

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1407

October 19, 2020

His Holiness, Pope Francis  
Secretariat of State  
Apostolic Palace  
00120 Vatican City

Your Holiness,

It is with great respect that we write to you regarding a matter of significant international concern: the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in Xinjiang, China.

We had the great privilege to hear your encouraging words to a Joint Session of Congress just over five years ago. In September 2015 you encouraged Senators and Representatives to use the “voice of love” as a “resource in the battle to eliminate new global forms of slavery.” Today, we are still encountering slavery and oppression, and it is perhaps no place more extreme than what we are witnessing in Xinjiang and the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) indefensible treatment of Uyghur Muslims.

As you are undoubtedly aware, for years the CCP has waged a campaign of totalitarian terror against the Uyghur population of Xinjiang. More than one million Uyghurs have endured unspeakable human rights abuses in “re-education camps” while their relatives are left without answers or support. The CCP has subjected countless women to forced abortions, sterilization, or the involuntary use of contraceptives. Birthrates in Xinjiang fell by 24% last year, part of what experts are describing as a “demographic genocide.” As the international community seeks to eradicate slavery and forced labor, in Xinjiang these practices are being used as tools for social control and economic “progress.” This systematic pattern of injustice and abuse has all occurred under the legal umbrella of laws that associate practices of faith and culture with extremism and terrorism. In short, the CCP is waging a war against the very ideas of expression, of culture, and of religious belief.

The CCP’s actions should not only shock or outrage us but also lead us to act. Every individual has a choice: to continue to turn a blind eye towards the ongoing abuses occurring in Xinjiang or to use whatever power we have to affect change. Those in positions of authority have the option to create consequences for these assaults on life. As the leader of the world’s largest institution of faith, we respectfully request that Your Holiness do all that you can to protect the most basic human rights for all people, including Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

It is our understanding that the agreement the Vatican reached with the CCP leadership concerning Your Holiness’s role in the appointment of Chinese bishops will soon expire and that you are making progress on a renewal. We support your desire to ensure the integrity and safety of the Catholic Church and your congregants in the PRC, and respect the challenging decisions you must make to accomplish these outcomes. We encourage you to use this mutually desired outcome to express to the CCP your concern about the treatment of religious minorities in Xinjiang and elsewhere. The CCP has much to gain from a continued agreement with Your Holiness, and as

such we believe you possess a unique opportunity to make a positive difference in how all religions and practitioners are treated by the Chinese authorities—especially in Xinjiang.

Throughout your papacy, you have repeatedly used your influential voice to raise awareness of social injustice, of economic inequality, and the idea that all people are made in the image of the Creator. Your lessons shape the beliefs of millions of Catholics, and they matter for countless others of all faiths and backgrounds. Today, the world is witnessing perhaps our young century's most devastating human rights disaster. We encourage Your Holiness to add your voice, with all its accompanying power and legitimacy, to those that have already called for change and justice in Xinjiang. We ask that Your Holiness challenge the leadership of the People's Republic of China, as you have challenged leaders around the globe. Just as you encouraged us five years ago, we encourage you to use your loud and formidable voice as a voice for love that encourages all the nations of the world to pursue peace and justice.

We thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of our requests.

Very Respectfully,



Todd Young  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator