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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

The Assistant Director-General for Culture

Mr Tom Tugendhat
Chair
Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA
United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland

5 March 2021

Ref.: CLT/ADG/21/1364

Dear Mr Tugendhat,

On behalf of the Director-General, I wish to thank you for your letter of 18 February, in which you share concerns over reports of the destruction of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China.

As it stands, we have no reports of any damage to the inscribed World Heritage properties located in the Xinjiang Province. For your information, the following sites in the Xinjiang Province are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List:

- The natural heritage site "Xinjiang Tianshan", part of the Tianshan mountain system of Central Asia, which is inscribed for its unique physical, geographical, biological and ecological features, as well as its scenically beautiful areas;
- The cultural heritage site "Silk Roads: Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor" (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), a serial transnational World Heritage property. This site spans a 5,000 km section of the extensive Silk Roads network, stretching from Chang'an/Luoyang, the central capital of China in the Han and Tang dynasties, to the Zhetysu region of Central Asia. It took shape between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. and remained in use until the 16th century, linking multiple civilizations and facilitating far-reaching exchanges in trade, religious beliefs, scientific knowledge, technological innovation, cultural practices and the arts.

There are six component sites located in Xinjiang:

- Qocho City (Turpan, Ancient City of Gaochang);
- Yar City Site (Turpan, Ancient City of Jiaohe);
- Kizil Cave Temple (Baicheng County);
- Subash Buddhist Temple (Kuche County);
- Kizilgaha Beacon Tower (Kuche County);
- Bachbaliq City (Jimsar County, Ancient City of Beiting)

In addition, several sites located in Xinjiang are currently on the People's Republic of China Tentative List, namely:

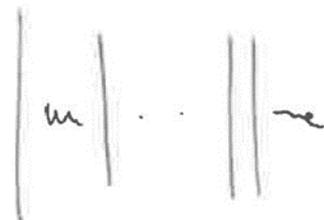
- The "Chinese Section of the Silk Road: Land routes in Henan Province, Shaanxi Province, Gansu Province, Qinghai Province, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region; Sea Routes in Ningbo City, Zhejiang Province and Quanzhou City, Fujian Province from Western-Han Dynasties to Qing Dynasty" and the "The Chinese Section of the Silk Roads", respectively added in 2008 and 2016 as part of ongoing international efforts to gradually inscribe the heritage of the Silk Roads on the World Heritage List;
- "Karez Wells", also added in 2008;
- The natural site "China Altay", added in 2010;
- The natural site "Xinjiang Yardang", added in 2015.

With regards to intangible cultural heritage, two elements specifically practiced by Uyghur communities have been inscribed on the Lists of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: 'Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang' on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (2008) and 'Meshrep' on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (2010). The periodic report on the 'Meshrep' element will be examined by the sixteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2022. It will include the current situation of the element, the effectiveness of the safeguarding measures implemented by the State Party, and the challenges it has encountered. The Intergovernmental Committee is able to discuss any ongoing issues related to inscribed elements on the basis of information received, also from third parties, with regards to their practice and transmission.

UNESCO, in line with its mandate as the United Nations agency charged with the safeguarding of cultural heritage, is closely monitoring this situation. Any reports sent to UNESCO are processed within the existing mechanisms of the intergovernmental bodies of the Culture Conventions ratified by Member States.

With my best wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several vertical strokes and a small flourish at the end, positioned above the printed name.

Ernesto Ottone R.



Foreign Affairs Committee

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From the Chair
Tom Tugendhat MP

Audrey Azoulay
Director-General
UNESCO

18 February 2021

Letter by email: g.papagiannis@unesco.org

Dear Ms Azoulay,

I am writing to you regarding credible reports of serious cultural destruction and erasure in Xinjiang, China. It is believed that, since 2017, as many as 16,000 mosques have been damaged or destroyed in Xinjiang. If true, this represents a concerted effort on the part of the Chinese government to destroy key elements of Uyghur and Islamic cultural expression and heritage in Xinjiang.

Besides the evidence of physical destruction of monuments, there is also widespread concern that the Chinese Government's expressly stated attempts to 'sinicise' the people of Xinjiang represent an attempt to wipe out the intangible cultural heritage of the Uyghurs and other ethnic groups. The 're-education camps', where internees are forced to speak Mandarin instead of their mother tongues, are among the main drivers of this.

I would be grateful if you would respond to the following questions:

- What is UNESCO's response to reports of cultural erasure and cultural destruction in Xinjiang?
- Will UNESCO commit to a full investigation in Xinjiang in order to verify the extent of the reported destruction?
- Is UNESCO planning to allocate any funding or resource to the prevention of further destruction, and the preservation of the culture of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang?

It would be helpful to have a response by 5 March. I intend to place your response in the public domain.

Best wishes,

TOM TUGENDHAT