abortions and forced sterilizations. It contradicts their own preferential population policies for minority groups, but they do it anyway. In a town called Chapchal with a population of 180,000, only 100 women were allowed to give birth. And 40 Uyghurs working in the Chinese administration were fired, because it was found that their wives were pregnant. The worst part of it is the fact that they take many 16-to-25-year-old Uyghur girls to the inner Chinese cities. 'We will provide employment for you,' they say. In 2006 alone, 45,000 young Uyghur women were transferred from East Turkestan to inland China, where many of these future mothers were sterilized or ended up in prostitution. If they resisted, they were transferred to other Chinese cities, and severely punished.

The Uyghurs are not an aggressive nation. Yes, there are some militant Uyghurs that feel we are being too friendly toward the Chinese and that they should be resisted with guns and explosives. But there are only very few. We would encourage them to stop that, because we don't want them or any of the Chinese to be killed. We continue to hope that we can solve this problem with the help of the international community and of democratic countries. The greatest help comes from the US Congress. Whichever president represents the United States, I hope it will be somebody who better understands the Chinese leaders, and who can deal with people who don't usually say what they really think.

For the freedom of East Turkestan, Islam doesn't have much importance. But Islam and our national customs are good for the moral grounding of our culture, and as the Chinese regime doesn't have such beliefs, it is changing the Uyghur people psychologically. China is a godless country. But when a person's manners are based in morality, it will make them loyal to their own culture, their own people and their own country. We do have highly educated people and scientists, but even when they work very hard, they can just afford to put food on their plates and take care of their families. They too, are just very poor people, and even before your country, your family matters most. Those scientists could probably help to alleviate the suffering of the Uyghurs in the same way as I did through my businesses. But if there is nobody that stands out from the crowd, nothing can be accomplished.

Obstacles to overcome

You can see people's dreams and wishes just by looking into their eyes. And likewise they can see them in yours, hoping that you will represent their dreams and wishes accurately. That creates a natural leadership role, and it explains why I have people's support. As I'm getting older, I wish to train young people to take up the Uyghur cause, because the exploitation and the pressure exerted on the Uyghurs is intolerable. By working diligently, I hope to find the kind of people that may lead the next step in the struggle of the Uyghurs. But they only have real support when they naturally arise from the Uyghur people. One of my greatest examples was Ehmetjan Qasimi, a Uyghur leader during a short-lived period of independence in the 1940s.

Among Crafty Foxes

According to contemporaries, Ehmetjan Qasimi (1914-1949), the last President of East Turkestan, was a charismatic leader and an excellent political speaker fluent in Uyghur, Russian and Chinese. In August 1948, he was elected as the central committee member of the East Turkestan Democratic Union. Qasimi was convinced that independence

was ‘a desire not only of Uyghurs, but all the inhabitants and nationalities that live in Eastern Turkestan’.

The new republic, however, only lasted five years (1944-1949). Ehmetjan had to perform a delicate balancing act between the Soviet Union, the Kuomintang, and the emerging Chinese Communist Party. East Turkestan was treated as a bargaining chip and lost the ‘Struggle for the Motherland’ to ‘crafty foxes’. Perhaps the most telling facts of Qasimi’s life are the places of his birth and death. He was born in Ghulja, the city where the Ghulja Massacre occurred (see box above). He studied at Moscow’s East Socialist Laborers’ University in 1936, which is also the place where he met his fate.

In the 20th century, East Turkestan’s Uyghur, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Mongol and Kazakh peoples fought for independence, while China itself went through the transition from the Qing Dynasty to the Kuomintang and then to the Communist rule of Mao Zedong. In August 1949, East Turkestan representatives including Qasimi boarded a plane in Almaty, the capital of neighboring Kazakhstan. The plane was on its way to Beijing. The representatives had been invited by Mao Zedong to attend the All-China Conference that proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.

The plane never arrived. Instead, it landed in Moscow. Ten days later, the Soviet Union informed the Chinese Government that the plane had crashed near Lake Baikal, killing all on board. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 however, former KGB leaders revealed that Qasimi was among five Uyghur leaders that had been kidnapped, imprisoned and killed in Moscow on Stalin’s orders, in accordance with a deal between Stalin and Mao Zedong. The truth isn’t known, as both Mao and Stalin had the motive and means to dispose of Qasimi. Writer James Millward concludes that ‘the answer may wait in an archive somewhere’.

In East Turkestan, people of Uyghur nationality are the largest group. The Chinese are much fewer in number, but they disregard our rights and those of other nationalities. The Chinese regime may have changed its ideology, but there is one constant: they have always felt hatred toward people of other nationalities. When you look at them however, they always have a smile. It is a fake smile, for in their hearts they never smile. But I don't think it is the same for Chinese people outside China. The Chinese Government is still using the Communist ideology to control its people, but in reality they have already been on the road to capitalism for a long time. It still is a low-level, state-regulated, and immoral kind of capitalism that doesn't measure up to western standards. But they simply want something different.

During a discussion with Sidik and some of my friends, the writer Abdurahim Ötkür once said: 'In East Turkestan it is impossible to oppose the Chinese Government. As soon as we raise our voices, we will all be exterminated. That won't solve anything. We also don't have any chance of organizing a mass movement. They will simply shoot us. Whoever wants to take up leadership must go abroad and work from there. Just between 1949 and 1972 I have witnessed about sixty major rebellions, in which approximately 360,000 people have lost their lives and almost half a million were jailed in labor camps.' I suffered in Chinese prisons as well. But prison life has strengthened me and I will never tire of working for my people. In moments when I feel lost, I remind myself of a fable my father used to tell me about an ant. Its message? There is no obstacle that cannot be overcome, no aim that is too high.

Colophon

Human Dignity

Eleven Defenders of Human Rights *at Close Range*

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