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Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights and
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Uyghur women and girls are victims of genocide. The United States has a powerful tool to draw attention to their plight and spur collective action: the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017. Unlike the Shoah during the Second World War and the Armenian Genocide during the First World War, the ongoing genocide in China is not subjected to the constraints of international conflict, and modern technology makes the genocide widely known. We are called to ask whether, or in what way, Americans might endorse, sponsor, participate in, and celebrate the upcoming Olympic Games without looking back in shame. The very purpose of the Women Peace and Security Act of 2017—which Congress passed with unanimous bipartisan support—is to address just this kind of international crisis. The following examines how this domestic law, and attendant international human rights law, can help Congress galvanize international support for the plight of Uyghur women and girls before the 2022 Winter Olympic Games.

The plight of Uyghur women and girls

The Olympic Games glorify the genius and beauty of the human body, tenacity of the human spirit, and inviolability of individual human freedom in its cultivation to excellence. The games [have promoted](#) gender equality and women’s empowerment. In a matter of months these heights of human enterprise will take place on the same soil where—and at the very same time when—other bodies are raped, tortured, and subjected to enforced sterilization, forced marriages, and religious persecution, in violation of international law, including: the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Chinese Communist Party, the host of the 2022 Winter Olympics, equates women’s fertility and reproductive freedom to terrorism. It brutally enforces population control with unwanted drugs and invasive bodily brutality. It punishes those who exceed the so-called childbirth limit. It

expels people from their homes, breaks up marriages and families, and banishes citizens to cruel internment camps on account of one's religion.

According to [reports](#), Uyghur women have been [coerced](#) into unwanted marriages to ethnic Han Chinese men under the threat of internment and other punishment. Open Doors International, in its report "2020 Gender Specific Religious Persecution," found that women of religious minorities are more [vulnerable](#) to sexual violence, forced marriage, and physical violence.

[Testimonies](#) of Uyghur women revealed that they are beaten by government law enforcement personnel while in custody, especially in the areas of the stomach and womb, systematically raped, and tortured in the "re-education" camps. According to [Dr. Adrian Zenz](#), a researcher at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has placed Uyghurs in internment camps in the Xinjiang Province, where the CCP has been accused of forcing upon detained Uyghur women birth control and sterilization procedures, including injections, surgical sterilizations, abortions, and the implanting of intrauterine contraceptive devices. Evidence includes:

- In 2019 and 2020, the Xinjiang's Health Commission set a budget of \$37 million for birth control procedures. According to the [Associated Press](#) the enforced sterilization by the drug Depo-Provera inflicted prolonged physical pain in addition to sterilization;
- Evidence of genocide was indicated as early as 2015, when population growth declined in minority counties. That year the CCP correlated population growth with "religious extremism."
- Further evidence of genocide was indicated from 2015 to 2018, by statistics from [Xinjiang Statistical Yearbooks](#). Birthrates of Uyghurs in the Hotan and Kashgar regions in those years dropped more than 60%. In 2019, the Uyghur population in Xinjiang dropped nearly 24% and 4.2% nation-wide.

In light of this and other evidence, United States Secretary of State Michael Pompeo [declared](#) that the CCP's treatment of Uyghur Muslims amounted to "genocide" on January 19, 2021. On January 27th his successor, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, [endorsed](#) that designation, reflecting bipartisan support for that conclusion.

U.S. and International Mandates on Women Peace and Security

The Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda provides an important tool in rallying the peoples' conscience and goodwill in U.S. partner and allied nations. Instigated and propelled by civil society around the world, some 90 governments have national action plans to implement the agenda. An essential part of the [Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017](#) is the requirement for U.S. foreign and security policy agencies to engage other nations to protect women and girls.

The law made it the policy of the United States to "promote the physical safety, economic security, and dignity of women and girls" and put in place concrete programs for "developing and enhancing early warning systems of conflict and violence." The law requires the Secretary of

State, the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of Defense to train and equip with the necessary tools for personnel such as special envoys, members of mediation or negotiation teams, the U.S. military, civil service and Foreign Service members, and contractors who are sent to countries in need of (1) conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution; (2) protecting civilians from violence, exploitation, and trafficking in persons, and (3) international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

Notably, the Act states that the Secretary of State should work with international, regional, national, and local organizations to increase the security of women. Local Olympic organizations in our allied and partner nations can and should be engaged to find common or complementary ways to condemn the CCP's outrages on women and girls. Together we can help each other avoid the unconscionable prospect of aiding and abetting the abuses by failing to respond proportionally during the upcoming Olympic Games.

The WPS agenda began two decades ago at the UN Security Council and that body has issued ten resolutions, some specifically committing the Council to work together to end violence against women and girls. While the resolutions are not legally binding on States, the treaties that underpin them are. Women, Peace, and Security networks can be rallied to oppose the situation in Xinjiang as a violation of various human rights instruments, most notably:

- The [Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#), which defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,” including “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;”
- The [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), which defines “torture” as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.”
- The [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which states that “No marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses.”

The U.S. [Strategy](#) on Women Peace and Security recognizes the influential role of these universal values in great power competition. We compete by attracting partners to our values of liberty, dignity, and opportunity for all people. We risk ceding ground if our competitors and our friends perceive our commitment to those values as inconstant. How we respond to the upcoming Olympic Games will influence these perceptions one way or the other.

Engage Women, Peace and Security Networks to Counter Genocide

As part of an international approach, the U.S. Congress, including the recently formed House Women Peace and Security Caucus, can use the upcoming Olympic Games to:

- Urge the UN Security Council to condemn violence against, and persecution of, Uyghur women and girls, and to take up the issue in its next Open Debate on Women Peace and Security;
- Urge all UN agencies responsible for the protection and empowerment of women and girls to condemn the violence against and persecution of Uyghur women and girls, in particular UN Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief;
- Study the links between religious persecution and sexual violence against women and girls to understand the double vulnerability of women and girls from religious minorities by engaging the collaborative efforts of WPS implementing agencies such as the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues, the Office of International Religious Freedom, the Office of Democracy Human Rights and Labor, and other relevant offices and U.S. agencies;
- Condemn any and all attempts to equate women's fertility, childbirth, and childrearing to "religious extremism" and refute the equating women's and couple's reproductive freedom with terrorism. By this means, the CCP has declared war on the most intimate of human relationships. Sad is the silence from quarters otherwise known for extolling reproductive rights and freedoms.

When considering how he would get away with eliminating an entire race of people under the gaze of the international community, Adolf Hitler mused "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" Only in the last few weeks, more than a century after the fact, has a U.S. president [named](#) as "genocide" the ruthless extermination by forced expulsion of the Armenian people from Turkey. The immediacy and pervasiveness of modern technology ensures that the world is watching and will remember our national, allied, and collective response to the genocide of the Uyghur people.

The commissions would do well to consider the Women Peace and Security Act of 2017 and its international civil society and governmental network as a valuable resource in coming weeks and months as they address this pressing and important issue.

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