



Council on American-Islamic Relations
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August 17, 2020

Commissioner Adam Silver
National Basketball Association
645 5th Ave
New York, NY 10022

Dear Commissioner Silver:

On behalf of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, I write to call on the National Basketball Association (NBA) to fundamentally reexamine how its continued presence and operations in China normalizes the human rights abuses taking place in that country, including the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the country's Uyghur Muslim minority.

For the reasons highlighted below, we call upon the NBA to publicly announce that it will cease all operations in China unless and until the communist party ceases its persecution of millions of Uyghur Muslims. We are urging all other U.S. organizations and corporations that express support for freedom and justice do the same.

As you know, the Chinese government has transformed Xinjiang into a repressive high-tech surveillance police state that has criminalized the practice of Islam and being Muslim – having arrested 1 to 2 million of Xinjiang's Uyghur Muslim minority inhabitants, detaining them in barbed wired concentration camps for no other reason than practicing their Islamic faith.

The *New York Times* reports that the Chinese government will detain Uyghur Muslims for common Islamic practices such as “wearing long beards, giving up smoking or drinking, studying Arabic and praying outside mosques.”¹ Leaked documents reveal Chinese government officials are being instructed to tell college students returning home to Xinjiang who find their parents or family members missing that “their behavior could either shorten or extend the detention of their relatives” – a veiled threat.

Dubbed the “Xinjiang Papers” by the *New York Times* in November 2019, more than 400 pages of leaked Chinese government documents reveal classified Chinese government directives and private speeches by leaders of that country on the mass detention of Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region. Included in the leaked files are quotes by China President Xi Jinping to government officials instructing them to use the “organs of dictatorship” to show “absolutely no mercy” to Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang region as part of China’s “struggle against terrorism,

¹ Austin Ramzy and Chris Buckley, “Xinjiang Papers: ‘Absolutely No Mercy’: Leaked Files Expose How China Organized Mass Detentions of Muslims,” *New York Times*, November 16, 2019. Website: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/16/world/asia/china-xinjiang-documents.html>

infiltration and separatism.” The Chinese Communist Party boss for the region, Chen Quanguo, is also shown instructing officials to “round up everyone who should be rounded up.”

Uyghur Muslim concentration camp detainees report being forced to listen to lectures, learn Mandarin, sing songs praising the Chinese Communist Party, and are coerced into abandoning their faith. Some inmates are forced to eat pork and drink alcohol, both forbidden activities in Islam. Some are tortured. Muslim women detainees have reported being sexually assaulted, raped, forcefully sterilized, and made to have abortions in Chinese detention facilities.

According to a July 29 report by ESPN, a former NBA league employee “compared the atmosphere when he worked in Xinjiang to ‘World War II Germany.’”²

Recently, two Uyghur rights groups filed a complaint to the International Criminal Court against the leadership of the Chinese government for the crimes of committing genocide and human rights violations, including the allegation of stealing organs from Uyghur Muslims by force.

In August 2019, CAIR called for the cancellation of NBA exhibition games in China and closure of training centers in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region following the league's criticism of Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey for tweeting in support of pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong.

In July of this year, the American Muslim community welcomed the NBA's public response to Tennessee U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn's June 30 letter inquiring about the NBA's operations in Xinjiang, whereby the NBA stated:

While CAIR is concerned that a July 29th report by ESPN called into question whether or not NBA had truly cut all ties with its training academy in Xinjiang by spring of 2019 – the report indicated that the NBA was still seeking out coaches for its training academy well into the summer – we consider any step to end the NBA's overall presence in Xinjiang a positive development.

However, it is not enough. CAIR now urges the NBA to prioritize its commitment to social justice over profits by ceasing all operations that benefit the genocidal Chinese government, including earning revenue from broadcasting games and licensing merchandise.

We also request the NBA end its anti-free speech policy of not permitting, and even confiscating, in U.S. stadiums during NBA games pro-Uyghur human right signs with slogans like

² Steve Fainaru and Mark Fainaru-Wada, “ESPN investigation finds coaches at NBA China academies complained of player abuse, lack of schooling,” ESPN.com, July 29, 2020.

Website: https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/29553829/espn-investigation-finds-coaches-nba-china-academies-complained-player-abuse-lack-schooling

“Google Uighur,” or “Free Uighur.”³ NBA fans have a right to free speech, especially in defense of oppressed peoples like the Uyghur.

China’s anti-Muslim policies, acts of cultural erasure, forced serialization and abortion, and system of concentration camps meet the United Nation’s definition of ethnic cleansing, if not genocide. Any continued presence that the NBA maintains in China effectively normalizes these crimes against humanity.

The NBA continuing to operate in China under these circumstances would be akin to operating in Germany during the 1930s as the Nazi regime began to round up its Jewish citizens prior to the start of the Holocaust.

Once again, CAIR requests that the NBA stand on the right side of history by announcing that it will cease all operations in China unless and until its government ceases its persecution of millions of innocent people.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward Ahmed Mitchell, III". The signature is written in a cursive style with a distinct "III" at the end.

Edward Ahmed Mitchell
CAIR National Deputy Director

³ Zachary Stieber, “Video: NBA Security Takes Fan’s ‘Google Uyghurs’ Sign,” The Epoch Times, October 10, 2019. Website: https://www.theepochtimes.com/video-nba-security-takes-fans-google-uyghurs-sign_3112460.html