



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**MOTIONS**

**Human Rights in China**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 22 March 2021**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (10:47): In China's north-west rise autonomous ion called Xinjiang. 'Xin' translates into 'new' and 'jiang' translates into 'frontier'. The name 'new frontier' has an aspirational ring to it. But that's not how the world sees Xinjiang—especially for its Uighur people, an ethnic minority about whom there've been deeply disturbing reports of enforced disappearances, mass detentions, systematic torture, abuse of women, pervasive surveillance and religious discrimination.

The Australian government has already conveyed its concerns about the situation in Xinjiang to the People's Republic of China, including during Foreign Minister Marise Payne's last three meetings with her Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. A nation's foreign policy is an outward expression of its national identity, its values, its people and what they believe in. One of the things we believe in, as a liberal democracy, is universal human rights. And the breaches of human rights being reported out of Xinjiang are so egregious, so grave, that the House of Commons in Canada has passed a unanimous resolution calling them acts of genocide. However, the Chinese Communist Party denies these allegations. And herein lies our dilemma: unless we can draw more evidence-based conclusions the world the world remains at an impasse. While a determination on the question of genocide is a matter for the courts, and a range of judicial and quasi-judicial systems exist to consider such crimes, the starting point has to be uncover what is actually going on. That requires unfettered access to Xinjiang, something the Chinese Communist Party is not allowing.

Australia has raised its concerns during sessions of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly. But still transparency is denied. Today I appeal to the Chinese Communist Party to reconsider its position and provide international observers, including the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, immediate and unfettered access. What's more, I contend that doing so is in fact in China's interests. Since a nation's foreign policy is an outward expression of its national identity, it is worth considering the situation in Xinjiang within the context of China's national identity.

China's identity consists of two parts: the yin and yang, if you like, the positive and the negative, the pessimistic and the optimistic. Where the yin is a memory of historical trauma they refer to as the century of humiliation, the yang is an aspirational expression of national rejuvenation when China reclaimed what it perceived to be its rightful place as the world's middle kingdom, with a clear line of sight between its past and its future, believing its history preordained its destiny. As the former 'middle kingdom under heaven', the Chinese remember themselves as not only possessing the greatest power and most advanced economy on earth but also the most culturally and morally superior civilisation. Let me underscore the words 'morally superior', because it is this part of China's national identity and this part of the China narrative that the situation in Xinjiang undermines.

If indeed the accusations of abuses of the Uighur people are false, as the Chinese Communist Party claims, then it should have nothing to hide. It would be in its interests to provide the unfettered access to Xinjiang that the world needs. To do otherwise, to continue to refuse access, dilutes the moral authority to which China lays claim, undermining its national identity and compromising the vision of Xi Jinping of the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation. That is unless, of course, the allegations are true.