

Political repression in Xinjiang: The fight for the recognition of the Uyghur Community's rights

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The events that took place on July 5, 2009, in Urumqi – the capital town of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, in far west China – and that have left its streets blood-stained, are “unprecedented” in the last twenty years. The extent of the events is so serious that President Hu Jintao has been “forced” to abandon the G8 summit in Aquila (Italy) to return to China. Army and police reinforcements have been deployed in the area to assure the “stability” of the region. Security forces and armoured carriers have taken the control of the city and a curfew has been imposed in certain areas. According to an official report, at least 156 people are dead and more than 1000 are wounded.

The protests were reminiscent of last year's unrest in Tibet. The origin of the conflict can be found in the hostility between the two cohabiting communities. Like in Tibet, as the original inhabitants of Xinjiang, Muslim Turkic-speaking Uyghur Community (8.3 million people) has been confronted to the recent settlement and domination of the Han Chinese Community.

Another reason for the worsening of the conflict between the two communities is that the effects of the ongoing Han Chinese colonisation add up to the political, cultural and religious oppression against the Uyghur Community. While back in 1949 Uyghur population made up 95% of the total population of the region, their population represents nowadays about only the half. Han Chinese Community is majority in some of the most important towns; only in the capital Urumqi (two millions inhabitants), they account for 83% of its population.

The capitalist development of China has quickened the flow of internal colonizers to a region rich in oil and natural gas resources, as well as in raw materials. Uyghur people are the left-behind of this economic growth encouraged by the authorities in Beijing. As a result, social inequalities have worsened.

In order to justify its policy of repression, Beijing has waved the threat of Islamic “Terror”, and has condemned the activities of the independentist or autonomist movements in exile. The origins of the tensions that have unleashed the current clashes are different, though. Chinese government is, in reality, confronting the intrinsic democratic, cultural, religious, economic and social rights of the Uyghur people; rights they are entitled to, rights we uphold.

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P.S.

* Translated by Laura Pla Cobles.