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## **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.

1 **12<sup>th</sup> September 2021 (3:23:10 – 4:06:06)**

2 **Baqitali Nur**

3

4 *COUNSEL – You stated that in the detention camp they beat you every day, and they*  
5 *beat you with a plastic rod by asking “reveal your crimes! You are hiding it!” Could you*  
6 *explain to the Tribunal how you were beaten on a daily basis?*

7 BAQITALI NUR – It happened in the very beginning of my detention. They accused  
8 me of visiting one of the twenty-six “terrorist” countries. That is why they questioned  
9 me and asked me to reveal my crimes. I was sitting on a tiger chair for 24 hours. There  
10 were many other things that happened: when they questioned me, it would always be  
11 a severe interrogation.

12 *COUNSEL – You said that you were beaten every day by a plastic rod. Can you*  
13 *explain that a bit further?*

14 *[Technical issues]*

15 BN – I was locked up in a prison during the first two days. It happened when they  
16 questioned me. They asked why I went to Kazakhstan, what kind of people I met or  
17 communicated with while I was there. They asked those questions and tortured me,  
18 beat me, and coerced me to sign papers that I did not understand.

19 *COUNSEL – You also refer, in your statement, to a young man by the name of Ablimit,*  
20 *that was in your cell and was beaten by the guards. Can you explain the situation of*  
21 *Ablimit to the Tribunal?*

22 BN – I was with him in the same cell. One day, around midnight or 12:30, he was taken  
23 away. He was only taken back after four days, and he was paralysed when he was

24 taken back to the cell. The head-warden, who was a Han Chinese, asked me to help  
25 Ablimit to eat food, and whenever he wanted to go to the toilet, I needed to accompany  
26 him. Since the cameras were installed everywhere and we were not allowed to speak  
27 in the camp, the only place that we could speak was in the toilet. So, once when I took  
28 him to the toilet, I asked him what happened. He said that those guys were from the  
29 State Security Bureau, and they took him to a place where they hung him from the  
30 ceiling. Initially, his feet did not touch the floor but after four days, his body stretched  
31 so much that his feet touched the floor. He thought “what have I done?” and he was  
32 thinking that he should have died rather than experiencing such torture. He was beaten  
33 up by electric batons as well. He was tortured and ended up in the detention centre  
34 because he had attended [**a \*mashrab\* – 3:34:42**], which is a kind of gathering for  
35 Uyghur people.

36 *COUNSEL – Is there anything that you wish to add to your statement?*

37 BN – In 2015, my wife was forcefully made to abort. By that time, she had been  
38 pregnant for over six months. I have all the relevant documentation. The foetus in her  
39 body was ripped off, and she passed out twice. It happened on 9 December 2015.

40 *PANEL – If we can go back to the beginnings of your detention: at the time you were*  
41 *arrested, were you a Kazakh citizen at that stage?*

42 BN – No, I was a Chinese citizen. I used to have a business: I was selling vegetables  
43 to Kazakhstan. Two months prior I had gotten back the passport from the local  
44 authorities. On 1 November 2017, I was detained at the [**\*Khorgas\* – 3:38:48**] border.

45 *PANEL – Can you tell us what travels you had in Kazakhstan before you were detained*  
46 *in November 2017? Were you a regular visitor to Kazakhstan?*

47 BN – From 2007, I would travel back and forth between Kazakhstan and China,  
48 because I had business to do and relatives there.

49 *PANEL – Can I ask what your passport was? Were those travels done without a*  
50 *passport or was this a new passport replacing an existing one?*

51 BN – Yes, it was my second passport, it was newly issued.

52 *PANEL – When you were first detained by the police and spend two or three days in*  
53 *a police station, the questioning all seemed to be about the people that you had met*  
54 *in Kazakhstan following the grant of this new passport.*

55 BN – Yes.

56 *PANEL – But apart from suggesting that you had met terrorists, or “bad people” I*  
57 *believe they called them, did they give you any idea who it was that they were*  
58 *concerned you had met while you were in Kazakhstan?*

59 BN – No, they did not. They would not tell me. I asked them back “what kind of people  
60 have I contacted?” or “what kind of people do you mean are related to terrorism?” But  
61 they did not say anything, instead they asked me to confess my guilt, and that was it.

62 *PANEL – They asked you, while you were detained in the police station, to sign a*  
63 *confession, which I think you said to counsel was written in Mandarin, which you did*  
64 *not understand?*

65 BN – Yes.

66 *PANEL – You stated that during your time in the police station you were tortured, and*  
67 *torture included being confined to a tiger chair. Could you give us a bit more detail*  
68 *about the torture treatment you received in the police station?*

69 BN – They were from the State Security. There were two guys named Erkin and Murat.  
70 When Murat was out of the room, Erkin tied me up and beat me, and ordered me to  
71 confess. I asked: “what should I confess?”, “what crime have I committed?” but instead  
72 of replying to me, he gave me some papers that were pre-written in Chinese with  
73 stamps, and he ordered me to sign these papers. Then I was fitted on the tiger chair  
74 for 24 hours. It started from the early morning and continued to the early morning of  
75 the second day. Both my legs and my hands were tied to the chair.

76 *PANEL – After three days you were taken to a detention centre, and you said the*  
77 *detention centre that you were in was primarily for men, but not old men, and that*  
78 *women and older men were kept separately. Could you say a bit more about your daily*  
79 *routine? You described in your statement 10 to 15 hours of sitting without movement,*  
80 *and daily beatings...*

81 BN – I was taken to building No.1, on the sixth floor. Before going to that particular  
82 room, we went through several gates and every gate was opened only with the  
83 fingerprint of the policeman. Every gate was flanked by two policemen. The door of  
84 the cell room was chained to the wall so you cannot open it wide, so you have to bend  
85 a bit to be able to enter the cell. The amount of people varied, in the beginning there  
86 were eight people, there were times where there were twelve people in the room, and  
87 they were changing the people all the time. At some point, the total number reached  
88 more than 9,000 people. It was too crowded, then they transferred the old men and  
89 the women to another camp.

90 *PANEL – You described in your statement the very poor quality of the food you were*  
91 *given in prison. Could you just say what was the quantity of the food like?*

92 BN – For breakfast, we would be given cold congee [*rice porridge or gruel*] with a  
93 steam bun which is only this big. In the evenings we would have some celery and a  
94 little amount of food. The food was really bad there, even the dogs would not have  
95 eaten it.

96 *PANEL – You stated in your statement that you witnessed many other people being*  
97 *paralysed and killed, particularly young people, who were taken away at night and not*  
98 *returned. Can you give any idea of the numbers of people that you saw, or were aware*  
99 *of, who were paralysed or killed in the detention centre?*

100 BN – Yes, there were many people who suffered like this. We would have to sit for  
101 fifteen hours. I can say that around 80% of the internees had their legs swollen  
102 because of these long periods of time sitting at on their chair. Eventually, some of them  
103 became disabled. They did not care if we learned something or not, because they  
104 would bring those disabled people, including the completely blind people, to sit to  
105 study. I remember a Uyghur guy, named [**? – 3:54:13**], who was completely blind, and  
106 the two guards would accompany him and take him to his seat. The purpose was not  
107 to teach us anything, because among us there were people who finished school in  
108 Mandarin language, and there were people who had studied abroad so they did not  
109 need any education. So, in most cases we learned how to sing songs.

110 *PANEL – After eight months of detention in the centre, you collapsed and were taken*  
111 *to a hospital. Could you tell us what the nature of the illness you were suffering from*  
112 *was, and what was the quality of the facilities in the hospital you were taken to?*

113 BN – On 26 June 2018 in the morning, the guy called Ablimit, from Chapchal county,  
114 passed out. Nobody cared about him, he was lying on the floor. In the afternoon, I  
115 fainted, and I vomited blood. So, my case was serious, and I was taken to the hospital,

116 and I spent fifteen days in the emergency room. Actually, the hospital I was taken to  
117 used to be a disease prevention centre, and it was repurposed to a hospital for the  
118 camp detainees. It was almost like a prison, because we were being monitored all the  
119 time and there were more than a hundred people taken to that hospital almost every  
120 day. To be honest, everyone in those camps ended up being somehow sick. I did not  
121 see anyone who did not develop any disease after spending time in the camp.

122 *PANEL – During your twenty-four hours in the tiger chair, were you released to go to*  
123 *the toilet?*

124 BN – Yes, I was given permission to go to the toilet only once.

125 *PANEL – When detained, were blood samples taken from you?*

126 BN – Yes, blood was drawn from me. I spent three months and twenty days in the  
127 hospital, and in total they drew blood maybe a dozen times.

128 *PANEL – Did you see the container into which the blood went, and if so, can you say*  
129 *roughly how large or small it was?*

130 BN – They would bring three such containers, for about thirty grams.

131 *PANEL – Was any reason given to you for why blood samples were being taken?*

132 BN – I haven't got a clue. We did not have the right to ask or speak. We needed to do  
133 what we were asked to do. It is the general situation for all ethnic minorities. The  
134 policemen there would taunt us, saying "you are beasts" and "this is your life now, you  
135 will spend the rest of your life like this."

136 *PANEL – In your statement you described the number of people in your cell, initially*  
137 *eight, rising to twelve. Could you tell us how big the cell was?*

138 BN – I think it was around three by three metres.

139 *PANEL – You also described that in other cells there were a greater number of people,*  
140 *up to forty. How big were those cells? Were they different in size from your cell?*

141 BN – There were different cell rooms. There were rooms for forty people, thirty-five  
142 people or twenty. I was able to see them when I was being taken to the “evening  
143 interrogation” as they called it. On my way to that interrogation room, I saw them.  
144 These were mainly in Building No.3.

145 *PANEL – So, in those 3x3 metres cells that contained forty people, there was not*  
146 *enough room to sleep, is that correct?*

147 BN – Yes.

148 *PANEL – Before I thank Mr Nur, the Tribunal, which responded to a request from the*  
149 *World Uyghur Congress, is described as looking into alleged offenses in respect of*  
150 *both Uyghurs and Kazakhs. Has the Tribunal from the beginning been seeking and*  
151 *willing to call Kazakh witnesses as this witness and the next two demonstrate?*

152 *COUNSEL – Yes, they are all from Kazakh heritage.*

153 *PANEL – Thank you for giving evidence Mr Nur.*