Good morning/afternoon/evening.

Uyghur women in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), are facing a number of challenges that undermine their individual and collective human rights.

In the wake of the July 2009 unrest in the regional capital of Urumchi, a group of Uyghur women gathered on the streets of Urumchi on July 7, 2009 to ask Chinese security forces what had happened to their husbands, fathers and brothers, who had been arrested en masse in indiscriminate security sweeps of Uyghur neighborhoods. Without the actions of these women, the international community may not have known about the mass detentions and forcible disappearances that were taking place in the city, since the Chinese government had used intimidation, detention and even beatings in an attempt to manage the actions of foreign reporters who had come to Urumchi. Many of those women simply disappeared after the July 7 protest.

The long arm of the Chinese security apparatus also targeted individual Uyghur women as the state sought reprisal for the 2009 unrest. A 19-year-old Uyghur student Pezilet Ekber was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve following a closed trial in April 2010 on charges of involvement in violence in Urumchi. It is unclear what criminal charges Ekber was convicted of. Authorities ordered her father to leave Urumchi when he attempted to visit her prior to her trial. Officials also reportedly warned Ekber’s parents to refrain from telling anyone about her sentence.

Prior to the 2009 unrest, 32-year-old Gulmire Imin was invited to become an administrator for the Uyghur language Salkin website after having published a number of poems online. Gulmire was arrested on July 14, 2009, but her family did not receive any official documents regarding her detention. On April 1, 2010, she was sentenced to life in prison for the crimes of “revealing state secrets”, illegally organizing a demonstration, and “splittism”. Gulmire was sentenced on the same day as being tried in a closed trial.
While the Chinese government recruits Han Chinese from other parts of the People’s Republic of China to take jobs in the Uyghur Region, the authorities use intimidation, threats, and deception to recruit Uyghurs to participate in a labor transfer program to urban factories in eastern China. The government focuses its aggressive recruitment efforts primarily on young, marriage-age Uyghur women and girls from predominantly Uyghur areas such as southern Xinjiang, which is a bastion of Uyghur culture and tradition. Thousands of Uyghur women and young girls have been removed from their communities and families in the XUAR and placed into abusive and poor working conditions in eastern China under this program.

Methods used by local authorities to force Uyghurs, particularly young Uyghur women and girls, to participate have included: threatening families with steep fines if they fail to send family members to join the program; threatening farmers with the confiscation of their farmlands and the destruction of their homes if they refuse to allow their daughters to participate; and threatening young women with the confiscation of their resident registration cards and denial of marriage certificates if they choose not to join.

Many participants report facing extremely oppressive working conditions and living arrangements in eastern China, including: physical beatings within the factories; coercion to work when sick and longer hours than are stipulated in the employment contracts; salaries withheld for months as “deposits”, garnished wages, and salary deductions for costs that it was agreed would be paid by others, such as transportation to the factory; medical ailments caused by poor working conditions; a lack of medical treatment; unsanitary food; and unlivable and unsafe dormitories.

Local governments have also reported on measures to politically train or regulate the activities of Uyghur female religious figures (known as buwi in Uyghur). In December 2008, the Xinjiang People’s Political Consultative Conference set forth a proposal initiated by the Vice Chairwoman of the Xinjiang Women’s Federation, on bringing buwi under government and party management. The proposal states, among other things, that buwi have existed in a “no-man’s land” without state oversight, and calls for using these women’s social status to spread the CCP’s religious and ethnic policies among Muslim women.

XUAR authorities have targeted their population planning enforcement activities in areas of the Uyghur region with predominantly non-Han populations. The coercive and abusive population planning practices to which Uyghur women have been subjected have included forced abortions and sterilizations. Individuals, acting in an official capacity, such as family planning officials, in the XUAR have forcibly taken Uyghur women from their homes and have subjected them to forced abortions and forced sterilizations. Uyghur women have suffered permanent health damage or even died as a result of negligent surgery during these forced operations. Population planning officials’ career advancement is routinely linked to their enforcement of a set birth quotas and this has created an incentive structure for officials to use coercive measures.

While I strongly condemn the subjection of any ethnic group to coercive population planning, this practice is particularly harmful to the continuity of the Uyghur people, as the Uyghurs make up less than one percent of China’s population. Furthermore, Uyghurs in the XUAR are being subjected to strict limitations on the number of children they can have at the same time as the Chinese government sponsors the mass resettlement of Han Chinese in the region.

Thank you.