



5 February 2021

Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

RE: Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced By Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia Inc (the Society) welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Senate Standing Committee.

The Society is a lay Catholic charitable organisation that comprises just over 50,000 volunteers and members and 6,000 employees who provide on-the-ground assistance in the form of emergency relief, housing and other support and community services across Australia.

Principles that underpin the Society

The Society fully supports the intent of the Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced By Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020 (the Forced Labour Bill).

The Society provides all forms of help that alleviates suffering or deprivation and promotes human dignity and personal integrity in all their dimensions. We serve all those who require assistance regardless of creed, ethnic or social background, health, gender, or political opinion. We strive to seek out and find those in need and the forgotten, the victims of exclusion or adversity.

The Society is ever aware of the changes that occur in human society and has a long history of advocating for the poorest of the poor and for those who are most rejected by society.¹

The Society believes that:

- the dignity of the human being must be maintained – everyone is of great value and worthy of respect and protection; and every person is entitled to their rights in justice
- the human dignity of vulnerable people must be enhanced – people must not be exploited or devalued
- those most disadvantaged should be prioritised for assistance and not further penalised or marginalised through punitive initiatives or poorly designed programs, processes or legislation
- resources must be used appropriately and directed to help those who need it most, and
- the common good of society must be fostered.

Support for the banning of imported goods produced in whole or part by forced labour

It is from this context that the Society and its members call on the Australian Parliament to support this Bill, in line with Australia's ratification of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and related international conventions against slavery and forced labour.

As a community, we cannot continue to import goods from Xinjiang or other provinces in the People's Republic of China that are produced in whole or part by forced labour.

Human rights abuse against many thousands of Uyghur people in Xinjiang Province are well-documented.²

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has found that China is continuing to build new detention centres in Xinjiang, in addition to the 380 that have already been identified. Survivors, family members and camp whistle-blowers have told of a system of arbitrary detention, political indoctrination, coercion, population control, human rights abuses, torture and forced labour.³

In March 2020, the APSI reported that Uyghurs are working in factories that are in the supply chain of more than 80 well-known global brands in the technology, clothing and automotive sectors. They concluded that “the Chinese government should uphold the civic, cultural and labour rights enshrined in China’s constitution and domestic laws, end its extrajudicial detention of Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, and ensure that all citizens can freely determine the terms of their own labour and mobility.”⁴

Other governments are taking a stand against the Chinese Government’s actions

China’s treatment of the Uyghurs and other Muslims is strongly counter to its international human rights obligations.⁵

Back in 2018, an independent United Nations human rights panel received credible reports that at least one million Uyghurs and other Muslims had been detained in Xinjiang.

Other governments are taking action.

In mid-December 2020, the US Government imposed a ban on all cotton and tomato products from Xinjiang.⁶

The Canadian Government has recently declared that the actions of the Chinese Communist Party constitute genocide as laid out in the 1948 *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*. In coordination with the United Kingdom and other international partners, Canada has adopted the following measures to defend the rights of Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities:

- the prohibition of imports of goods produced wholly or in part by forced labour.
- a Xinjiang Integrity Declaration for Canadian companies.
- a Business Advisory on Xinjiang-related entities.
- enhanced advice to Canadian businesses
- export controls
- increasing awareness for responsible business conduct linked to Xinjiang, and
- a study on forced labour and supply chain risks.⁷

Uyghur advocacy groups have also renewed calls for the international community to take action after the BBC published horrifying new accounts of rape and torture in China’s network of internment camps in Xinjiang.⁸

Turning a blind eye and remaining silent on the repressive surveillance, mass arbitrary detention, torture and mistreatment and forced labour imposed on the Uyghurs and other Muslims is not an option.

Australia must join other countries in banning goods produced by Uyghur forced labour.

We support the view that ‘this is a very necessary measure that supports Australia’s longstanding commitment to internationally recognised human rights.’⁹

Thank you for considering the views of the Society on the illegal detention of Uyghurs.

Yours sincerely



Toby oConnor
Chief Executive Officer

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- ¹ St Vincent de Paul Society. May 2014. *The Rule. 7th Edition 2012, Australia*. Articles 1.3-1.6. Accessed at: https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/168122_The_Rule.pdf
- ² Parliament of Australia. 8 December 2020. *Customs Amendment (Banning Goods Produced By Uyghur Forced Labour) Bill 2020. Senate*. Explanatory Memorandum. Accessed at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_LEGislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=s1284
- ³ Walsh, M. 24 September 2020. *China's still building detention camps in Xinjiang — and they're getting even bigger*. ABC News. Accessed at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-09-24/china-building-bigger-uyghur-detention-camps-in-xinjiang/12693338>
- ⁴ Xiuzhong Xu, Cave D. Leibold J. Munro K. Ruser N. 2 March 2020. *Uyghurs for sale: 're-education', forced labour and surveillance beyond Xinjiang*. Accessed at : <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/uyghurs-for-sale-re-education-forced-labour-and-surveillance-beyond-xinjiang/>
- ⁵ Parliament of Australia. 8 December 2020. Senate Hansard. pp. 7088-90. Accessed at https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/chamber/hansards/f2c5c3be-0fb8-4db1-9392-dba6ced55207/toc_pdf/Senate_2020_12_08_8407_Official.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22chamber/hansards/f2c5c3be-0fb8-4db1-9392-dba6ced55207/0157%22
- ⁶ ABC News. 20 January 2021. *US Government accuses China of committing genocide, crimes against humanity in treatment of Uyghur Muslims*. Accessed at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-20/united-states-calls-china-treatment-uyghur-muslims-genocide/13071898>
- ⁷ Government of Canada. 12 January 2021. *Canada announces new measures to address human rights abuses in Xinjiang, China*. News Release. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2021/01/canada-announces-new-measures-to-address-human-rights-abuses-in-xinjiang-china.html>
- ⁸ Dziedzich, S. 3 February 2021. *Uyghur advocates speak out after horrifying accounts of rape and torture in Xinjiang camps in China*. ABC News. Accessed at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-03/uyghur-renew-calls-for-action-report-rape-abuse-xinjiang-camp/13118190>
- ⁹ Parliament of Australia. 8 December 2020. Senate Hansard. pp. 7088-90. op.cit.