

Witness Statement

Sayragul Sauytbay

1. My name is Sayragul Sawutbay. My ethnicity is Kazakh. I was born on 16th September 1976 in Mongolkure County of Ghulja, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (East Turkistan). I studied at the Xinjiang Medical University from 1993 to 1997. After graduation, I worked several years at a local Traditional Medicine Hospital in my hometown. I then decided to change my career from medical to teaching. I worked at a school where I taught Chinese at the local school. In 2004, I got married and moved to a rural town where my husband was from. My husband was also working at the same school with me. I completed a further two-year course at Xinjiang Normal University from 2007 to 2009. I went back to teaching at the same local school and took some administrative tasks as well. In 2016, I was appointed as the director for administration of five state-owned kindergarten in the same area.
2. In 2016, the Chinese Government introduced new measures which called for termination of all mother language schoolings (whether Uyghur or Kazakh). We decided to emigrate to Kazakhstan but being a civil servant, I could not get my passport. My husband and my children emigrated to Kazakhstan and I stayed at home.
3. From January 2017, the regime started harassing me, because my husband and children were in Kazakhstan. On a number of occasions, I was taken to the police stations for interrogations. Some of them in the middle of night. In November 2017, I received a phone call at night when I was at home. A man on the phone told me to go to an address in the city centre immediately. I asked him what was the reason for me to go there? And who are you? He insisted that I shouldn't ask any questions, instead I must follow his orders to go there immediately. He also informed me that I will go to teach Chinese in the morning.
4. During that time the situation was extremely volatile, as they have been arresting people and detaining them in mass numbers in Xinjiang and also in my city. If I resisted the order, there would be severe consequences. So, I followed his instructions and went to the address he mentioned. He also gave me a telephone number and said, once you arrive there, text that number, "I have arrived." Our staff members will come to meet you. I went to the address as instructed and texted the number that I have arrived.
5. After I sent the text to that number, four armed police arrived by a police car. They placed a black hood over my head, and they took me away by car. We travelled for some distance before reaching the destination. Once we arrived there, they removed the black hood from my head I realised we were in a detention centre. I was told that I would be teaching detainees at there-

education centre. My first impression of the centre was that it was a scary fascist camp.

6. They forced me to sign a confidentiality agreement, repeatedly stating that if I break any of the rules I would face death. That is how I started my work at the detention camp in East Turkestan. My memories of the camp are that it was chilling, worse than a prison. Detainees were subjected to extreme mental torture under various malevolent schemes of pressure and horror. All the detainees were handcuffed and shackled, both men and women's heads were shaved, there were cameras installed everywhere, their movements were surveyed for 24 hours. Detainees were from all ages. The youngest was a 13-year-old boy and the oldest an 84-year-old man. The majority were men and women aged 60 to 70 years old.
7. So, I started "teaching" there at the camp. Usually, there were armed police/guards watching me teach. Everything I said had to be within the limits as permitted by the authorities. The contents of the "courses" and instructions were also pre-arranged by the authorities. I just taught whatever I was told to "teach" and I could not say anything beyond what was allowed. We (the so called "teachers" at the camp) have no rights to decide anything beyond those guidelines. In addition, no one was allowed to laugh or cry in the camp. These were all clear guidelines/rules in there that everyone should know. Anyone who dared to disobey these rules would face severe punishment and other consequences.
8. There was an internal documents/directive stating in Chinese as "First deal with the people who wears straw shoes, then deal with the people who wears leather shoes." That basically meant the common people (i.e. non-government employees) are the ones who wears "straw shoes", and the government employees (i.e. civil servants) are the people who wore "leather shoes". That meant first purge/silence the people who are not government employees then get rid of the ones who are government employees (i.e. civil servants).
9. The things (i.e. indoctrination) we were told to "teach" to the detainees are the propaganda of the communist party including party guidelines, policies, ideology, etc. It also included the speeches of Xi Jinping, official statements from the 19th congress of the CCP and so on. In addition, we were asked to teach the Chinese culture/tradition such as the things Chinese people say and do during the funerals and wedding ceremonies and other tradition in everyday life of the Chinese people. Other than that, we were also told to "teach" the history of China and more specifically the history of Xinjiang. That was the so-called "History of Xinjiang in Three Parts" which falsely stated that "Xinjiang" (known as East Turkistan) has always been part of China.
10. Additionally, we taught the speech of CCP leaders like president Xi Jinping. The camp guards provided materials to teach and not to teach. They confiscated all the materials after we finish teaching every day and these were returned to us the next day. They checked and managed all the materials.

11. I taught 50-60 people who sat on small chairs like children's chairs. If there were not enough chairs, they sat on the floor. Elders would sit down on the small chairs. This was one type of torture. Because they could not bear this type of sitting. If they moved a bit, they were punished for breaking the rules.
12. The detainees in the camp came from various fields/careers of the society such as civil servants, workers, rich people, businessmen/merchants, herdsmen, peasants, common people, and youth. Also, they included intellectuals, elites and those who were famous and influential figures. There were people from every part of society.
13. Although I was in the camp to teach, I was a detainee there as well. I did not have any rights there. The only difference is that I did not have handcuffs around my wrists and shackles around my ankle.
14. I soon found that, according to the camp rules, each detainee was only allowed to occupy one square metre space. Therefore, based on that rule, in 16-or 17-square metre cells, there were 16, 17, or even 20 inmates were crammed inside. They were all handcuffed and shackled. There were 5 cameras installed in the 4 corners with one in the centre of the ceiling. Detainees' every movement was watched 24 hours. To sleep, each person had to lay down cramped within one square meter space until sunrise. No movement was allowed, and you would be punished if you moved.
15. Detainees had to sleep on cement. As a result, people's bodies hurt, got swollen and were unable to get up. Some people get constipation. Some individuals had neurological tumor and had to take medicine every day to stay alive. However, their conditions gotten worse since they were not allowed to bring medicine to the camp. The prison authorities did not care if the patients with severe disease died.
16. A plastic bucket was placed in every cell to be used as a toilet. All the detainees in the cell had to use that bucket for both bodily functions. Once the bucket was full, a lid was placed over it. However, it would only be emptied the next morning. Therefore, when the bucket got full, no matter how desperately you were, you had to withhold your bodily functions until it was emptied the next morning. Only after it was emptied the next morning, then people could use it. I witnessed that detainees suffered from bowel problems due to forcibly retaining water and excrement, as a result developed kidney problems and infections. They also suffered from severe haemorrhoids, so various health issues became common.
17. They gave us food, three times a day, however, the quality of the food was very bad. We only had two types of food, one was rice and water. The other was vegetable soup and small bread. Usually there was no meat except on Fridays, when they fed us with pork. They tested whether detainees denounced their religion or not, and one of the tests was to feed us pork every Friday. They monitored every detainee and fed them pork every Friday. Detainees that refused to eat pork would be punished more severely with harsher treatments or longer detention. Therefore, everyone was scared and

forced to eat pork.

18. Now, let me explain what we did in 24 hours. This does not mean that we do these routines every 24 hours. Sometimes it changed a bit depending on orders from higher level officials. Usually, we woke up at 6 am, and 6 am to 7 am was breakfast time. 7 am to 9 am, I taught classes. 9 am to 11 am, I repeated teaching of the same contents once more. 11 am to 12 pm, there were slogans, which detainees had to raise over their head and they had to repeat thousands of times. A detainee who had repeated the most was considered a good performer in the camp. For example, the propaganda content, such as "I am a Chinese, I am from China", "I am proud to be a Chinese", "I love China", "My loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party", "The Communist Party gave me my life and my soul", "There is no power except the Communist Party" etc. We repeated those words written on a paper and raise over our head for an hour.
19. Then, 12 pm to 2 pm were lunch break. After then, 2 pm to 4 pm, we sung songs to praise the Communist Party, which are commonly called "red songs". Starting with the Chinese national anthem, other songs included 'We Are Family', 'No New China Without the Communist Party', 'Unity is the Power' etc. Most songs praised the CCP, Chairman Xi, and the Han Chinese culture.
20. From 4 pm to 6 pm, detainees were told to self-criticize themselves, meaning that they had to make up faults and crimes they "had committed." Of course, detainees inside the camps were innocent. Despite committing no crimes, however, they were forced to find some crimes or mistakes for themselves.
21. From 6 pm to 8 pm was the dinner time. After 8 pm until 10 pm, everyone had to put their hands up against the cold wall to re-think about their crimes and repent. Compared to the previous two hours (4 pm to 6 pm), this time they had to think deeper into their thoughts about their crimes. From 10 pm to 12 am, the camp detainees had to write down their self-criticizing problems onto a paper and hands them in next morning.
22. From 12 am to 1 am, we (the camp teachers) walked around to monitor the detainees. From 1 am to 6 am was sleeping time –only 5 hours. We get up at 6 am. Usually, two armed police came together with us (each teacher) to the classroom. We walked in the front and the police followed us. They stayed inside the "classroom". During the teaching session, some other armed police may enter the classroom without knocking. They dragged the detainees that they were going to penalize. They took them to separate isolated rooms, commonly known as the "Black Room (or the Dark Room)".
23. In that camp, cameras were everywhere, including the corridors. So, they can monitor everyone 24 hours round the clock. There is a room—we called it "Black Room" –where there were no cameras. It was in that room they carried out the most vicious tortures, during teaching hours, the police would take detainees selected for interrogation to that room and torture them there.
24. We always hear terrified sounds of people crying, screaming and begging for

help saying "help/save me!". I should say those kinds of sounds of screaming almost does not stop 24/7. We constantly heard the painful screams and cries for help coming from the Black Room, they would bring back some of the detainees by dragging them after inflicting on them severe injuries, also some of them disappeared after being taken there. I suspect that they might have died during the torture. Those who were brought back were covered in blood, their injuries were so severe. Some had some of their finger nails pulled off. There were chairs with nails pointing up from the seat, they forcibly pushed the victims to sit on them in order to torment them, we could see the blood dripping from their bodies.

25. And some of the detainees never came back. I think they have died during the torture. I have not seen a dead person, but where did they go if they are alive? Some of the detainees came back from the Black Room and some do not. I saw the Black Room with my own eyes. For example, when the number of the people in the camp reduced significantly, they would bring more people in. One day they brought new detainees, placing them in a queue bringing them in one by one. At the time, I was ordered to help with the work as a security guard, I was on duty. They brought newcomers, while they were letting them inside, among them there was an elderly Kazakh lady who was arrested from her home in the mountain where she was a herder. She wasn't even given a chance to put outdoor cloths on before arresting her from her house –our elderly women all wear galoshes over their soft leather boots during winter, you know. However, when they arrested her, they didn't give her the chance to wear her galoshes over her leather boots. She was only wearing the indoor clothes.
26. The weather was bitterly cold. Plus, she was suffering from extreme fear: she was shivering and her teeth were chattering. While they were bringing in the people in a queue she saw me, and she ran towards me and throw herself to hug me, and started telling me what had happened to her in a flood of tears. "They said that they found a problem in my phone and arrested me, I am a herder living in the mountain, I don't even know how to use a phone, and I don't even have a phone. They made up accusations against me, please rescue me."
27. Because she hugged me, and among the long list of rules of the camp, it stated clearly that no one is allowed to talk, smile or cry, so I was accused of breaking the camp rules and was taken to the black room for punishment.
28. On that day, when I saw the Black Room with my own eyes, if someone had told me about the tools used for torture, I wouldn't have believed them that in the 21st century such torture tools still existed. I saw those tools with my own eyes. So many different types of torture instruments laid out on the table, an electric chair, iron rod, electric stick, so many different tools, including a tool like a sword with a sharp end. When you are taken inside the Black Room, on seeing those torture tools, you would be completely finished psychologically; it was such a scary place!
29. They placed me in the electric chair and electrocuted me, they repeatedly

interrogated me asking what did she say to you? What did you say to her? They repeated one question again and again. During the time when I was tortured, one minute I was conscious and the next I was unconscious.

30. I thought I was going to die, and I won't be able to see my children again, and I would be killed in this camp without having committed any crime. I was placed on the electric chair and was electrocuted, beaten and tortured severely, and I was taken back several hours later by being dragged, and they insisted that I must get up on time the next morning to continue my teaching work.
31. I was in between consciousness and unconsciousness during my torment, we must get up at 6:00 am when the bell goes off. I pulled myself together realising that I was still alive. After experiencing such severe punishment, I was forced to carry out my duty as usual.
32. However, after seeing the Black Room, I thought about if I can even leave this place alive. Everyone who got into the Black Room was certain to die mentally before they died from physical torture. Because when you see those tools inside the Black Room, you will be lost. The only thing that comes to your mind would be death.
33. I also saw girls and women subjected to sexual violence, and rape. At nights, the police/ guards would pick prettiest girls and take them.
34. Let me tell you of one event which was absolutely horrific, I will never forget it as it hurt me so deeply. I don't think there is any other suffering could be worse than that. It was so tragic! One day they assembled many people in a large hall. There were approximately 100 people, in this hall. Then they brought a young girl, 20 or 21 years old. She was forced to confess a bogus crime in front of everyone. She pleaded guilty to the made-up crime in flood of tears in her speech in which she was forced to confess. After that, in front of so many people the police raped her in turns. It was their way of testing those detainees whether they have transformed, in other words, whether they have given up their humanity, while hearing the girl's painful pleas: "rescue me please, help me please!" I felt I died, I was dead. It was absolutely horrendous; I don't believe there is any other suffering that surpasses this!
35. Having witnessed such horror, my mind was tormented with anguish. While carrying out this test, the employees of the camp watched people closely, and picked out those who resisted, clenched their fists, closed their eyes, or looked away and took them for punishment. These employees included the policemen who worked inside the camp. And also, the camp guards, who were encircling the crowd watching the people, but it wasn't possible for anyone to watch the rape taken place continuously. This is because the entire process lasted quite a long time.
36. In the camp, there were different ranks of officials in charge of different levels of tasks; they have different positions and responsibilities. I don't know who gave the order to assemble us in the hall, it was not possible to enquire about

anything, and we simply don't know how they operate.

37. For instance, when I was ordered to teach in the camp, I had to accept whatever duty I was given. It was impossible for us to oppose any order. If we resist against their orders, there is severe consequences. We might even lose our life. The orders came from the top, and people who were placed in different levels execute the orders, police and assistant police execute the orders.
38. They were Han Chinese. Some were local, and others were from mainland China as they spoke in different dialects. They came from various different provinces, I say this because they had very different accents.
39. During the rape of the girl in the hall, people carried out the order, I believe they had planned it in advance. Because they brought the girl in and ordered her to speak. She spoke about the things that she has never done and made a confession crying. Once she finished, they started the thing (rape).
40. A placeman who wore a mask started it. We all spoke Chinese inside there, because they all wore masks, we could not see their faces, we only heard what they said. Also, those policemen who carried out that thing (rape) all wore masks.
41. Roughly 5 or 6 men participated in the rape of this girl.
42. I also know that detainees were forced to undergo medical tests. In the name of preventing infectious disease they forcibly injected detainees with medicine and forced them to take pills. They forced people to agree to it. Those injection and pills are extremely damaging to one's health, it also damages the neurological system, and prevent birth. Because I was the symptoms of the detainees and the women stopped having periods. They took blood samples from detainees, they drew blood periodically. I didn't experience medical examination, but all the detainees did.
43. Each detainee had a medical file. There were times that I was ordered to organise the medical files. And while doing that I saw the information in the file with my own eyes. In the medical file, the blood type, any infectious disease, 5 different test results of the liver, detailed results of blood tests, x-ray results, for example, if the file belongs to a female detainee, it has information whether or not she had a IUD inserted, the date when fitted, the date it was removed, how many children she has, and whether or not she had given birth, when was the last time they had her period, their menstrual cycle etc. Basically whatever the information related to one's health all clearly recorded in the file.
44. Prior to bringing detainees to the internment camp, they were taken for the medical check up, and they brought their medical files with them. When they line them up to enter the camp one by one, they have their files in their hands.
45. Taking blood samples was regular practice, however I didn't see other

medical check-ups with my own eyes.