

FIDH calls for an independent and impartial investigation in Xinjiang

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International Federation for Human rights (FIDH)

Press Release

China

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Paris, 10 July 2009 - On 5 July, a protest in Urumqi, capital of northwest China's Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, turned violent and the security forces reportedly violently cracked down on the protesters. The official Chinese news agency Xinhua announced today that the clashes between the protesters and the police left 156 people killed and more than 1,000 injured.

The Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China met on 8 July to discuss the situation in Urumqi. The Uighurs, the largest non-Chinese ethnic group in the region, form half of the population of this region.

The Standing Committee declared that the violence had a "profound" political background and that what happened was a serious crime, which was masterminded and organized by the "three forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism at home and abroad.

Uighurs, as other minorities in China, are unable to exercise real political decision-making that has an impact on their own communities; China's rapid economic transformation has not improved their lives: discrimination in the field of social rights is deeply entrenched; their cultural rights are being violated; they face persecution based on their religion, and under the guise of the fight against terrorism, those who are accused of separatism are often arbitrarily arrested, tortured, and even executed.

The BBC reported that the Chinese authorities allowed journalists from more than 60 foreign media organisations to Xinjiang to cover the aftermath of Sunday's violence. However, it is important to note that while there may be increased international coverage, the authorities are still censoring coverage domestically.

FIDH urges the Chinese authorities to respect the international standards relating to the use of force by law enforcement officials, and to refrain in all circumstances from crushing peaceful dissent. The Chinese authorities should put an end to censorship of Chinese media about the events and allow international observers, in particular human rights organizations and UN bodies, to visit the region immediately. The UN must be able to investigate those deadly events as soon as possible.

Any long term solution in Xinjiang will necessarily have to take into account the root-causes of the profound resentment of the Uighur minority. The serious human rights violations perpetrated on a daily basis against this Muslim minority must be addressed as a matter of priority by the Chinese authorities.

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