

Secrecy, scores and punishments: life in the Xinjiang camps

The "China Cables", secret documents of the Communist Party that emerged thanks to the efforts of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, describe in detail life in the detention camps where 1.8 million Chinese Muslims are imprisoned. The emphasis on the education of the youngest, who must be isolated from the world and re-educated. The denied requests of the international community to be able to visit these areas that are "vocational institutes" for Beijing.



Beijing (AsiaNews) - Prevent leaks from the camps, maintain secrecy about what happens, create a scoring system for prisoners. These are just some of the guidelines that the Chinese government imposes on its officials employed in detention camps destined for Uyghurs, revealed by new secret documents just obtained thanks to the efforts of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), a group composed of 17 media partners in 14 countries.

From the official point of view, for Beijing these camps do not exist: They are "vocational institutes" created to "insert the members of the ethnic group into the world of work".

The Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnic group living in Xinjiang, have been demanding greater political and economic autonomy for decades, but Beijing accuses them of separatism and terrorism, justifying a harsh policy of military control. A BBC study has revealed that hundreds of children have been separated from their parents in an attempt to remove their ethnic-religious roots.

The document discovered by the ICIJ - included in a larger file called "China Cables" - was drafted in 2017 and signed by the then deputy secretary of the province's Communist Party, Zhu Hailun, also head of security. The text explains how - to combat terrorism - we need to improve "education and job placement" through "training camps".

According to some sources, the authorities have locked up around 1.8 million people in these camps, including Uyghurs and members of other minorities of Islamic religion, on charges of having an "overly religious" and "politically incorrect" worldview. According to Randall Schriver, head of the Asian Office of the US Department of Defense, the real number "is close to 3 million".

The text also explains to local authorities how to implement security measures that include instructions to "manage and control student activities more closely. This includes class behavior, nutrition, time spent in the bathroom, visits to family members ". Anyone leaving school "must have a carer".

The officials employed in the camps are forced instead to "evaluate and resolve the ideological problems of the students and the abnormal emotions". To do this, complete isolation of prisoners from the outside world and continuous monitoring is encouraged. The camps must also maintain a scoring system, to be linked to punishments and prizes. The awards include family visits.

The UN has repeatedly asked to visit Xinjiang to verify abuses against the Uyghurs. China is accused of having detained at least one million people, subjected to brainwashing to weaken their attachment to the Islamic faith, considered a "radicalization" against their will. Despite the testimony of many survivors, Beijing has always maintained that the camps are only "vocational training centers".

