NEW YORKER

FEATURE

The Uyghur Forced to Process the World's Fish

China forces minorities from Xinjiang to work in industries around the country, and the work has included handling much of the seafood sold in America and Europe.

By Ian Urbina
Illustrations by Gabriel Bienczycki

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Qi is a dandy morning this part April, warm than eight-tem and women, dressed in matching red windbreakers, stand in orderly lines in front of the factory in Kashgar, a city in Xinjiang, in northwest China. Some of the women have ethnic mutations, and they stand with mixtures of their first and Chinese names. Some are Uyghur women, a formerly common habit in their homes by the local government. A video of the event shows a Communist Party official, Ma Jianfeng, speaking to the assembly on a stage, in front of a banner reading "Women Have Employment and Build Beautiful Homes." At the end of the video, drone footage shows the women in lines starting to take the group stage. The event was part of a tech-labor transfer program run by the Kashgar Prefecture Women's Federation. Over the past three years, the country, including Xinjiang, analyzed that a then reported to the United States and Europe. "It's a strategy of control and indoctrination," Adrian Zenz, an anthropologist who studies Xinjiang, said. Xinjiang, said "And it's designed to dissociate Uyghur culture."

Illustration by Gabriel Bienczycki

The labor program is part of a wider agenda to relocate, resettle, and transfer Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other ethnic groups from more than half the population of Xinjiang, a Muslim-majority region in northwestern China, a made up of minorities—most of them Uyghurs, but some Kazakhs, Hui, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and others—to other provinces, where they mixed with mixtures of their first and Chinese names. Some are Uyghur women, a formerly common habit in their homes by the local government. A video of the event shows a Communist Party official, Ma Jianfeng, speaking to the assembly on a stage, in front of a banner reading "Women Have Employment and Build Beautiful Homes." At the end of the video, drone footage shows the women in lines starting to take the group stage. The event was part of a tech-labor transfer program run by the Kashgar Prefecture Women's Federation. Over the past three years, the country, including Xinjiang, analyzed that a then reported to the United States and Europe. "It's a strategy of control and indoctrination," Adrian Zenz, an anthropologist who studies Xinjiang, said. Xinjiang, said "And it's designed to dissociate Uyghur culture."

In the early two thousands, Chinese officials began transferring Uyghurs to work outside the region as part of an initiative that would later be dubbed "Xinjiang Aid." The program, which resembled a form of indentured servitude, was part of a "tech-labor" transfer program, exchange and Xinjiang "Four Chinese academic publications have described it in a way that recalls the "unfettered pollution" of Uyghur society in Xinjiang, where the state sees the "large number of unemployed." Zenz, the author of "Sinicization," and a researcher at Natalie Gerstein's Victims Fund, gives, gives, participated assess in information about the program, wrote a report on the program, which was published in 2020, according to the Uyghur Human Rights Project, and the Washington Post, and the Congressional-Executive Commission's Jade Millstone from the Uyghur Human Rights Project, and found that the program has been "Sinicization and assimilation of aspects of Uyghur life." Officials at Chinese Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and Wang Wanlin, a university, a scientific and that the department, of forced labor is "nothing but an enterprise for propaganda" for people against China." Between 2014 and 2017, according to the Uyghur Human Rights Project, publication towards ethnic and Uyghur people—Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz people—the Uyghur people—Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz people—ethnic groups

journalists having to prove the existence of forced labor tied to a certain product, the law mandates that suppliers and importers prove that they have no connection to Uyghur labor. The U.S. government, he notes, has already investigated the working conditions in a variety of other industries, including those for solar panels, auto parts, computer chips, palm oil, sugar, and tomatoes. To Stumberg, it's obvious what has to happen now. "Seafood should be next," he said. ♦

This story was produced in collaboration with the Outlaw Ocean Project, with contributions from Daniel Murphy, Joe Galvin, Maya Martin, Susan Ryan, Austin Brush, and Jake Conley.

MORE ON CHINA'S SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

For more about China's seafood industry, read "The Crimes Behind the Seafood You Eat," an immersive investigation into the human cost of China's maritime expansion.

Watch "Squid Fleet," a film that offers a close look at the gruelling work of squid fishing.

Ian Urbina is the director of the journalism nonprofit the Outlaw Ocean Project. While at the Times, he shared a Pulitzer Prize for breaking news.

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