

Witness Statement

Gulzire Awulqanqizi

Summary

In July 2017, the witness was arrested upon entering China at the Korgas border checkpoint. She was detained in four different facilities over the course of 437 days. She was detained in the Yining County Vocational School from July to November 2017. On entering, she was injected with a substance and her blood samples were taken. She was told the injection was an “anti-flu shot” and they forced her to sign an agreement to receive the injection. The injection seemed to alter her senses, making it harder for her to think. She noticed that, following the injection, many women stopped menstruating. It also caused her period to last fourteen days when in the past it used to last three to five days. She was also regularly forced to take unknown pills.

Ten days after she arrived at the camp, she was taken for medical check-ups at a hospital. Several medical tests were conducted on her, like ultra-sound scans and taking blood samples. She was never told what these were for or the results of the tests.

In November 2017, she was taken to a new camp. She was forced to eat pork. If detainees refused, they were placed in cuffs and locked up. In this camp, conjugal visits were allowed. For those who had their husbands close, they were forced to meet them once a month for two hours at the camp. Before seeing the husbands, the women were given a pill. Even an old woman had to lie for two hours with her husband. From what other women told the witness, the husbands had a procedure conducted on them before the marital visits.

Sometimes, the single, divorced, or widowed women were taken too, at night. These were tied to the bed and raped violently. Sometimes they did not return. The witness had to sit next to the curtain, and take the woman’s name and fingerprints before the

rape. She helped the women take off their clothes and restrain their hands with chains. After the rape, she took the woman for a shower. All the men who went to that room were Han Chinese men. They were very frank and opened about what was going on there: they would tell those women that they had nobody who could help or rescue them.

After being released in 2018, the witness was taken to Ghulja village. A ceremony was held for her and other women from the village. They were forced to say nice things about the re-education centres. They told the locals about their “achievements” and about how they were now well-educated.

Gulzire Awulqanqizi

1. My name is Gulzire Awulqanqizi. I was born on 29th June 1979 in Ghulja, Xinjiang. I immigrated to Kazakhstan in 2014. In 2017, I returned to Xinjiang holding a Kazakhstan green card and a Chinese passport to visit my daughter, who was ten months old. On 17th July 2017, I was arrested upon entering China at the Khorgas border checkpoint and my passport was confiscated. A group of policemen took it, saying that I could not return to Kazakhstan any longer, but they did not tell me why. I was taken for interrogation by the local police. They took me to my village of origin, about fifty miles from there, and it was the longest drive of my life. I was crying in the car and they told me to stop crying. They dropped me at my brother-in-law's house.

2. The next morning, I had to go to the local police station. I went to meet the head (mayor) of the Fourth Unit of the Dolan Farm in Ghulja County and asked him for my passport. The man, a Uyghur, refused and said I was going to study for fifteen days. I had been hoping to visit my dying father, but the mayor told me not to worry, that it would only be fifteen days. I also asked permission to go to my brother-in-law's to pick up clothes and things, he refused. They drove me straight from the office to the camp.

3. Upon entering the camp, I was given a uniform: a red tee-shirt, black trousers, and trainers. Then they cut my hair short, they injected me with a substance, and they took blood samples for tests. They kept taking a blood sample every once in a while. I do not know what the purpose of these medical procedures were. I was told the injection was an "anti-flu shot" that costs 250 Yuan. They forced me to sign an agreement to receive the injection and then proceeded to the injections. I was then given hot water to drink for three days. The injection seemed to alter my senses: prior to taking it I would spend my time missing my daughter, but after the injection I could only think of my stomach, it was hard to think. They held a meeting a week after the injection, where they said "You do not know it yet, but after a year and a half, the injection will show its results." Following the injection, many women stopped menstruating, it disrupted our

normal cycles. This happened to me as well. Now, my period lasts fourteen days when in the past it used to last three to five days. I have children but after leaving the camp I can never have children again. I think that is what they meant when they said that after about a year, we would see the results. I also do not feel well, I have no energy, I feel tired all the time and I get severe headaches. We were also regularly forced to take unknown pills.

4. Eventually, I found out that I was going to be “re-educated” for a year, not fifteen days. I tried to explain that I had a travel permit but they did not care. They said that it was their prerogative to have me stay there as I am a Chinese citizen. Inside the camp, everyone must introduce themselves and confess their crimes. For instance, I said that I was here because I had visited Kazakhstan. They asked if I had relatives in Kazakhstan, in the police force, in the legal system, or in prison, how many children I have, etc. They notably asked why my brother Samedin was given a religious name. They asked many questions and made a record of my answers. In camps, they keep asking you the same questions over and over: personally, I was interrogated nineteen times throughout my detention. There were many Kazakhs in the camp. Once, a security official in the camp told me that Kazakhstan was on a list of twenty-six “most dangerous countries”, countries that should not be visited. When I would ask Kazakhs why they were detained, they would tell me it was because they visited family members in Kazakhstan, made phone calls to foreign countries, and things of that nature.
5. I stayed in this “re-education facility,” the Yining County Vocational School, from July to November 2017, and it was only the first of several. In this camp, I believe there were eight hundred women. I did not see any men there except for some security officers. The guards were women, but their superiors, their bosses were men. In a classroom, there were about fifty women with three teachers and two security guards. There were cameras in every room, recording from every angle twenty-four hours a day. We studied Chinese for 45 minutes every day. We were made to say things like “I love China” or “I love Xi Jinping”. We had to write down everything, our feelings and our gratitude

towards Xi Jinping. Once every week they would mark our writings, and they would tell us that if we failed to pass, we would be kept inside the camp our whole life. They told us that our priority was to learn Chinese and that following that we could get a good job like work for the government, but even then, we knew that was ridiculous.

6. In the camp, we were living together in a long hall, like a sort of shed. Each hall housed thirty-three women. There were a lot of disabled women. We had to make our beds every morning without a wrinkle and in under three minutes, as if we were in the army. If the inspector did not like how I made my bed he would take my bedsheets over to the toilet in the corner and throw them in. Each night, we had to take two-hour shifts to watch each other. In the camps, the guards did not spare us. They would hurt us, and they would humiliate us. They were always punishing people, even those that were disabled. Zainura, a cellmate of mine, could not even go to the toilet because of how bad her body was after all the punishments she received. They did not care about the detainees' health, so everyone's health kept deteriorating. Sometimes we had to change cells. In some rooms there was a toilet, but in others there was only a bucket. So, if you were sent to a cell without the toilet, you had to use the bucket. At night, we could not talk to each other at all, or we would be punished again. Even if you wanted to kill yourself, you could not because you were being monitored everywhere. We could not cry because if they saw us crying, they would say we had evil thoughts in our minds. We could sometimes hear screams echoing. We also had to go the toilets in pairs, so one could keep an eye on the other. This was particularly to prevent forbidden religious expression like ablutions. Once, I accompanied an older lady to the toilet and she accidentally splashed urine on her feet. The guards noticed that she had rinsed herself clean and they saw it as ritual washing, so they punished me, who was watching her, by handcuffing my hands behind my back for twenty-four hours. We had to keep trips to the toilets very short as we only had two minutes, and if we took more time we would receive electric shocks by stun guns. I was beaten five or six times because I was slow.

7. We also received medical check-ups at a hospital we were brought to. Ten days after I arrived in the camp, policemen called us by our names and divided us into group of 10 to 20 before herding us onto buses. They took us to a maternity hospital. They had us write our names and give our fingerprints and, afterwards, they had us take off all our clothes. They did all sorts of examinations, like ultra-sound scans and taking blood samples. They inserted something inside me. I did not know whether it was an injection or something else. I was stressed and it felt very cold and uncomfortable, even hours after the medical exam. They did not tell us anything about the tests, their findings or anything else.

8. In early October 2017, the camp was overcrowded for about five days. There were so many people that they would give us only a boiled egg and hot water for breakfast, sometimes with steamed bread. One of our teachers asked some of us to help in the kitchen as the cooks could not manage the kitchen for so many people. I volunteered to help. There was a Hui woman, a Muslim, who was a cook and who had been working there for two and a half years. When I went out with her to empty the waste, she told me to drink a lot of water when I eat the boiled egg, because the eggs were injected with something before serving. I thanked her with tears in my eyes. During those five days, we went to the toilet outside. Once, on the way there, I saw two sorts of caverns, big cavities, like the ones used for storing vegetables, and there were piles of car tires around the entrance, and the floor was cement. The cavities were about the length of a human body. I asked a teacher about these holes, and she said, "it is a place where we deal with dead bodies," and I felt shocked and sick. She added "obey the rules, do whatever they say and try to get out safely."

9. I was detained in four different facilities over the course of 437 days. In November 2017, they took me to a new camp, the second one. It looked like a new hospital but turned into a camp. There was barbed wire on the fences. This camp was one of the Professional Reeducation Centers of the Ghulja region (Yining). In this facility, we could talk to our relatives once a week over the phone, and they could visit once a month, behind a wall of mesh wire. We spoke through this wall. They fed us rice and plain, empty steamed buns. We never

felt full. Once, for a Chinese holiday, they made us eat pork. They actually forced us to eat pork: if you refused, as I did once or twice, they would put you in cuffs and lock you up, saying your ideology is wrong and you must become friends with the Chinese people. They would handcuff you to a “tiger chair” and ask “Why are you refusing to eat this food provided by the Communist Party?” and they would reprimand you. If you kept refusing, they would take you to another, harsher facility, so eventually I stopped refusing this food. They were making us eat pork to “bring us closer” to them, to the Hans, to be part of the same people. Also, sometimes the guards would make us burn Qurans.

10. Again, I was lodged with mostly Uighur women. In this camp, conjugal visits were apparently allowed. My husband was in Kazakhstan but for those who had their husbands close, they could meet them once a month for two hours at the camp. A room full of cameras was provided, they were left alone, and the husbands were told to bring bedsheets. Before seeing the husbands, the women were given a pill. They were forcing every woman who had a husband to meet with him. Even an old woman had to lie for two hours with her husband. From what other women told me, the husbands had a procedure conducted on them before the marital visits, and sperm was taken from them with a syringe, such that they were in pain and unable to pass water. Sometimes, the single, divorced, or widowed women were taken too, at night. These were tied to the bed and raped violently. Sometimes they did not return. I know because from New Year of 2018, I started working as a cleaner in the camp until June 2018. I was a normal “student” like the others during the day, but I was a cleaner at night. I used to clean the meeting room where husband and wife meet. Only then I found out about the rapes. My duty was to sit next to the curtain, then when staff comes in with a woman, she writes her name in Chinese and I take her fingerprints, I help her take her clothes off, but not the clothing below the waist. I also had to restrain her hands with chains. I was not allowed to talk to her. Then a man enters the room, and I go sit silently next to the door, outside the room. When the man leaves the room, I take the woman for a shower. There was nothing I could do, I was forced. If I refused to do this, they said they would send me to another, worse location. The only thing that saved me from being

raped was my marriage certificate. Although the women who were taken to that room did not speak to me, I knew they were either divorced or widowed because my cellmates who were divorced or widowed were going through the same thing. I would go on to do this task for six months. Once, I was in that room, mopping the floor, and there was a man there. I asked him to move his feet so I could clean the floor, but he replied: "I paid to come here, it is up to me if I want to move my feet or not." All those who went to that room were Han Chinese men. They were very frank and opened about what was going on there: they would tell those women that they had nobody who could help or rescue them. Many young women disappeared: they were taken away from the cell and they never returned, different women were simply brought to take their place. We were often assembled in a hall when leaders or officials visited the camp, so we would recognise one another and we would know if someone disappeared, as we would never see them again.

11. In July 2018, they transferred me to a third camp. An ordinary school turned into a re-education camp. In this camp, there were no toilets, so we had to use a bucket. Here too, they would interrogate us, asking us about our husbands and children, and sometimes, they would take away three or four women at a time and they would never come back. In August, I went to a fourth and final facility. They kept promising that we would be released eventually. If we behaved, they said, we would learn a vocation in a month. On 6th October 2018, some ethnic Kazakh officials came to the camp, and one of them said that good news was coming and, the next day, I was released with about 250 women, about 150 of which were Kazakh. They said: "We have to make our two countries friends. You will be treated in a friendly way, but dangerous ideas are coming from Kazakhstan, so only say good things about the camp," and we knew there was a threat implied there. If one person is taken for re-education, others follow, it is like a spiderweb and all the relatives end up in a camp.

12. After being released on 7th October 2018, I was taken to Ghulja village. A ceremony was held for me and other women from the village. They made each of us speak, say nice things about the re-education centres. They told the locals

about my “achievements” and about how I was now well-educated. At last, I went to my father’s village, but even there my sister-in-law was made to spy on me by authorities. I spent five nights at my father’s house until they gathered all women in the area who were from Kazakhstan and told us that from now on we would be working in a factory. Thus, I started making gloves in a factory. We were told the products were being exported abroad and sold to foreigners. Although we were making some money, refusing to work resulted in being sent back to the camp, so we had no choice anyway. They told me to sign a contract where I agreed to work at this factory for a year. I ended up working there for a month and a half. I earned very little: in total I made more than two thousand gloves and earned 220 Yuan (about £24). One good thing was that I now had my phone back, so after a year I could talk with my husband. One day, I took a picture of the factory and sent it to him. From there it became public. Following this, I was interrogated, they asked the same questions they had always asked, all night long, but eventually they let me go. My husband’s relatives were angry with me and him because of what we had done, they sent him messages telling him to stop complaining and that he should praise the country and thank the Party. I was taken back to my father’s place in January 2019. I saw him again, probably for the last time as he was weak. The police told my family that I would better not speak about the camp or my father would be arrested. They took photos of us all drinking tea together. Then they took me back to the mayor’s office and had me write a letter thanking the party for re-educating me for a year and a half. Then, they took me to the border, they interrogated me for another four hours and, finally, they let me cross to Kazakhstan.

13. As I said, even today I can feel the lasting consequences of the camp: I always feel tired. The doctors say that I have kidney problems. I was lucky, because although I did not know it at the time, when I was working at the factory my husband was working toward my release. He was uploading videos with Atajurt about my detention in China and publicising my case.

14. I am not aware of anyone’s organs being harvested. However, my son had disappeared on 11th November 2011. We had found him four months later; he

had been sold to a Chinese woman. Among six children who disappeared at the same time, he was one of two who were found safely and brought back to their family. The rest disappeared, but there are rumours of children's organs sale in mainland China. About a year after we found my son, he died. I suspect that he was also given injections, because he used to be a healthy and active boy.

I have read and understood this witness statement and I confirm that I agree with its contents.

I understand that this statement will be published on the Uyghur Tribunal website and will be available to the general public online.

Signature: Gulzire Aulhan

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