

CONTACT

Susana McDermott

Director of Communications

Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility

201-417-9060 (mobile)

smcdermott@iccr.org

Human Rights Groups Call on U.S. for Regional Ban on Imports from China Made w/Uyghur Forced Labor

Groups file petition with Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) for a regional WRO on cotton products from the Xinjiang Region

NEW YORK, NY, MONDAY, AUGUST 31st, 2020 - Today a group of human rights, labor and investor organizations, filed a formal petition with U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), urging it to issue a regional withhold release order (WRO) on all cotton-made goods linked to the Xinjiang region of China based on evidence of widespread forced labor. Under U.S. law [19 U.S.C. §1307](#) it is illegal for the United States to allow entry of goods, “produced, or manufactured wholly or in part in any foreign country by convict labor and/or [forced labor and/or indentured labor](#).”

Credible reports and widespread media coverage have thoroughly documented that global garment supply chains are tainted by forced labor and systematic human rights abuses against the ethnic Muslim populations in China’s Xinjiang region. Abuses include [sterilization](#), [violence](#), [forced labor](#) and [imprisonment](#) of Uyghur and Turkmenic peoples. United States Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, recently [said](#): “Beijing’s barbarous actions targeting the Uyghur people are an outrage to the collective conscious of the world.” And just last month, over 200 human and labor rights and investor organizations [launched](#) a campaign, [End Uyghur Forced Labor](#), calling on global corporations to divest from the region.

“It is time for concrete action to bring enforcement in line with reality. The large-scale forced-labor program is a core part of the government’s plan for control and surveillance of Uyghurs. It is a deliberate policy carried out in every corner of the Uyghur homeland,” said **Omer Kanat, Executive Director, Uyghur Human Rights Project**.

"Greedy for profit, major brands have put dollars over human rights. The Tariff Act was designed for cases like this to block goods - in this case brand name clothes - from being sold to U.S. consumers making them complicit in gross abuses against the Uyghur people." said **Jennifer (JJ) Rosenbaum, Executive Director of Global Labor Justice- International Labor Rights Forum**. "Corporate Social Responsibility efforts have again failed. A regional WRO creates the necessary market consequences for the fast fashion brands who are profiting from forced labor."

Earlier this summer, CBP issued four WROs against certain products from the Xinjiang region, but nothing sufficiently sweeping to dissuade the government of China from continuing its persecution of the Uyghur people, or to discourage major garment brands from importing cotton

goods linked to forced labor and selling them to US consumers. Industry groups have repeatedly requested clear guidance from the US government and a regional WRO would provide it. There is precedent for such a blanket order. In 2018, the CBP issued a WRO on all cotton and cotton made goods originating in Turkmenistan because of the country's state-sponsored program of forced labor in the cotton sector.

“The same threshold is clearly met in Xinjiang given the scale and severity of state-sponsored forced labor and other abuses targeting Uyghurs and other Muslim and Turkic peoples,” said **David Schilling, Sr Program Director for the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and the Investor Alliance for Human Rights.**

At the same time, the UK-based Global Legal Action Network (GLAN), along with the World Uyghur Congress, is filing a companion petition with CBP based on a similar complaint filed with UK authorities earlier this year alleging widespread prison labor. UK law prohibits the import of prison labor-made goods.

Read the full petition [attached](#).

Petitioners are:

AFL-CIO
Corporate Accountability Lab
Freedom United
Global Labor Justice – International Labor Rights Forum
Human Trafficking Legal Center
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility
Investor Alliance for Human Rights
Uyghur American Association
Uyghur Human Rights Project
World Uyghur Congress

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