

Locke Lord QuickStudy: UK Enacts Sanctions Legislation for the Protection of Uyghur Muslim Community in Xinjiang Province, People's Republic of China ("PRC")

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On 22 March 2021, UK foreign secretary, Dominic Raab, speaking in respect of the human rights situation in Xinjiang, PRC, stated that it was 'the largest mass detention of an ethnic and religious group since the second world war'. Furthermore, he stated in respect of the treatment of the Uyghur Muslims by the Chinese government, that:

"In sum, the evidence points to a highly disturbing program of repression. Expressions of religion have been criminalised; Uyghur language and culture discriminated against on a systematic scale; there is widespread use of forced labour; women forcibly sterilised; children separated from their parents; an entire population subject to surveillance, including collection of DNA, use of facial recognition software, and so-called 'predictive policing' algorithms".

Activists and UN experts say at least 1 million Muslims are detained in camps in Xinjiang. PRC denies rights abuses and says its camps provide vocational training and are needed to fight extremism.

Consequently, following legislation from the EU, US and Canada, the UK government introduced the **Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations 2020** ('the Regulation'). The Regulation imposes travel bans on certain senior Chinese officials and asset freezes against individuals and entities involved in the Xinjiang regime. To date, four senior officials have been sanctioned as 'designated persons' by the EU and the UK. The UK has also imposed sanctions against the Public Policy Security Bureau of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps. The Regulation also prohibits making funds and economic resources available to designated persons.

The Regulation is intended to send a clear message to the Chinese Government that the international community will not turn a blind eye to serious and systematic violations of human rights. The move also marked the first time in three decades that the UK or EU had punished China for Human Rights abuses. To date, 39 countries have signed a joint statement at the UN condemning the Xinjiang human rights violations. The EU sanctions regime is similar to the Magnitsky Act, an Obama era legislation that permits the US government to sanction persons it considers to be human rights offenders, freeze their assets and prevent them from entering the US.

Conclusion

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