

## Amnesty International Public Statement

### China: Stop pressuring states to return at-risk asylum seekers and others

On World Refugee Day, Amnesty International calls on Chinese authorities to end their long-standing practice of pressuring states to forcibly return refugees and asylum seekers. Such actions contribute to violations of human rights obligations under the Convention against Torture (CAT), including the absolute prohibition of refoulement, and undermine the customary international law ban on returning individuals to a real risk of serious harm. They also have a chilling effect on freedom of opinion and expression and on human rights activism both within China and around the world.

Currently, at least six individuals in Thailand are under direct threat of being forcibly returned to China, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. **Five Uyghur men** are currently imprisoned and [at risk of deportation at the end of their sentences](#), after they were arrested during an attempt to cross from Thailand into Malaysia in 2014. According to press reports, **Zhang Xinyan**, a mainland Chinese citizen and Falun Gong practitioner recognized as a refugee by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), is at risk of being returned from Thailand to China. Hong Kong's national security police have issued an arrest warrant and a bounty for her in relation to her involvement with the overseas "Hong Kong Parliament" group.

Amnesty International has consistently engaged with Thai authorities on concerns that certain individuals may be at risk of persecution, on political, ethnic or religious grounds, or other human rights violations if returned to China.

Forcibly returning any such person to China would for Thai authorities constitute not only a failure to uphold Thailand's obligations under CAT but would also violate Article 13 of the Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act of Thailand, which prohibits refoulement. This echoes the serious concerns raised by the [UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Refugee Agency](#) regarding the refoulement in 2025 of 40 Uyghurs from detention in Thailand to China, and of [UN experts](#) in February 2026 regarding the remaining men.

Amnesty International has also highlighted persistent concerns about the transparency and fairness of the Chinese legal system. Research from 2025 details shortcomings in fair trial guarantees and the risks of torture and other ill-treatment faced [by human rights defenders in China](#) and those charged with [national security crimes in Hong Kong](#).

For more than a decade, Amnesty International has documented escalation of repression and human rights violations in China's so-called "minority" areas. [In 2021, the organization found](#) that Chinese officials had committed the crimes against humanity of imprisonment, torture and persecution against Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims in the western region the Chinese government calls Xinjiang.

Amnesty International, other civil society organizations and the UN have reported the intimidation, detention and forcible return of Uyghur and other Turkic and majority Muslim individuals in and from Cambodia, Egypt, Malaysia, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Thailand and Turkey, dating as early as 2009 and as recently as 2025. In many of these cases, civil society advocates and the detained individuals' families raised real concerns about the risks of deporting them to China. These are credible

concerns, given that in most cases, the fate of those returned is unknown and independent monitoring within China in general, or Xinjiang in particular, virtually nonexistent. Uyghurs abroad – where they feel safe to speak to media or NGOs – have stated that they are unable to reach their family members who were sent back.

Members of minorities are not the only ones who fear forcible returns to China and the related risks to them upon arrival. For its 2024 report [On my campus, I am afraid](#), Amnesty International interviewed 32 students in universities in eight countries across Europe and North America. The organization found that mainland Chinese and Hong Kong individuals who engage in human rights activism overseas face significant pressure and live in a state of heightened fear. Specifically, they shared their fear of being required to return to China, or risking deportation to China, at the end of their studies – even after having reported cases of state- or perceived state actors targeting themselves and their families still in China. For those human rights defenders and others from Hong Kong, pressure from authorities takes distinct forms, with Hong Kong authorities using extraterritorial application of national security laws to issue bounties and seek extradition of pro-democracy and human rights activists in the years following the 2019 protests in the territory.

Although the 2024 research was limited in geographic scope, in countries with less legal protection for human rights defenders and refugees and asylum seekers, the stakes are even higher. This is particularly the case in contexts where states have close ties to China or are more vulnerable to Chinese pressure, increasing the risks for members of at-risk groups originating from China who engage in activism or are targeted on the basis of their ethnic identity.

In other words, forcible returns to China are not a new phenomenon, and do not just happen from Thailand. A number of cases over the past 10 years alone have illustrated the risks across Southeast Asia.

- In July 2015, Thai authorities [transferred 109 Uyghur asylum seekers](#) to the custody of Chinese security officials, who forced them onto a chartered flight to China.
- In October 2015, [bookseller Gui Minhai disappeared from Thailand](#), and later re-emerged in Chinese police custody in Ningbo, China.
- In August 2022, activists and media reported the disappearance and forcible return of Chinese democracy activist [Dong Guangping from Viet Nam](#) into Chinese custody; he had previously been [forcibly returned from Thailand in 2015](#).
- In July 2023, [veteran human rights lawyer Lu Siwei](#) was boarding a train to travel to Thailand from Laos when he was stopped by authorities. After being held incommunicado, he was deported back to Sichuan, China, where he was detained and faced charges of “illegally crossing a border”.
- In August 2023, Laos-based [anti-censorship activist Yang Zewei](#) was reported to be held in a detention centre in China after being arrested in Vientiane, the Lao capital, and deported.
- In February 2025, as mentioned above, [the Thai government deported 40 Uyghurs](#) who had been held in immigration detention for over a decade.

Amnesty International calls on mainland Chinese and Hong Kong authorities to cease efforts to undermine human rights activism overseas and to exert undue pressure on other governments to this end. In particular, they must stop seeking the politically motivated return of individuals they deem

threatening “state security” for merely exercising their fundamental freedoms or for being from a particular ethnic group. Both governments must amend or repeal all legislation, including the National Security Law for Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Safeguarding National Security Ordinance, that has been used to target human rights defenders overseas and seek their return.

UNHCR must urgently uphold its duty to support individuals at risk of persecution in China to access international protection and seek resettlement.

Countries who return individuals who would face persecution or other serious human rights violations in mainland China or Hong Kong might think that doing so is in line with their own political and economic interests. However, the principle of non-refoulement is at the heart of international law, including the CAT. Violating it can expose countries to scrutiny and in some cases legal proceedings, damaging their reputation and undermining their international commitments.

All UN member states, and especially States Parties to the CAT, should ensure that they:

- Put in place a robust screening mechanism informed by civil society groups and members of at-risk communities and other experts to advise on those at risk of human rights violations in China.
- Scrutinize fully all requests for returns including diplomatic assurances from China to identify where there is credible evidence of serious risks; so-called assurances against ill-treatment should be seen as inherently insufficient.
- Desist from agreeing treaties or memoranda of understanding (MOUs) on law enforcement cooperation, mutual legal assistance or extradition with mainland Chinese or Hong Kong authorities, unless human rights or humanitarian grounds for refusal to cooperate on specific cases or requests by either side are clear and in line with international law and standards.
- Renegotiate and pending this, suspend the implementation of any existing extradition agreements with China to ensure that bi- or multilateral accords do not facilitate human rights violations, in particular refoulement.
- Put in place and implement effective laws, policies and practices that grant refugees, asylum seekers and others seeking international protection formal legal status and rights protection in line with international standards.
- For those states not yet party, accede to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.