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# Witness Statement

## Omira Bekali

1. My name is Omira Bekali and I was born on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1976 in Pichan County, Turpan, from a Uyghur mother and a Kazakh father. I studied in Uyghur schools. In 2006, I moved to Kazakhstan due to the injustice and persecution in the region, then became a Kazakh citizen. My ethnicity is Kazakh on my passport. I got erased completely all the ID registrations in China. Since then, I was travelling back and forth between the two countries for business quite frequently.
2. On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017, I came to Urumqi to attend a conference organized by Chinese travel companies related to Astana Expo. After two days of conference, I went to Pichan to visit my family for one day. On 26<sup>th</sup> March around ten o'clock in the morning, five police officers came to the house in two police cars. They didn't have any written police notice. I explained to them that I had only come to visit my parents and planned to go back to Almaty on the next day. They said that they needed to talk to me and that it would be over in half an hour. I was taken to Dighar police station, where we talked for almost two hours. I could contact my wife to tell her that I was at the police station. Then they automatically deactivated my phone. Since then, I couldn't contact anyone else. They showed me on their computer a warrant for my arrest, emitted by the Karamay Public Security Bureau.
3. I was handcuffed and a black hood was placed on my head. They said this was the rule and they did this to everyone. Three policemen took me to a place like a hospital where a full body examination took place while my hood was still on. Blood and urine samples were taken. Then I was placed on a bed. They applied a cold gel on different parts of my body, so I thought they were doing ultrasound. I could hear them speaking about my examination, but I could not see anything, I was terrified that they might cut me open and remove my organs. They checked my lungs. These tests lasted for two hours. Then I was taken to a police station where I was given an eye test. My eyelids were held open while they were instructing me to look left, right, up and down. They would take photographs of the positions of the irises of my eyes. They then took my fingerprints and recorded my voice. This procedure lasted for another hour.
4. It was about eight in the evening when they took me to a detention centre. I had to change into a prison uniform, and I was then placed in a cell with thirteen young men. They were all Uyghurs and in shackles. I was kept there, also in shackles, for eight days. On the last day, three men – one Uyghur and two Chinese came from Karamay to question me. They alleged that I had assisted people with their visa applications, that I took money from them claiming I could

obtain a passport for them. Then they said that they would carry out further investigation on me in Karamay.

5. On 3<sup>rd</sup> April, I was taken from Pichan to Karamay in handcuffs and shackles, but they removed the black hood as I felt unwell. I was brought to the Jerenbulaq police station and placed in a basement cell, one hand chained high on the metal bar of the door. The next day, the police chief, a Han Chinese man whose surname is Liu, came to question me. I will never forget what he said: "Kazakhstan is equal to my \*\*\* ". They started questioning me about my life. I had nothing to hide so I told them everything. They kept asking which organisations I was in contact with; what my purpose for entering the country was; what services I had provided to people in Karamay; how I assisted people leaving from Karamay to Turkey, Syria and Europe, and how I was giving money to organisations. They interrogated me for four days and nights with extreme torture methods. They made me sit on the "tiger" chair. They hung me from the ceiling. They chained me to the wall and beat me with plastic, wooden, electric batons and metal wire whip. They pierced needles under my nails. I could take nap of ten or fifteen minutes only when I was seated on "tiger" chair. They forced me to accept three crimes: instigating terrorism, organising terror activities, and covering up for terrorists. I denied everything.
6. On 7<sup>th</sup> April, I was again taken to the hospital for a full examination. I was then taken to Karamay City Camp and placed in cell number 209. There were about 35 people inside. It was about 18 square meters. Seven of them were tied to the bed with chain. I was eighth and tied to the bed in a similar way. The rest were in shackles. Until 16<sup>th</sup> July, I had to live in that state for three months and ten days and nights, without fresh air nor shower. After 16<sup>th</sup> July, everyone had to carry a shackle weighed seven kilograms. We had no rights at all. I was not allowed to contact either a lawyer, the consulate, or my parents. We were treated worse than animals. The food was very bad. There was nothing but steamed bun, rice water, celery water. We sang red songs and constantly learnt political lessons. In principle, there should be twelve people maximum in this small cell. But we were about thirty-five to forty. Seven, eight, or even ten men aged from 16 to 40 disappeared from one cell per week. We gave blood once a month by putting our hands out. We didn't know how much they took. It lasted for fifteen to twenty minutes. For one month, I was locked alone in a three-square-meter cell.
7. I thought we were brought here to be killed, not to be educated. A man named Yunus Abliz from the next cell died of severe torture and was taken away. The 26-year-old nephew of Yolwas, the deputy head of the municipal police, also died of torture in the camp. After this, the camp remained silent for a month.
8. In search of my whereabouts, my wife wrote to the Kazakh Foreign Ministry and the United Nations, talked to the media. My mother and sister in Turpan went to the Kazakh consulate asking the reasons for the disappearance of a Kazakh

citizen like me. At the end of July, a Kazakh diplomat from Beijing along with another diplomat from Urumqi, came to see me. The shackles were temporarily removed. When I got up, I couldn't keep my balance and walked like a drunk. We talked for about an hour and a half. They explained to me my rights and responsibilities. They emphasized that camp guards had no right to torture me; If I got sick, I should get medical treatment and I should be given three meals a day.

9. On 4<sup>th</sup> November, I was asked to sign a document stating the conditions for my release on bail. I signed that document as I was so eager to leave this hell and see the outside world. Then they took me to another concentration camp. I stayed there for 20 days. I thought the reason they sent me to this camp was because of the food there. The food there was a little better. They might have wanted me to come to myself somehow. As my weight had dropped from 115kg to 60kg.
10. This camp was divided into three areas: A, B and C. I stayed in the C area with more than 2,000 other people. We went out to dinner together for the first week. After the second week, we didn't know why, but we were banned from going outside. We were 45 to 50 people in a 22-square-foot cell that could hold 14 to 16 people. Cameras were placed inside the cell and they monitored us all the time. We gave blood from time to time. We were forced to take unknown medicines. People were removed if they experienced changes on their bodies, such as tumours. Similarly, young men between the ages of 16 and 40 disappeared frequently. Among them were businessmen, cadres and employees. For example, Tahir was a teacher of 2<sup>nd</sup> High School and Atawullah was a lawyer. All of us were innocent. The pretexts were that one had an extremist ideology, or wanted to commit terrorism, or had visited one of the 26 countries on the list, or had a passport. There were people between the ages from 16 to 60/70. During this period, I was moved to 4 or 5 cells. There were times when I was hungry all day. 4 or 5 days before I left, Tahir, the teacher, was taken away on a stretcher.
11. I even saw a whole family – father and sons. The government employees were accused of being “two-faced”, the most convenient accusation to use. People who had completed their prison sentence were also transferred there. Once, I heard cadres saying that it was now time to bring people who worked within the legal system. Doctors, teachers, and lawyers were starting to be detained. There were over ten thousand men in the camp, with 70 to 80% Uyghurs and 20 to 30% Kazakhs.
12. In the camp, we slept from 12am to 6am. In the morning, all beds must be made in military style and failure to do this would be considered “failure in ideology.” At 7:30am, we must attend the flag raising ceremony. After washing our faces, and before breakfast, we sang red songs, such as “Where there is no Communist party there is no new China,” or “Socialism is good.” Before starting

to eat, we must say “thanks to the party, thanks to the country, thanks to President Xi, I wish him good health; I wish President Xi lives long and stays young.” The lessons include Party laws and regulations, and the red songs. All lessons were taught in Mandarin and there was an exam every week. During lessons, they informed us of cases that had taken place in courts, and sentences that were given. This was to spread fear, a way for them to let us know what a heavy price we would pay if we did not follow the rules. During my time there, I didn’t see anyone leave from there. According to the cadre there, it took at least five years to complete the “re-education”. There were young men who had stayed there already for two years. The guards had wooden batons, and they would beat us heavily if we manifested any sign of disobedience.

13. I heard there were two or three more camps in Karamay and another big one was being built. I also heard that the government ethnic minority employees were told that they must complete a re-education program to correct their ideology. The cadres informed their staff that it was a directive from the central government, and no one had the power to refuse.
14. On the seventh day in the camp, after persistent request, we managed to take a shower. That was the only time. There were cameras everywhere inside and outside the collective shower room. Just before I left the camp, the doors of the cells were locked and chained, even though they were locked automatically. I didn’t know the reason for this sudden change. We couldn’t get medical treatment if we got sick. A cellmate named Dilshat Setiwaldi had a kidney problem due to heavy beatings, he urinated blood. Another named, Alim Awut, had extremely serious haemorrhoids. None of them got medical treatment. After my blood pressure went too high, I was given medicine. Probably because I’m a foreigner.
15. I constantly asked them to either give me a trial, or shoot me, or release me. I was punished many times. The first was that after the policemen were tired of beating, they put me up against the wall for 24 hours. The second was, after the beating, locked me on the “tiger” chair for 24 hours. The third punishment was a 24-hour hunger in a solitary confinement. The fourth type, in the harsh winter, was to stay outside only with shorts. The fifth type was not used for me, and it was the harshest. One was kept from neck down in the water prison. I heard that many died there. When I was in solitary confinement, they did not give me a meal for a day, and finally gave me five or six spoons of rice given by the other cellmates. My cellmates later told me they actually filled the plate with their food. I found out that the police had dumped most of the food that was sent to me.
16. On 24<sup>th</sup> November, they announced my release. I was too weak to walk. They took me to my sister's house. The next day, A police women named Wang Xiaomi gave me a 15-day visa for 320 yuan, and told me that I should be thankful that I was still alive. She also threatened me that since my parents,

siblings and my wife's siblings were here, I should peacefully leave for Kazakhstan. After having stayed in Karamay for two days and come to myself a little, I went to my parents in Pichan.

17. I told my father that I would go to Beijing and inform the higher authorities about the circumstances. I did not know that these orders came from the central government, from Xi Jinping himself. My father told me it was useless and that I had to tell the truth in Kazakhstan, at the United Nations. My parents knew they would be in trouble, but said, "We've lived our lives, and you have to expose these injustices." On arrival at the customs, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. without water or food, I was interrogated and threatened again.
18. Three days after landing in Kazakhstan, I underwent facial surgery. On 11<sup>th</sup> December, at Atayurt Organization, I called out Kazakh people to oppose the injustice of the Chinese oppression, illegal abduction and imprisonment in death camps. I was interviewed by Freedom Radio on 27<sup>th</sup> December, 2017. I spoke on Radio Free Asia. Associated Press correspondent Jerry Wang contacted from Beijing on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018. On 9<sup>th</sup> March, they detained my sister. On 16<sup>th</sup> March, my mother was detained. Jerry Wang then came to Kazakhstan and interviewed me for seven consecutive days. Two hours after news report was released on 17<sup>th</sup> May, a Russian and a Kazakh security agents came to my house to conduct a full search. So worried about my safety, I was forced to flee to Turkey on 20<sup>th</sup> May. Four months later, I was able to bring my family to Turkey. I was able to tell the media in Turkey details that were not disclosed in Kazakhstan. Because my security in Kazakhstan was not quite guaranteed. I went to Japan in November 2018. I narrated the Chinese oppression for 11 days. I later came to the Czech Republic on an invitation to report on my experiences in Chinese camps. I arrived in the Netherlands in March 2019 with a visa. I gave witness statement to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland on 17<sup>th</sup> March. I gave interviews in Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. I decided to stay in the Netherlands because I did not feel safe in Turkey and at the suggestion of my brothers in Europe. Just recently, I was reunited with my family.
19. Because of my activities, China has harmed my family. My brother, Abdurahman Bekri, was a millionaire businessman who graduated from Xinjiang University with a degree in law. Because of me, he was put into a camp and came out handicapped. My mother and my sister suffered in the camps. My father was detained on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 2018 and tortured to death on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2018. China may one day kill me. But I was ready to die. As long as my soul is in my body, I will not cease to bear witness and testify to the oppression of my people. I believe the truth will win one day.

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**4 June 2021 (01:39:00 – 02:25:30)**

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**Omer Bekali – UTFW-018**

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*Counsel – Mr Bekali, your witness statement relates to several men disappearing, can*

139

*you provide further detail on these disappearances?*

140 OB – I was in three different camps, with people up from 30-40 cell mates. The males  
141 were aged from 16-40, every week some were taken out form the cell and never returned,  
142 to be replaced by newcomers.

143 *Counsel – Was there any pattern as to who was taken and who remained in their cells?*

144 OB – I was a healthy man, very strong, 150kg when I was arrested. The males who were  
145 detained in those facilities, especially those between 16-40 were very healthy. Those who  
146 were especially healthy and strong were those who disappeared.

147 *Counsel – Did any of those disappeared returned to their cells, or was that the last the  
148 witness heard of them?*

149 OB – I do not remember seeing anyone return.

150 *Counsel – You have referred to a water prison, can you describe what that was?*

151 OB – We had 5 different types of torture. The water prison, though I have not experienced  
152 it personally, according to those who have the person is sunk in water up to their neck  
153 and hung from the ceiling.

154 *Counsel – Can you tell us who was sent there and how many were sent there?*

155 OB – I remember two names, who were both young, Juret, who was 26 and Amet who  
156 was 23.

157 *Counsel – You have stated you gave blood once a month, which lasted 15-20 minutes,  
158 can you confirm if the procedure lasted that long, or giving blood was that long?*

159 OB – The time that I mentioned was approximate, as I did not have a watch. When they  
160 came to draw blood, we just had to spread our arms through the hole in the wall. That is  
161 where they took blood, sometimes for 10 or 15 minutes.

162 *Counsel – In terms of profession, do you know what proportion of detainees were  
163 professionals?*

164 OB – In the cell that I shared it was mostly well-educated people. One was a lawyer, one  
165 a teacher and a few very successful businessmen.

166 *Counsel – Did you have any side effects from the unidentified medication you were given?*

167 OB – Yes, apart from the pills and the injections it is common that people suffer from food  
168 poisoning. I have also suffered this. I collapsed and later I was told I was after I was given  
169 medicine that I regained consciousness. It is difficult to express the feelings with words.  
170 You become a very inward person reluctant to even talk or show any interest in anything.  
171 You become so tired and could not stand without feeling as if you were going to collapse.  
172 It is extremely difficult to me to even tell you how you feel after those pills and injections.

173 *Counsel – You have indicated you suffered form of ill treatment. You have brought  
174 something in today. Can you explain this?*

175 OB – The chain that I brought here is a chain that I was chained for 7 months 10 days an  
176 if you allow me, I would like to show you how I was chained and demonstrate this. (\*the  
177 witness puts on chains which have strapped his wrists together to a chain connected to  
178 his ankles\*) I was chained like this – this is much more flexible. I could not stand up. I was  
179 in that position for seven months and ten days. It is about 7kg.

180 *Counsel – Can the witness tell us how he was able to get these chains?*

181 OB – In order to demonstrate about what happened to me and others. I bought the chain  
182 in Turkey as you can buy them.

183 *Panel – Have there been any criticisms of the witness by the PRC?*

184 Counsel – Media sources which claim the witnesses lied about being tortured in the re-  
185 education camp, that he has been involved in terrorist activities, and that his mother and  
186 sister are living normal lives in Xinjiang.

187 *Panel – In 2006 you decided to leave Xinjiang to Kazakhstan, what were the  
188 circumstances back then which caused you to leave?*

189 OB – Having gone to university in Beijing in 1997, I returned to my home but was able to  
190 obtain a job in my chosen profession. I became a driver. With salaries we received,  
191 especially for Uyghurs and Kazakhs, were lower due to the discrimination we received  
192 very unfair treatment.

193 *Panel – So you moved to Kazakstan and travelled extensively back and forth between*  
194 *there and China. Did you have reason to believe you would be detained? Was there a*  
195 *risk?*

196 OB – No.

197 *Panel – When you were first detained, you were taken for a medical examination, you*  
198 *said you were worried they would remove your organs, why did you worry about this?*

199 OB – During my time in Kazakhstan when I was doing business, that is what I studied, I  
200 was interested in more information, and I learned that Falun Gong practitioners' organs  
201 were harvested as well as Uyghur people's organs were harvested. It was extremely  
202 terrifying experience as people who were examining me, I could feel although I had a  
203 black bag I could feel there were three people not saying anything and when they placed  
204 the cold gel on my body and started examining, I almost passed water and felt so nervous.

205 *Panel – But do you know what the basis for that thorough medical examination was?*

206 OB – Our people, we became here now on an international stage they are accusing us of  
207 lying. The organ harvesting is common as you must have heard that they advertise a halal  
208 organ. And even when they tortured us, they would make sure our internal organs were  
209 not damaged.

210 *Panel – When you were first detained, you were told you had committed terrorist related*  
211 *crimes, did they explain what these were?*

212 OB – No not at all, they did not present any evidence. On paper they showed me what I  
213 was accused of, organizing terrorism, instigating terrorism and intention to split the  
214 country, separatism. They forced me to sign the paper, to admit those so-called crimes. I  
215 was not the only, one, every one experienced exactly the same pressure, to sign the  
216 document in order to make them sign, they would use torture.

217 *Panel – In the camp, you explained it was an education camp, for education, can you say*  
218 *something about the nature of that education?*

219 OB – There is no such education. I did not to be re-education as I was a director of a  
220 company. My father who worked all his life for the government, who was detained and  
221 died in the camp did not need to be re-educated.

222 *Panel – You said you were visited by Kazakh diplomats as a Kazakh citizen, they*  
223 *explained your rights, what rights did you have?*

224 OB – I was told that first, they cannot force me to work, put me in forced labour. The  
225 second was a right to have medication if I was ill. The third right was getting 3 meals a  
226 day.

227 *Panel – Did you explain to the diplomats the nature of your treatment in the camp?*

228 OB – It was not possible to before I was taken to meet them. I was threatened that if I told  
229 them anything that happened to those diplomats and they removed all the chains and  
230 handcuffed me and took me.

231 *Panel – Did you experience any different treatment to the Uyghur detainees as a Kazakh*  
232 *citizen?*

233 OB – In the past it was slightly different, between the two. But after 2017, hardly any  
234 difference. Once I questioned and said I am a Kazakh citizen - I was punished in a dark  
235 cell. It was three square metre in a cell locked up for one month in solitary confinement.

236 *Panel – When you came to be released, you were asked to sign conditions of release,*  
237 *what were the conditions?*

238 OB – The terms and conditions were that if I ever wanted to return to the country and visit  
239 my parents again then I must not say anything about what I have experienced or  
240 witnessed during my detention.

241 *Panel – Your family stayed behind, could you explain the basis for your belief about their*  
242 *treatment as opposed to the Chinese government's treatment's version of the story?*

243 OB – After I was released, I started telling the truth to the world. My family suffered the  
244 consequences, my father died and my sister and brother my mother were all branded a  
245 terrorist family.

246 *Panel – How are you able to find this out?*

247 OB – I could not communicate with anyone. I was cut off.

248 *Panel – During the period of detention, can you describe the ill treatment and torture you*  
249 *have alleged in your statement?*

250 OB – It is extremely hard for me to talk about it. I don't even want to remind myself about  
251 it. But for the first four day and nights I was tortured intensely. In the beginning I was  
252 secured on the tiger chair and beaten up. These pictures I am showing from google, it  
253 was a similar cell. That was the basement of the police station. I was hung from the ceiling  
254 and then similar to this position – they used thin wire and other tools to hit my body all  
255 over including the sole of my feet. While experiencing such horror non-stop it makes you  
256 wonder whether those people are human.

257 *Panel – You heard regarding the Karamay camps that all government ethnic minorities*  
258 *were to have re-education and that this was a directive from the central government, what*  
259 *does that mean, can you explain some more?*

260 OB – Initially I thought it was Chen Quanguo that we have been put through and therefore  
261 I decided to go to Beijing to make a complaint. My father stopped me and said that without  
262 an order from Beijing, that would not happen.

263 *Panel – Can you explain the connection between Beijing and that region in northwest*  
264 *China? What did your father mean that the order came from Beijing to that region in*  
265 *question?*

266 OB – My father was a retired civil servant who worked for the government for over 30  
267 years so he knows the nature of the government. He has seen many official papers, and  
268 therefore he understands how the system cheats and lies. He knew that nothing can be  
269 achieved or implemented without the order from the central government in Beijing. I do  
270 not know how it works, we assume it is from the central government, but how the central  
271 government works we do not have any information.