

From Urumqi to Shanghai: Demands from Chinese and Hong Kong Socialists

Tuesday 29 November 2022, by [Chinese and Hong Kong socialists](#) (Date first published: 28 November 2022).

This is an expanded version of a letter written by Chinese and Hong Kong socialists on the mainland and overseas on the night of 26 November 2022, when protests first erupted. The abridged Chinese version first appeared in [Borderless Movement](#) on 27 November. This version has been revised through the weekend as events developed. Republished with permission.

On Thursday, 24 November, 2022, a fire broke out in a residential building in Urumqi, the capital of China's "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region." [1] The fire killed mostly Uyghur victims and injured many more. These numbers are said to be under-reported, and the tragedy was a result of China's failed pandemic policy which has severely restricted the movements of everyday citizens and denied their access to basic necessities for prolonged periods of time. While these policies have affected millions of Chinese citizens, Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang region have long suffered from heightened repression, up to and including mass internment and extreme surveillance by the Chinese government. Xinjiang has also seen the most stringent lockdown policies implemented, with many unable to leave their homes for more than a hundred days.

In response, Urumqi residents launched an unprecedented city-wide protest on Saturday 26 November, braving the police to surround government buildings and demand an end to the current lockdown policies. These flawed lockdown policies resulted in the compound gates being bolted shut by authorities, such that residents were unable to escape. Protests of different kinds spread across major cities throughout the night. Some took the form of collective and independent mass action, like the student-led vigil in the Communication University of China in Nanjing and the public statement written by medical students from Huazhong University of Science and Technology in Wuhan. Citizens of Shanghai took to the streets to escalate their action further, chanting slogans like "Down with the CCP! Down with Xi Jinping!"

Regimes across the world have failed their people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and China's authoritarian brand of capitalism has led to further restriction of the rights of its everyday citizens. Working conditions have become even more precarious. In late October, [it was revealed](#) that Foxconn workers in Zhengzhou were trapped in a 'closed-loop system' that restricted their movements and access to basic necessities in conditions of forced labor. Many workers tried to flee the factories by scaling fences. Instead of calling for accountability from its private enterprises and revising its lockdown policies in the region, the local government responded by sending its cadres to Foxconn's production line to ensure profitability. Last week, newly-hired Foxconn workers staged a small revolt protesting their conditions, and the local government sent hundreds of hazmat-suited police to aid Foxconn in repressing the workers.

Students and workers across China are taking to the streets to demand accountability for a "Zero Covid" policy that has seen their rights taken away and their safety placed in danger. Once again, the people of Xinjiang have had to bear the brunt of China's repressive policies in the horrific

Urumqi fire. But now the region with some of the country's most marginalized has become the spark for what is possibly the largest scale mobilization in Chinese society in years. More urgently than ever, Han Chinese residents of Xinjiang and in other regions of China must continue to center the struggle of Uyghurs and oppressed minorities and fight alongside them.

We demand accountability for the victims of the Urumqi fire, and call for radical systemic change:

Demands

1. Abolish the current lockdowns that forcibly detain people in their homes, denying them of access to basic needs.
2. Abolish forced PCR testing for COVID-19.
3. Allow those who are infected to isolate at home, while those with severe symptoms have the right to treatment in the hospital; cancel forcible transfer and isolation of infected and non-infected individuals in mobile cabin "hospitals".
4. Provide options for multiple vaccines, allowing individuals the right to choose their own healthcare.
5. Release Sitong Bridge protestor [Peng Zaizhou](#) and other political prisoners who are being detained from the protests.
6. Call for nation-wide mourning of the deaths of those caused by irresponsible lockdown measures.
7. Ensure the resignation of bureaucrats responsible for pandemic mismanagement.
8. Pandemic control measures must be informed by medical experts and conducted democratically amongst the people.
9. Safeguard the rights of people to the freedom of speech, assembly, organization, and protest.
10. Support independent workers' power in and beyond these protests; abolish anti-worker practices like the [996 work schedule](#) and strengthen labor law protections, including protecting workers' right to strike and self-organization, so they can participate more extensively in political life.

Strategies

1. If anyone is threatened by the police, others should stand up to support them.
2. We should not stop others from chanting more radical slogans, but try to prioritize positive and concrete demands for systemic change.
3. Changes in the political authorities within the system would not be useful unless we thoroughly democratize the system itself.
4. Avoid the risky tactic of long-term occupation of streets and town squares—adopt "Be Water"-style mobilization to prevent authorities from too easily clamping down on protesters.
5. Beyond protesting, strengthen mutual aid and self-organization among communities and workplaces.

People in China today are beginning to mobilize around Sitong Bridge protestor Peng Zaizhou's call for mass action across to demand "democracy, not more forced PCR testing." We do not know how this movement will develop, but we continue encouraging independent mass organization by students, workers, and other marginalized groups in the mainland and abroad, including Hongkongers, Taiwanese, Uyghurs and Tibetans to continue building a long-term strategic program for democratic struggle in China.

We stand in solidarity with this developing movement and call on the Chinese government to respect the livelihood and basic civil liberties of its citizens.

Chinese and Hong Kong socialists

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] The CCP's tactics of mass detention and surveillance affect many communities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR, also known as "Xinjiang," "Northwest China," "East Turkestan," "Uighuria," "Ghulja," "Tarbagai," "Altay," "Dzungarstan and Altishahr," and/or "Dzungaria and the Tarim Basin Region," and which will henceforth be referred to as "Xinjiang"), most visibly Uyghurs but no less significantly other indigenous and minority ethnic groups. A highly contested term, the proper name Xinjiang (新疆) was first used by the 18th century emperor Qianlong, and conferred on the XUAR upon Zuo Zongtang's reoccupation of the region in the late 19th century. In Mandarin Chinese, it means "new territory," "new border," or "new frontier."

As outsiders, we appreciate being in conversation with comrades on how best to advocate for the liberation of those suffering settler colonial repression in the region. Using accurate terminology to the best of our knowledge and recognizing how the CCP's campaign of mass detention and cultural genocide impacts numerous communities differently across the XUAR region are important elements of this work. Please contact us if you have further questions and comments.