RE: Working to release Dr. Rahile Dawut, distinguished anthropologist

Dear Mr. Meale,

The American Anthropological Association last wrote to the embassy in 2018 concerning the disappearance of Dr. Rahile Dawut, a celebrated anthropologist and renowned scholar from China’s Uighur ethnic minority group. We have now learned, as confirmed by the Radio Free Asia Uyghur Service, that she has officially been arrested.

Human rights groups estimate that hundreds of thousands of Uighurs, a predominantly Muslim group, have been detained for weeks, months or years in “re-education centers” in China’s far western Xinjiang region. The Chinese authorities have never assumed responsibility. We believe Dr. Dawut was arrested because she is an outstanding woman scholar, and it is evident their methods of disappearing people are designed to inflict maximum hurt and destruction within the Uighur community and, indeed, the world at large. The Chinese Communist Party and its leadership have engineered and publicly taken responsibility for the ongoing program of destruction of the Uyghur people and the other indigenous peoples of East Turkestan.

As the world’s largest professional and scholarly society for our field, we stand for advancing understanding of the human condition through anthropological research, and for applying this understanding to addressing some of the world’s most pressing problems. It is often said that anthropology is a field of knowledge that is dedicated to making the world safe for cultural differences.

Anthropologists have a long and rich tradition of reporting on distinctive cultural perspectives, allowing people to give voice to these perspectives in their own words. Dr. Dawut, who wrote and lectured widely on Uighur folklore and traditions, is far from being a threat of any kind. In fact, until she “disappeared,” her work had been supported with grants and awards from China’s Ministry of Culture.

We strongly urge the U.S. Embassy in Beijing to do what you can do to have Dr. Dawut released, along with the many thousands of other disappeared scholars/intellectuals and other camp detainees, and bring a halt to the state program destroying their peoples’ cultures. Please don’t hesitate to contact us if we can provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Edward Liebow, PhD
Executive Director, American Anthropological Association
ELiebow@americananthro.org