



- Press Release -

## Majority of China's Muslims Still Cannot Make it to Mecca

*China turns a deaf ear to an appeal sent by human rights organizations and members of the European Parliament on the right of Muslims to conduct the pilgrimage to Mecca. Each of China's Muslims can go to Mecca – as long as s/he remains true to Communism and pays a hefty deposit.*

This year again, large numbers of China's Muslims will not be allowed to conduct the pilgrimage to Mecca. One of the five pillars of Islam, the *Hajj* is a fundamental duty for all able-bodied Muslims, but Chinese law, while theoretically protecting freedom of religion, operates a *de facto* selection of candidates to the Hajj on the basis of political beliefs and wealth.

Spearheaded by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), the Vice-President of the European Parliament, prominent Parliamentarians as well as many human rights NGOs, an appeal for the right to conduct the Hajj was sent to Chinese authorities earlier this month. Despite their acknowledged receipt of the document, they have so far failed to respond. One month ahead of the Hajj (which will begin on 18 December) there is little hope left for China's Muslims.

Demonstrations of support will be held on 10 December in Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey and the USA.

Please find below: the appeal and the list of supporters.

For further information please contact Mr. Paul Mailhot at the UNPO Secretariat (+31 (0)70 3646 504) or visit the UNPO website ([www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org)).

*Attachments:*

- *fact sheet on the situation of Uyghur Muslims in China;*
- *fact sheet on UNPO*

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## **Appeal for Freedom of Religion in China**

### **A campaign is organized to let Muslims in China participate to the Hajj**

*The Hague, 29 October 2007* - On 23 October 2007, UNPO sent a letter to President Hu Jintao to request that fundamental religious rights be guaranteed in China, in accordance with its international commitments.

As one of the fundamental duties of Islam, the Hajj requires able Muslims to complete a pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. However, Chinese local authorities have collected the passports of all Uyghur Muslims in China to ensure that no independent pilgrimages to Mecca could be organised. These passports may only be retrieved once authorities have approved the applicant's participation.

It is worthy to recall that the People's Republic of China has a constitutional provision protecting freedom of religion (Article 36), an equivalent provision in the 1984 Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law (Article 11) and regulations reaffirming free religious practices. **However, UNPO has continuously received reports of religious censorship, mosques being forcefully closed, religious meetings being raided and religious leaders being 're-educated'.** This year's Chinese participants to the Hajj have been carefully selected by local committees after submitting applications and paying, in addition to expensive travel costs, a security deposit of more than one year's average income, which will only be given back to them upon their return.

With the selection of pilgrims based solely on their political beliefs and personal wealth, these regulations result in preventing great numbers of Chinese Muslims from fulfilling their religious duty. **This stands in stark contradiction with the concept of freedom of religion enshrined in Chinese law, as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5) which China has signed and ratified in 1982.**

Lately, the People's Republic of China has made numerous promises to guarantee fundamental human rights, including religious rights to all of its citizens. At the dawn of the 2008 Olympic Games, the Chinese government has sworn that athletes and tourists alike will be permitted to freely practice and express their religion. Unfortunately, the recent developments do not lead us to think that this will be the case.

With the period of the Hajj approaching, we request, in accordance with China's commitment to guarantee the liberty of religion, to:

- *Let Chinese Muslims who had previously been issued a passport, retrieve them before the end of November 2007; and*
- *Allow them to travel to Mecca without submitting an application to a selection committee or having to deposit a sum of money as a security, on the basis of the fulfilment of the criteria listed by Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Hajj.*

To raise awareness of these human rights infringements, UNPO will organise a demonstration on 10 December 2007, day of human rights, in The Hague and Munich. Supporters for religious freedoms from all around the world are invited to attend this event.

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## List of Signatories to Hajj Campaign (to Date)

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)

Edward McMillan Scott  
Vice-President of the European Parliament and member of the sub-committee on Human Rights

Marco Cappato  
Member of the European Parliament (M.E.P.), Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Human Rights

Agnoletto Vittorio  
M.E.P., Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dr. Willy Fautré  
Director Human Rights Without Frontiers International

Giorgio Schultze,  
President of the European Humanist International

Niccolo Figa-Talamanca  
Program Director, No Peace Without Justice

Bob Fu  
Founder, China Aid Association

International Society for Human Rights

World Uyghur Congress

Isa Yusup Alptekin Foundation

International Pen Uyghur Centre

Union of European Turkish Democrats

Contactorgaan Moslim en Overheid

Uyghur American Association (UAA)

Eastern Turkistan Foundation in Istanbul

Eastern Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association

Eastern Turkistan Culture and Solidarity Association – Ankara Section

East Turkistan Union in Europe

East Turkistan Union in Europe - Frankfurt Section

Uyghur Canadian Association

Swedish Uyghur Committee

Uyghur U.K. Association

Netherlands Eastern Turkistan Foundation

Norway Uyghur Committee  
Ittipak Uigur Society of the Kyrgyz Republic  
Bishkek Human Rights Committee (Kirgizstan)  
Uyghur Youth Union in Kazakhsatan  
Society Union of Uyghur National Association (Kazakhstan)  
Australian Uyghur Association  
Kazakhstan Representative of World Uyghur Congress  
Turkey Representative of World Uyghur Congress  
Stichting Selam netwerk  
Stichting Avrasya  
Sweden Uyghur Education Centre  
Netherlands Turkish Youth Association  
Turkevi Research Centre  
Kuriren Newspaper, Sweden  
Turkish-Dutch Student Association  
Stichting Khorlo

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