

THE SPECTATOR

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China's human rights crackdown is getting worse

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(Photo: Getty)

The Chinese Communist Party regime's repression is pervasive and intensifying. Over the past five years, Xi Jinping's brutal assault on basic human rights has accelerated with horrifying ferocity and speed.

But while the incarceration, forced sterilisation and enslavement of

millions of Uyghurs is increasingly recognised as a genocide, and the dismantling of Hong Kong's promised freedom and autonomy a grave breach of an international treaty, it is worth remembering that numerous groups in China are under attack.

Christians in China are facing the worst conditions since the Cultural Revolution, the Falun Gong spiritual movement continues to be hounded, repression in Tibet increases, and human rights defenders, civil society activists, bloggers, citizen journalists, lawyers and dissidents are targeted.

Arbitrary arrests, disappearances and imprisonment, torture, forced televised confessions, forced organ harvesting, slave labour and an Orwellian surveillance state form the state's apparatus of repression. Many of these abuses have been laid out in a new report by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission, focused on the crackdown on human rights in China in the last four years.

The evidence shows that no one is safe from the long arm of this cruel regime, including foreign nationals. Chinese-born Swedish national Gui Minhai was **abducted** from Thailand in 2015 and sentenced last year to ten years in prison, simply for running a Hong Kong-based publishing house that produced books about China's leaders. Simon Cheng, a former employee of the British Consulate in Hong Kong, was **imprisoned** and severely tortured in China. Taiwanese **activist** Lee Ming-che and two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, are in prison. British businessman Peter Humphrey and his wife spent two years in prison, where he was forced to record a televised confession which was broadcast on state media. 'I was placed into a metal chair with a locking bar over my lap, wearing handcuffs and the orange prison vest, inside the steel-barred cage,' he told the Commission.

Slave labour is widespread. **According** to the Australian Strategic

Policy Institute (ASPI), Uyghurs have been forced to work in factories that supply at least 83 well-known global brands in the technology, clothing and automotive sectors. Between 2017 and 2019, over 80,000 Uyghurs were sent to work in factories across China. Mr Humphrey claims that prison labour also forms part of global supply chains, citing prison-made products supplied to companies. After media revelations some companies investigated and suspended their contacts with their Chinese suppliers, but many other global brands have yet to act.

The regime's development and deployment of mass surveillance technologies lie at the heart of its intensifying repression. As Dr Yang Jianli of the NGO Initiatives for China told the Commission, 'China's weapons of mass surveillance have already shown its ability to exert absolute control of populations... The system uses cutting-edge technologies to control almost every aspect of people's lives'. China's technology companies are at the very centre of this operation.

China's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic has been praised in some quarters. But let's not forget that doctors and citizen journalists who tried to warn of the virus at the very beginning were threatened, silenced or disappeared. Instead of dealing with the virus, the regime suppressed the truth about it. And technologies developed to handle the pandemic will only strengthen the regime's totalitarian grip.

In light of this evidence, it is time for the British government to conduct a wholesale and thorough review of UK-China policy, leading to a recalibration and a reset in the relationship and in UK strategy. Britain should work with the United States and other allies to coordinate an international response to the crisis in China. It should impose targeted sanctions, diversify supply chains, seek to

establish accountability mechanisms and take up the proposal made by over 50 current United Nations experts, to establish a UN mechanism to report on human rights in China.

In particular, Parliament should vote for the genocide amendment to the Trade Bill, which would allow our courts to make a determination in cases of alleged genocide and, if proven, require our government not to sign trade deals with states convicted of this 'crime of crimes'. The amendment passed the House of Lords last month with an extraordinary majority and the backing of some of the country's most eminent peers. When the Tory MPs Sir Iain Duncan Smith and Nus Ghani introduce the same amendment in the House of Commons next week, MPs have no excuse to reject it.

The evidence of China's crackdown on human rights must be taken seriously. It cannot – and must not – be ignored.

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