



China's "Physicals for All" Program in Xinjiang

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpt from Nepal's largest selling English daily, *The Himalayan Times*, reports that beginning in July 2017, authorities in Xinjiang began collecting biometric data as part of a "Physicals for All" program. With a focus on 'priority individuals,' the government has collected a range of biometric information on the region's predominately Uyghur and minority population. However, the shape and scope of this program has been heavily criticized by international human rights organizations, particularly by Human Rights Watch.

The *Himalayan Times* reports that Chinese authorities have begun to amass a significant database of biometric data from the residents of Xinjiang amid an ongoing and massive security crackdown in the province. According to the report, police are collecting "pictures, fingerprints, iris scans and household registration information," while health authorities collect "DNA samples and blood type information" as part of the program. Citing concerns over mandatory participation, as well as privacy concerns, the paper further notes that human rights organizations are publically denouncing the collection process, taking place under the so-called "Physicals for All" program. Human Rights Watch in particular maintains a strong stance against the security crackdown.

As the second excerpt from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates, Lu Kang, a spokesperson for the Ministry dismissed the concerns as "untrue" during a daily press conference on 13 December 2017. While promising progress and emphasizing the "peaceful and happy life" of residents, Lu decried that overseas observers have been "unwilling to see" the situation for what it is. **End OE Watch Commentary (Shanks)**

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- Human Rights Watch, China director Sophie Richardson

Source: "Rights group criticizes China for mass DNA collection in Xinjiang," *The Himalayan Times*—World. 13 December 2017. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/world/rights-group-criticizes-china-for-mass-dna-collection-in-xinjiang/>

Chinese authorities have collected DNA and other biometric data from the whole population of the volatile western region of Xinjiang, Human Right Watch said on Wednesday, denouncing the campaign as a gross violation of international norms. Hundreds of people have been killed in Xinjiang in the past few years in violence between Uighurs, a mostly Muslim people, and ethnic majority Han Chinese, which Beijing blames on Islamist militants.

The unrest has fueled a sweeping security crackdown there, including mass rallies by armed police, tough measures that rights advocates say restrict religious and cultural expression, and widespread surveillance. Police are responsible for collecting pictures, fingerprints, iris scans and household registration information, while health authorities should collect DNA samples and blood type information as part of a "Physicals for All" program, the New York-based group said in a statement, citing government a document.

"The mandatory data-banking of a whole population’s biodata, including DNA, is a gross violation of international human rights norms, and it’s even more disturbing if it is done surreptitiously, under the guise of a free health care program," Human Rights Watch’s China director Sophie Richardson said. According to the Xinjiang-wide plan posted online by the Aksu city government in July, main goals for the campaign include collecting the biometric data for all people between the age of 12 and 65, and verifying the region’s population for a database....

...Data for "priority individuals" should be collected regardless of age, it said, using a term the government has adopted to refer to people deemed a security risk.... Human Rights Watch cited an unidentified Xinjiang resident saying he feared being labeled with "political disloyalty" if he did not participate, and that he had not received any results from the health checks.

Source: "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang’s Regular Press Conference on December 13, 2017," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*. 13 December 2017. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1519191.shtml

Q: According to reports, the Human Rights Watch today issued a report expressing concern about the Chinese government’s moves in Xinjiang to obtain DNA from every single resident. What’s your response to this?

A: This organization you mentioned has kept making false allegations on China-related issues all along. That’s why I would like to say that such allegation is not even worth your time.

In terms of the situation in Xinjiang, we have said from this podium many times that with economic development, people in Xinjiang are living a peaceful and happy life, and the situation there is sound. Indeed, certain people overseas may be unwilling to see such a situation. I would like to tell them that the Chinese government will continue to uphold the unity of people of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang, safeguard their happy life and promote progress in various fields of Xinjiang.