

Witness Statement

Mehmut Tevekkül

Male Aged 51

1. My name is Mehmut Tevekkül. I was born 15th February 1970. I am a Uyghur, and my religion is Islam. I was detained twice. The first time was roughly the 15th or 16th May 2009 for nine days. Then I was detained on 2nd July 2010 and after seventy-one days I was released in September 2010. I now reside in Istanbul, Turkey.

Background

2. I was the eldest in my family. We were three brothers and two sisters. During the cultural revolution the CCP murdered my grandfather. My father grew up with his uncle. When I grew up, I discovered my father had no education; he doesn't even know how to pray. My uncle was the Party's general secretary of the Number 13 village of Toguchi district in Kargilik County, so, he was in charge of everything. He and his family were religious. His son has always looked down on us saying we don't pray or practice Islam. In 1996 my uncle's two sons were arrested. One got sentenced for eight years and one for ten years. They were arrested because my uncle was general secretary. Since he was a party member, his family were not allowed to practice any religion or keep any faith or go to any religious schools. Because they both studied the religion they were sentenced.
3. Since they were sentenced, and since we were related, we became targets for the authorities. Our families were four kilometres apart, but they still targeted us as relatives and potential suspects. After his two sons got detained, his oldest son was taken away. My uncle died in 2002 because his three sons were detained.

My village

4. At that time the current Deputy Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Zhu Hailun, was head of the law enforcement officers in Kargilik County. Under his leadership we were forced to change our farming practices for less effective ones, and we were made to pay for the change and do all the hard labour to make it a possibility. There were three to four thousand people in our town. Seventy to eighty Uyghur familie's fields were taken away for not following orders and given to Chinese migrants. Because of this policy Zhu Hailun was almost directly promoted in Xinjiang.
5. Zhu Hailun is a very dedicated Chinese nationalist. Before he came to our county, in all our Uyghur villages we had two Uyghur secretaries. After he came, he fired almost all the Uyghur secretaries and replaced them with Han Chinese. One of these Han officials knew nothing, had no education, but Zhu Hailun promoted him to a high position. He does not trust Uyghurs. There are only two

Uyghurs left in charge and they are very obedient. All the rest are different from before. Zhu Hailun often held secret meetings without Uyghurs. Zhu Hailun murdered so many people in our county, he took around fifty to sixty, in some villages seventy Uyghurs. Very few were released, a large portion returned dead. One was called Mehmud Hassan. He was my neighbour and the same age as me. They took him away in September 2008 with eleven others, two were released two days later. In Spring 2009 his body was returned. Since we were neighbours, we went to the funeral. At the funeral there was the party secretary, armed police and lots of cars. We weren't even sure if the body had been cleaned. This kind of thing happened a lot when Zhu Hailun was in charge.

6. My uncle's eldest son was amongst those eleven taken away with Mehmud. Apart from my neighbour's death, I also know there were a few others who were from my village or the next-door village. We knew them. We heard they were taken away and only the bodies returned. We heard the funerals were similar. They didn't allow us to see Mehmud's naked body. They didn't even allow the Imam from the local mosque to see the body. Later on, in around April 2009, his two sisters dug his body from the grave and saw his body was badly damaged. They told me this.

Measures to prevent birth

7. I have four children. The first was born in 1996, the second 2002 and the third in 2003. The first was registered legally, the second and third were unregistered. They are illegal but we managed to bring them up by hiding them from the authorities. If we went to the market or city, we would cover them under stuff or we would take a donkey cart and sit them in the middle. The punishment for illegal birth is 300,000 to 500,000 Yuan. Somehow the local authorities found out in 2003 so I sent them to my parents in law to hide. They forced my wife to have an IUD. They did that for six years. My wife was sick for six years because she had a reaction to the IUD, she couldn't cope with any daily work. So, in around August 2008 I realised I had to save my wife, the mother of my children. So, we ran away. I took my whole family, my kids and wife, and we just ran without a plan. We went to Aksu, Turpan and Urumqi. If we hadn't run away, I am sure my wife would have died. Because we ran away the authorities came to my parent's house and told them to find me. The pressure was too high, my father was crying, so I had no choice but to come home. I came back on around the 15th October 2008. While we were running away my wife got pregnant, by the time we came back my wife was four months pregnant. It was illegal, so to save the baby we decided to get divorced. She gave birth in October. We divorced to save the baby. The first-born, the second-born and the third-born stayed with me. And my wife had the fourth child at her parent's house. Around March 2010 we remarried. We told the authorities we had sorted out the problems in the marriage and registered the new baby. So, the second-born and third-born were not registered but the first and last were.
8. In our county, there is one birth control office in every village. Every woman has to be checked every three months to see if they have a coil. By that time government policy allowed peasants to have two kids. State officers and servants were only allowed one. Despite this they were still forcibly sterilising

and aborting many women. Some eight-month-old babies they would just kill straight away. There was one female from our neighbourhood who was pregnant, and she tried to avoid the check-up. She was discovered after 9 months. The authorities said either you pay a 50,000 Yuan penalty or you agree to an abortion. Since they were quite poor, they had no choice, and the abortion was done. That mother couldn't cope with this and died soon after.

Achmed's first detention

9. In around February 2009 I once went to my parents' house which was not far away. When I arrived, my mother was crying outside. She said last night the police and authorities stormed our house and arrested my brother Achmed. Achmed can write very beautiful calligraphy and his writings were on the wall along with three maps. One was of Urumqi, one of Kashgar and one of Kargilik County: all of them were published by the Xinjiang People's Publisher.
10. After I heard that I went to the local police station and the police said they didn't have my brother. So, I went to the local government office. A state Uyghur militia force had taken my brother to the office and put him in a storage room outside for a night. The Uyghur militia were the ones who had stormed my parent's house. I was so angry I said, "What is wrong with having a map published by your government?". They beat me up badly for this.

My first detention

11. In May 2009 I was kept in a police station and used for free labour for nine days. They made me clean the police station and they also made me garden. One day when my father came to see me, they kept me in the front yard and made him wash the police cars. They kept me in the police station because they wanted to know where my brother was. They took my youngest brother Ablet as well because they wanted to find our other brother Achmed. They tortured Ablet, and he couldn't take it, so he made a false confession that he saw my other brother with me last week. When my brother said that, I told him to tell the truth. Then they started beating me and torturing me telling me to shut up. They tied me to a Tiger Chair and tortured me for two hours.

My detention

12. In January 2010 the police officers from Yarkant County came to my house searching for my brother Achmed. On 29th June 2010 they captured him in Hotan but I did not find this out until I went looking for him and found him in Hotan City Jail in 2012. I knew my brother went to a religious school and is a bit religious. They got him and accused him of translating and distributing religious books. On 2nd July 2010 police came to my house and took me and my brother Ablet. They took us to the local police office. During this period of time, we were going to the police station every day to give fingerprints and to register we are here. On this day in July, they detained us and took us to that local police station. From there they took us to the local police bureau. At this point I knew nothing about where my brother was. They took us and started beating us asking "where is your brother?". I said I don't know because he had

run away a few months ago. They beat me up. The level of torture I will never forget. I was put on the tiger chair and they whipped my feet with iron wire. There is a bolt directly above the tiger chair and the heat from that bolt is unbearable. After the police bureau they took me to Kagilik County Jail.

13. They locked us in a dark room with seven others. The room was so small there was not enough space to move around so we had to sit. If you sat for too long you would be paralysed. So, we had to take turns walking for two hours. During this time, we were not allowed to talk or say anything because there were two cameras. One was in the bedroom and one in the toilet. This was to prevent us from praying.
14. They locked us up for one month and then they took me for interrogation. During that interrogation they said, "we saw your bottom has been beaten and has dark spots. Why don't you answer our question? Where is your brother? Where did your brother get his religious education? Why did your brother become religious? Where did your brother get money from? When did you send money to your brother?" The most unbearable torture was when they beat the bottom of your feet. That is the torture you can't bear. I can bear when they beat my bum but not my feet.
15. After that interrogation another thirty days passed. They called me in again and gave me a piece of paper and asked me to sign it. On the paper it said the Local Police Bureau was extending my detention. I refused to sign so they came around and started beating me again. They beat me around the face so badly I couldn't eat for two days. For my first month we were given two meals a day plus tea. And then after one month Ramadan started and they increased our meals to three so that they could break our fasting. When they give you a meal they will sit there and watch you eating. If you don't eat and start fasting, they will beat you up. They will not only beat you up but even those who were not fasting would get beaten.
16. The food in the jail was terrible so my father sent money to the jail every two weeks. I did not receive the money but a voucher. The food was very expensive. A plate of noodle is 5 Yuan outside but 20 Yuan inside. A plate of rice without meat outside is 6 Yuan and inside 30 Yuan. The normal food is dirty. You cannot even look at it. But you have no choice but to eat it. There was a daily inspection. The system inside the cell was like a military dormitory. Your blanket had to be very tidy. If you failed to do that you got beaten. If someone stopped moving and went into a certain position for a while it meant they were praying. A speaker would say "attention". If they did it twice the guards would come without warning and beat everyone.
17. All the cells were designed in the same way. There was an alleyway in the middle. The toilet and shower are in open space, so you have no privacy. So, when you have a shower you have to use a blanket to cover yourself. But that doesn't cover you from the security cameras on the ceiling. The corridor was long. There were rooms on both sides. There were armed police in the corridor. Whenever you heard the sound of footsteps you stayed silent and sat straight and paid attention. The beatings depended on our behaviour. We were not

allowed to talk. If anybody made a sound they were beaten up. They don't beat individual offenders, they beat everyone. So, we developed a system where we slept in turns. At any time two people stayed awake watching and the rest slept. When the guards changed, which was every 2 hours, we could hear it and see it. We would change when the guards changed.

18. I never witnessed any sexual abuse, but I heard a case about a religious woman. The prison couldn't break her because she kept praying. Even the beating didn't stop her praying to Allah. Since she was doing that, all the women in the same cell got punished. The other women started beating that woman saying why should we be beaten for your stubbornness. Since she couldn't be broken the authorities took her into another single cell and tied her up and sexually assaulted her. The other prisoners next to that single cell heard her being assaulted. They heard her screaming and told me.
19. There was one song we had to sing before our morning meal. We had to sing it as perfectly as possible otherwise we were refused a meal. Or worse case we were punished. I learnt to sing it very well, but I have now forgotten how to sing it.
20. There were roughly ten to eleven people per cell. We heard that there were more than forty cells in the prison. 100% of the people in my cell and the rest of the prison were Uyghurs.
21. Sometimes they would call your name on a speaker and you would have to say yes. I heard when they called my brother Ablet's name and he said yes. Another day they were calling Achmed's name, and I was scared because I thought they had got him. They called his name, but nobody replied.
22. After seventy-one days in jail, I was released. During my time in prison, I was never given a lawyer. I was designated as a political prisoner; according to Chinese law if you are a political prisoner you have no rights. When they took me in 2010, they beat me up before they asked anything. That is their tactic. When they beat you up, they beat you up very hard. Their tactic is to conquer you.
23. The prison's Chief Interrogator Abdukadir Barat and his Deputy Hassan Kirem were directly involved in my torture. They are both Uyghurs. The Han prison doctor was so terrible. One day I had diarrhoea and I was lining up to go to the canteen for lunch. We had to sing a Chinese song. We had to cross the hall from another building to get to lunch. Often the doctor would be standing on the way to give pills. So, I asked another guy who could speak Chinese to ask the doctor to give me diarrhoea pills. The doctor said something we couldn't understand, and he obviously wasn't in a good mood, so he started beatings us. The doctor said things in Chinese, we didn't really understand. He said something like you are pigs.

Release from detention

24. When I was released, they didn't release me to my father but to police officers, the police bureau. Between the jail and the police bureau is quite a distance. Inside the station they gave me a questionnaire. They asked me to sign a list of regulations I needed to obey, such as you must not practice religion or pray. If I offended any of them, I would go back to jail. I signed everything to avoid going back to prison. From the bureau they released me to my local police station where I saw my father. I had to sign the questionnaire again. Then I got released to my father. The next day my brother Ablet was released.

Finding Achmed

25. Since I had no information on my other brother Achmed, I set out to find him. I went to Kashgar to look but couldn't find him, so I went to Hotan. I found him in Hotan City Jail. My brother had been sentenced to indefinite imprisonment. I started sending him money every two weeks like my father had done for me. Not long after that my brother was transferred to the Number One prison in Urumqi. I moved my whole family on 19th December 2012 to Urumqi by train.

26. I tried to visit my brother in the Number One prison but couldn't because you can only visit twice a year: every six months. So, I waited. My father came to see Achmed. The first opportunity to visit him was in the Chinese New Year so we weren't able to. We eventually got permission in December 2013 and got into the waiting room. We waited for a long time with people coming and going from behind us. Then an officer came and told them us they had made a mistake and we could not see Achmed. They had an order to make us go away. We insisted saying we will not leave until we see him. There was a guy called Enver who came to me and I said why cannot I not see my brother. He said, "we have an order from the top saying you cannot see him". We had no choice but to leave.

27. Then me and my father went back to my house in Urumqi. I was running a store which had our apartment on top of it. We rested and the next day we went to the law enforcement department of the Xinjiang government. We managed to speak to the people there and one of them received us and asked us our reason for coming. We explained and he left and thirty minutes later came back and said go to the prison tomorrow and you will see your son. So, we did and again they refused to let us see Achmed. I refused to leave so they had no choice but to call the director and then they sent me to a third floor of the building. There were a few officers there and one of them was the person in charge of the 9th Squadron which was the section where my brother was held. He was called Lee. There was a Kazakh police officer who was acting as an interpreter next to him; his family name was Eriq. They asked us do you know how long your brother is sentenced for? We hadn't told our parents how long; we wanted to keep this from them and told them seven years. They said, "since your brother transferred into this prison he refused to cooperate; he refused to eat, sleep, everything. If you cooperate with us and help persuade him to start eating and obey the regulation, we will let you see him every 14 days". My father went in

to see him, but they didn't allow me in. My brother agreed to cooperate and six months later I came back with my mother to see him.

28. My brother told me that when they caught him in Hotan he had a computer, a motorbike and a watch. My brother asked me to go to Hotan to reclaim the belongings. I went and the police in Hotan refused to give it to me. I told them these belongings are not guilty why do you refuse. Achmed is still detained.

Leaving China

29. Since all of this happened the police from Kargilik started looking for me as well. My parents said it is better if you leave and run. I sold my house in Kargilik and I sold my shop in Urumqi and gathered some money. I left on the 12th of January 2014. I arrived illegally in Turkey in June 2014. I don't have legal documents. I went from Vietnam to Cambodia to Thailand to Malaysia and then Turkey.

30. I am preparing a letter to the United Nations Human Rights Council informing them that I have no information on my whole family and that I demand to know from China what has happened to them. I last spoke to my relatives in July 2014. I suspect that there are many Uyghurs who used the route I took from China. I suspect that the Chinese intelligence services organised that route because it was too easy. It is better to live in jail in your homeland than in luxury in a foreign country.

The interviewer asked the witness whether they had understood the contents of the statement and whether they agreed with its contents.

The witness confirmed that they agreed with the contents of this statement orally on 02 March 2021 at 18:40 (GMT)