



EAST TURKISTAN LOBBY DAY

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Priority Political Prisoners

China is detaining hundreds of thousands of East Turkistani/Uyghur political prisoners—arrested, imprisoned, and often brutally tortured simply for exercising their basic human rights. Below are a few of the most prominent cases, representing the ongoing repression faced by Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples in East Turkistan.



Tashpolat Tiyip



Rahile Dawut



Gulmira Imin



Musajan Imam



Perhat Tursun

TASHPOLAT TIYIP



In 2017, Tashpolat Tiyip, the former president of “Xinjiang” University and a respected geographer, was detained by Chinese authorities. Despite his contributions to academic research, Tiyip was charged with “separatism” for allegedly supporting East Turkistani self-determination and advocating for Uyghur cultural preservation. Tiyip was sentenced to a suspended death sentence. His case has been marked by secrecy, and there is little information about his current status or whereabouts. It is feared that he is being held in severe conditions, possibly without access to proper legal representation. Tiyip’s detention reflects the broader repression of Uyghur intellectuals and academics as part of China’s efforts to suppress Uyghur identity and culture.

RAHILE DAWUT



Rahile Dawut, a world-renowned scholar of Uyghur folklore, disappeared in December 2017 after telling her family she was traveling from Urumqi to Beijing. Dawut, a professor at “Xinjiang” University, is internationally recognized for her work on Islamic sacred sites in Central Asia and her role as the founder of the “Minorities Folklore Research Center.” Her research into Uyghur religious practices and traditions made her a target for the Chinese government’s repression of Uyghur intellectuals. In September 2023, it was confirmed that she had been sentenced to life imprisonment for “endangering state security” during a secret trial in December 2018. Authorities have not disclosed her whereabouts or condition, but it is believed she is being held in one of China’s maximum security prisons in East Turkistan.

GULMIRA IMIN



Gulmira Imin, a Uyghur blogger and administrator of the website *Salkin*, was arrested following the July 5, 2009 Urumchi protests. Imin had used her platform to promote Uyghur culture and share news relevant to the Uyghur community. She was accused of “organizing the protests” and “leaking state secrets.” In a trial criticized by international human rights organizations, she was sentenced to life imprisonment. Imin’s arrest is part of a broader pattern of Chinese authorities cracking down on Uyghur intellectuals and activists in the wake of the 2009 unrest. She is currently serving her sentence in a Chinese prison, and concerns remain about her well-being due to the harsh conditions faced by Uyghur detainees.

MUSAJAN IMAM



On June 14, 2018, billionaire Uyghur businessman Musajan Imam was detained by Chinese authorities in Urumchi, East Turkistan. Founder of the Ihlas grocery chain, with over 500 stores across the East Turkistan, Imam was one of the wealthiest Uyghurs in the country. However, his immense wealth and philanthropic activities led to his arrest in 2018. Following a three-year investigation, Musajan was sentenced in May 2021 to 17 years and six months in prison for alleged ties to foreign entities and for promoting Uyghur cultural practices through his halal food business. He was also questioned about his philanthropic activities, including the construction of schools and donations for local infrastructure. His sentencing is part of a broader campaign by the Chinese government to suppress Uyghur business leaders and philanthropists. Musajan remains imprisoned in Aghu maximum security prison in Atush.

PERHAT TURSUN



Perhat Tursun, one of the most influential contemporary Uyghur writers, was detained by Chinese authorities in late 2017 or early 2018. Tursun is an existentialist writer and poet known for works such as *The Art of Suicide* and *The Backstreets*, which explore themes of Uyghur urban alienation and the human condition under Chinese oppression. His novel *The Backstreets* was later translated into English, gaining international attention. Tursun was arrested as part of the Chinese government’s crackdown on Uyghur intellectuals and was sentenced to 16 years in prison for his literary works, which authorities deemed to be promoting Uyghur ethnic identity and “separatism.” Reports indicate that he is currently imprisoned in Kizilsu Prison in Atush and may be subjected to forced labor as part of his sentence.