

Witness Statement

Omira Bekali

1. My name is Omira Bekali and I was born on 30th 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 23rd 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 26th 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 3rd 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 Jerebulaq 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 7th 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 16th July, I had to live in that state for three months and ten days and nights, without fresh air nor shower. After 16th 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 4th 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 2nd 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 24th 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 11th 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 27th December, 2017. I spoke on Radio Free Asia. Associated Press correspondent Jerry Wang contacted from Beijing on 8th March 2018. On 9th March, they detained my sister. On 16th 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 17th 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 20th 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 17th 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 24th April, 2018 and tortured to death on 18th 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.