

Uyghur Tribunal – Fact Witness statement

UTFW2-008 – Baqitali Nur

SUMMARY

In November 2017, Baqitali Nur was preparing to travel to Kazakhstan to visit a sick relative. He was arrested and brutally interrogated. The witness was questioned on his upcoming trip to Kazakhstan. Accused of having “ideological problems,” the witness was made to sign false confessions for crimes he did not commit. He was then taken to a camp, where he was subjected to measures of forced assimilation as well as various forms of ill-treatments including bodily and mental harm and food deprivation. In the camp, Baqitali Nur also witnessed these treatments being inflicted on other detainees, and he stated that he himself saw two detainees die from the beatings they received.

After eight months of detention, the witness had to be brought to a hospital as his health deteriorated. He was ultimately released in October 2018, in poor health.

Witness statement

Baqitali Nur

1. My name is Baqitali Nur and I was born in Sekkiz Sumun village, Chapchal county, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture. I am involved in sale of vegetables. On one day of November 2017, I was doing my vegetable business somewhere in China and was arrested on the way back to Khorgas. After that I was interrogated for two days and on the third day, they brought me to the Kunas camp. I did not know why I was arrested.
2. At that time, I was preparing to go to Kazakhstan, where one of our relatives was sick and we were going to visit him. They arrested me in Khorgas. I knew one of the people who had arrested me and did not know the other two of them. The one I knew was a Kazakh police officer named Murat, who worked at the police station in Sekkiz Sunum village of Chapchal county. One of the other two said that his name was Erkin and the third one neither uttered his name, nor did I ask. They pushed me to a car in front of my wife and children. I was handcuffed and put in the car while my wife and children were put in another car. I asked: "why do you arrest me?". They said: "we don't tell you now, we will tell you when we arrive". They didn't say anything else and took me away from my village, where they questioned me for one full day. Then they said that they would bring me to the Chapchal county security bureau. Before leaving, they took my photo and tied up my hands.
3. "Why are you going abroad?", they asked during the questioning. I said: "You gave me the passport and I got it recently". Murat, the police officer, knew it as well. I said: "I went abroad after I had completed all documents and regularities. I did not steal the passport, but I got it from your own hands. You approved and sealed it, only thing left is the process to pass here. We were going there to visit our relatives who are sick, I wanted to bring my family members". They said: "why are you going there? Kazakhstan is one of the 26 terrorist countries.". I said: "why didn't you say it earlier? If you had told me that it was a

terrorist country, I would not go there. You gave me the passport two months ago. Why didn't you say that at that time?" They then said: "you met with bad people abroad." I asked: "Who is that? Can you tell me?". But they didn't answer, instead said: "You are fleeing to Kazakhstan, you want to emigrate there." I said: "What happens if I go? Others are also going there. What's wrong to leave from here?" They said: "You have an ideological problem, you met bad people there, you met terrorists there. You went to one of the 26 terrorist countries, what you did is very severe and punishable." I said: "Why is it so severe? Are those Hitay people (Han Chinese) also terrorists then? Why don't you arrest them?" They said: "You said Hitay." Then I said: "What should we call the Hitays other than Hitay." They said: "you definitely have an ideological problem. That is why we have arrested you." I said: "Hmm, due to that you arrested me?" They said: "You should admit your crime." I asked: "Which crime?" They said: "You should tell us which kind of bad people you met?" I asked: "You said that, can you name them?" They did not reply again. With that they tortured me during the interrogation. They beat me and fastened my hands and feet to the tiger chair. They questioned me day and night. They ordered me to sign the document. I asked why I should sign it. They said because I went to such a terrorist country, met with many bad people, and must admit my crime. I said that I would not admit anything as I did nothing wrong. They said I was planning to flee. I reasoned how could one call it fleeing if I had a passport in my hand. They insisted that it would be OK to sign that I was going to flee and accused me of a lot of crimes. Then they brought the ink to take my fingerprint and forcefully pressed my finger on the paper, even though I said I refused to sign it. Then they stamped that document with many other seals. I didn't know what was happening. They were doing what they wanted. They forced my fingers several times to get signatures. Like that I was made to admit crimes which I never committed.

4. On the third day, I was taken to the No.3 middle school of Chapchal county. They transformed the school into a concentration camp. We passed the first, second and third gates. Buildings No.1, No.2, No.3 and No.4 were on one side and buildings No.5, No.6,

No.7 were on the other side, and there were seven buildings in total. They brought me into the building No.1. I stayed on the 6th floor of this building. All windows were blocked with iron and steel wires. There were several layers of doors. There was only one very small opening. We went in and out through there only by crawling and they usually didn't open the door. In the middle, there was a door which could only be opened with the finger of the police officer. To go outside one had to pass seven doors. Even after these seven doors, there was still iron fences, just like bird's cage. We were only allowed to walk within these iron fences. Outside of these fences were police officers. They were with their weapons. There were from security bureaus, from border security as well as from local police stations. There were also armed forces. Some of them had machine guns. There were watch towers and guards were patrolling all the time on those towers and roofs. There were also police dogs and we walked through them. They monitored us with weapons when we went to eat. Nearby there was a teaching building and they forced us to sit for 10 to 15 hours a day without allowing us to move our bodies. They forced us to sing Chinese songs. Except for singing red songs we did not do anything there. We were ordered to sing red songs. We learned nothing else. There were only singing songs and torture. Due to long hours of sitting, our feet swelled up quite frequently. We walked the same way and crawled back again to our cell. Inside the cell, there were children's chairs and we eight people sat in two rows. We were not allowed to look around but had to look at the ceiling only. At nine o'clock we were ordered to sleep. We were not allowed to sleep on the side, but only on the back with absolutely no movement. They would call us immediately if they saw through the camera any movements during the sleep. I don't know how many hours I slept when I was there. At night they would order two of us to guard. Thus, we monitored each other. I slept for two hours and the other one would monitor for two hours so on and so forth, until the next morning. It is not possible to count all the sufferings there. They beat me every day. Every evening, they took me to the interrogation room, and beat me by asking "What have you done in Kazakhstan?". They asked me to tell the truth. They questioned me three times per day, and I defended myself by answering "I didn't do anything, I just went and came back".

5. We were allowed only three times to go to the toilet and fourth time was not possible in a day. They woke us up every day at 4:20 in the morning with a whistle. They also called with loudspeakers, and we would line up. There was only one toilet, and we went to the toilet one after another. Everyone was allowed only two minutes to be in the toilet and another two minutes to wash the face. Five of us would go to the toilet at once. Everyone had only four minutes in total. We would be forced to leave when it exceeded four minutes. When one finished, he had to stand facing the wall and when the other four people also finished, then we returned to the cell. After that the next five people from the other cell would be brought to the toilet. In the same building I lived in, there were 160 people on the first floor. The number of the people in the cells were not the same. In some cells there were 20, in some 40, and in some others 12. In my cell there were 8 people and we slept on the floor. Later, others came to our cell raising the number to 12. In the end, it became very difficult to fit into the cell. I just heard about the cells with 40 people, but I did not see such cells myself.
6. Everyday day they gave such a small, steamed bun. We never got full. For lunch, they gave again one steamed bun and smelly pickled vegetable. We ate with cold water, and they didn't give boiled water. In the evening, they gave cut celery and water with a few pieces of bread in it. They called it soman (fried noodle). The food quality was extremely bad, not well cooked. In one word, it was difficult to eat, but we didn't have other choices.
7. Inside the cell, here was a camera, there was a camera, on all sides and angles there were cameras. There was a loudspeaker in the middle. Some of the cameras could turn around. Every place of the camp was filled with cameras. There were armed soldiers on the watch towers surrounding the camp. There were cameras as well. I assume that there were around 10,000 people in that camp where I was detained. Women and elderly were detained separately. In Chapchal county, there were 5 such concentration camps. Except for those who were sentenced and sent to jail, if we included them, it would be too many.

The number of detained people in those camps at least probably could be more than 30,000.

8. Han-Chinese and Kazakhs were asked to speak in Chinese only. They beat us with plastic rod by asking: "Reveal your crimes, you are hiding it. You should say all the crimes you committed when you went to Kazakhstan. Whom did you meet there? Speak this, speak that". They dragged out one of the guys who were detained with me in the same cell around mid-night. We could not do anything but watching. It was forbidden to make any sound or movement. Exactly four days later, he was brought back to the cell. His Name was Ablimit, his father's name was Eli Bay. Eli Bay was a bus driver in Qaynaq village, that's why I knew him well. I didn't know Ablimit, because he was a kid at that time. After four days of questioning, when they brought him back, he couldn't use his hands, which were severely paralyzed. They placed him next to me. "Baqitali, you bring him to the toilet, help him eat food, help him lie down and get up." they said. I agreed. I took care of him for around 10 or 15 days. In the toilet we managed to talk to each other. The only camera free area was where the toilet was. I had to help him with taking off and putting on his pants. During that, I asked him "what happened to you? What did they do to you? What happened to your hands?". They tied his hands and hanged him for four consecutive days without his feet touching on the ground. He was beaten with a stun baton and other batons. He showed some of the beaten parts on his body. All over his body were burned with stun batons. His back, abdomen and everywhere, it was very difficult to look at his body. He broke into tears and said: "Why don't they just kill me, instead of torturing me so brutally. I couldn't bear it brother" he said. I said by consoling him: "We have no choice brother, what can we do about it? We will go out one day." But then he said "no brother, they won't let me out from here. They tortured me by beating and asked me to tell them my crimes." His tendons were stretched so badly that he became a paralyzed person. Getting hung like that for four days finishes a person. They knew that he would die if he didn't eat anything, of course. While he was being hung, they pushed bread into his mouth, then poured water, just to prevent him from dying.

9. After a few days, they took him out of the cell and then he disappeared. He told me “I didn’t see my family members after the detention, for one year I didn't see my wife and none of my children.” He was a young man in his 30s. There were a lot of young men like him in the camp. The Chinese finished uncountable young guys there. What did Chinese do to those young men, no one knew. I forgot the names of a lot of people. I know all the paralyzed and killed young people there and I saw many of them.

10. At the beginning they took once or twice my blood sample. We didn't know why they took it. They gave me injections once or twice. At one time they injected in my arm, saying it was for cold. Then they gave me a blue drug, they said that I got a cold, and I should take it. They monitored you to make sure you took the drug. When I refused to take it, “why don’t you take it?” they shouted and put it into my mouth by force. “Take it, otherwise you won’t get better, ” they said. We didn’t know which kind of drug it was.

11. After eight months of detention there I collapsed. After I passed out and vomited blood in the camp, they brought me to the Chapchal county hospital, and I stayed there for around 10 days. Then they brought me back to the hospital of the camp. There I stayed for around 20 days. I have all the paper documents from the medical examinations which they carried out in the camp hospital. I was a completely healthy man before. I didn't see anyone there who could say that he was healthy. Many people got sick there.

12. There was questioning every day and you were asked to write a letter of regret. We didn't have a choice, but to write it. It didn't matter if we were willing or not, we had to sign some documents. There was no one who cared about you. Hiring a lawyer was absolutely impossible there. I saw people died due to harsh tortures. There were people who were beaten to death at around 12 or one o'clock at night. One was there today, but not the next day. No one knew where they were taken to. They were just dragged out from the cell and never came back again. Two of those I saw died. One of them was from “Yapchan”

town. The other one's name was Baratjan, who was the father of a young man named Muhammadeli. They beat him to death. Baratjan was a butcher in Chapchal county. I stayed with his son in the same cell while Baratjan in the neighboring cell. Once we saw him when we were in the hall together. Muhammadeli said "My dad is also here, he is my dad, brother Baqitali". "Yes, I know your father well, he is a butcher in Chapchal county." I said. We communicated other things with body language because it was not possible there to talk to each other. Baratjan was sentenced to 13 years in prison. Even though he had been sentenced, they beat him to death anyway. Together with him, another young man from Chapchal was also beaten to death, his name was Turghun.

13. There were uncountable beatings in the camp. They brought many young men to the camp everyday with handcuffs and chained to each other. Later in the evening, they would be taken away. Some of them would come back alive, while some others were killed. Some of them would disappear. No one knew where they were taken to. Many people became paralyzed there. The police did whatever they wanted. The detainees did not have any rights there.

14. I was released on October 16th, 2018, as a sick man. My feet were so paralyzed that I couldn't walk by myself. Every day I vomited blood and there was fluid in my lung. My stomach was also damaged. I was sentenced to five years in prison. Just before I left, they forced me to sign a paper by saying "You can leave if you sign this document, otherwise you can't leave". They also asked my family to sign a paper saying, "Your husband has been sentenced to five years". It was a document in Chinese with three official seals.

15. Those days, they freed people with light "offences" like those who went to Kazakhstan. Before leaving they said "You don't tell anyone about anything that you went through here, including even your wife. You should not say anything like that you have been detained in a camp, you were locked up in a detention center, you were severely tortured and so on. If a reporter asks you about it, you don't say anything. Just you know yourself.

If you tell someone, you will be brought back here again and you will not be free again.” They forced all of us to sign papers with such contents. No choice, we signed them. After we left there, they installed camera in my house. I was in house arrest. I was not allowed to go out. I have all the paper documents about my house arrest, which I concealed.

16. In 2015, my wife had been made to abort. I have a document about that forceful abortion. In addition to that, when I was in the camp, they threatened my family by stating “Your third child was not allowed, we will lock you up in the camp as well” and fined 17400 Chinese Yuan. I also have that receipt. I have all the relevant documents in my hands.

17. After I left the camp on October 16th, in order to terminate my business in Kazakhstan, I requested to have passports of my eldest daughter’s and mine. They forced me to sign a paper that mainly stated, “If I do not come back, they will not free my wife and my two children”. After that I got my passports back on 15th of August,2019 I came here. I was hospitalized for three months. Several people helped me. I got medical treatment here. If I hadn't managed to leave there, I would have already died. Later, in November 2019, after around three months, they allowed my wife and my children to come here as well.