

The Role of International NGOs in Uyghur Muslim Humanitarian Issues

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Abstract

The issue of oppression and brutality against Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region seems to have no end in sight. Various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have come forward to provide humanitarian aid activities for these affected groups. The campaigns, contributions, and commitments invigorated by the NGOs participating in this issue pose themselves as a challenge to the Chinese government. In light of this longstanding issue, the main goal of this study is to explore the role and form of assistance implemented by various NGO groups to help the Uyghur Muslims involved and to identify the differences in their approach to the issue. This study is based on a qualitative approach, which involves an in-depth analysis of documents and information regarding five international NGOs from Malaysia, Türkiye, the United States, and two Uyghur Muslims. The findings of this study demonstrate that the various forms of humanitarian aids and contributions—in the economic, educational, social, and health aspects—have been considerably successful. The success of their efforts can be observed in the forms of gradually increased awareness of the humanitarian issues faced by Uyghur Muslims among Malaysian, Turkish, and other Muslim communities around the globe.

Keywords:

Role, humanitarian, Uyghur Muslims, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Xinjiang.

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Introduction

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are very influential actors in today's internationally networked world. They engage themselves in programmes related to the developments of communities and aid works.¹ There has been an abundance of scholarly research conducted on NGOs and their international activities; however, there is still a need to examine NGOs as actors in the global arena with regard to the conditions under which they operate. Much of the existing literature argues that NGOs act according to the functionalist theory,² where the roles played by NGOs today have forced states or countries to be more attentive to issues of human rights. Indirectly, this scenario challenges the status quo of states as the primary protectors, or even the arbiter, of human rights.³

NGOs involvement can be said to be a response that is representative of the voice of the local communities in upholding human rights in various aspects—education, health, and humanity.⁴ In recent years, the issue of discrimination in China has reached a climax, whereby the victims of this oppression are the Uyghur—or more specifically, the Uyghur Muslims. Year by year, this unrest worsens, and signs of its resolution are yet to be seen.⁵ Recently, the Chinese government has intensified its oppressive grip on the Uyghur Muslim population, implementing increasingly draconian measures to monitor, restrict, and control their daily lives including their religious and cultural activities. This situation has rendered the Uyghur conflict strikingly reminiscent of the Rakhine conflict in Myanmar, which unfolded prior to the escalation of the Uyghur crisis. This article explores the roles of NGOs, that is, how the efforts made by the NGOs contribute to the betterment of the welfare of Uyghur Muslims, and the differences in the approaches of each NGO.

1. Atika Shafinaz Nazri and Nidzam Sulaiman, “Partisipasi NGO dalam Bantuan Kemanusiaan terhadap Pelarian di Malaysia dan Sumbangannya ke Arah Penyatupaduan Masyarakat,” *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies* 47, no. 3 (December 2020): 215.
2. Ann-Charlotte Buntinx and Francesca Colli, “Moral Policy Entrepreneurship: The Role of NGOs in the EU’s External Human Rights Policy towards China,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 3 (August 2021): 553.
3. Ismah Rustam and Arida Meilani, “The Strategy of World Uyghur Congress (WUC) to Strive for Human Rights for Uyghur People,” *Resolusi: Jurnal Sosial Politik* 4, no. 2 (November 2021): 56.
4. Meenal Sharma, “Role of International Organisations in Protecting the Uyghur Muslims,” *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities* 4, no. 3 (2021): 1726.
5. Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar and Sharifah Hayaati Syed Ismail, “Development of NGO Governance in Malaysia: Lessons from Indonesia and Jordan,” *Al-Qanadir: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2019): 71.

Background of Study

In the contemporary context of globalisation, the Uyghur Muslims find themselves entrenched in a grim dystopian reality as they navigate their daily existence. Predominantly, the Uyghur Muslim population identifies itself as Sunnī Muslims, similar to the Muslim communities in the neighbouring countries of Central Asia.⁶ Historically, the emergence of the Uyghur ethnic can be traced back to the third period of the Mu Continent.⁷ Culturally, the Uyghur Muslims, particularly those who reside within the Xinjiang region, are proficient in the Turkic language.⁸ Recognised as one of China's 56 officially acknowledged ethnic groups, an estimated 80% of the Uyghur population resides in the western region of Xinjiang, a territory central to their cultural and historical identity.⁹ Formally, the region is referred to as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

The designation “Xinjiang,” which means “new border” or “new territory,” was first used in record in 1884 during the Qing Dynasty; in the Chinese language, it denotes the inhabitants who were not originally native to that region.¹⁰ Its strategic geographical position along China's northwest border renders it the largest administrative region of the People's Republic of China (PRC) compared to other densely populated areas.¹¹ The geography of XUAR is characterised mainly by its vast landscapes of oasis, which are present not only at the urban level but also throughout its villages. This region is home to a diverse array of ethnic groups, with the Uyghur population being the earliest and most significant indigenous group in the region. Even the Uyghur Muslims, an ethnic group not only living in the Xinjiang region of China but also other parts of East and Central Asia,¹² have a long history and cultural heritage

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6. Michal Zelcer Lavid, “‘Green-Colored Uyghur Poet’: Religion, Nostalgia, and Identity in Contemporary Uyghur Poetry,” *Modern China* 48, no. 4 (2021): 847.
 7. Nur Izzati Hafieza Ismail and Rohaida Nordin, *Nasib Masyarakat Uyghur Xinjiang* (Bangi, Selangor Darul Ehsan: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2020), 28.
 8. Malika Abdulkakieva, “‘Uyghur’ or ‘Muslim’? Identity Development among Uyghur Diasporas: A Case Study of Kyrgyzstan and Turkey,” *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 19, no. 1 (December 2022): 10.
 9. Bozhen Zhang, “An Analysis of China's Muslim-Related Policies from the Perspectives of Ethnic Heterogeneity, Sinicization and ‘Anxiety Management,’” *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 7, no. 1 (2022): 46.
 10. Mei Ding, “Security Matters in Marriage: Uyghurs' Perceptions of Security in Xinjiang, China,” *Central Asian Survey* 37, no. 1 (February 2018): 89.
 11. Ross Holder, “On the Interrelatedness of Human Rights, Culture and Religion: Considering the Significance of Cultural Rights in Protecting the Religious Identity of China's Uyghur Minority,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 5 (February 2020): 773.
 12. Meenal Sharmai, “Role of International Organizations in Protecting the Uyghur Muslims,” *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities* 4, no. 3 (2021): 1724.

dating back centuries.¹³ They have identified as Muslims for generations and have managed to preserve their religious identity and way of life over time.¹⁴ For this reason, the Uyghurs assert that Xinjiang is the ancestral homeland of their people.¹⁵

After the Cultural Revolution in 1989, XUAR experienced a period of relative calm and stability. During this time, the Uyghur community were content with the advancements initiated by the Chinese government, which included the participation of Uyghurs in the management of the regional economy. This involvement allowed the people of Xinjiang to exercise their cultural, linguistic, and religious freedoms.¹⁶ However, the situation in the region began to deteriorate subsequent to the introduction of new government policies that contravened the previously assured religious freedoms under the Chinese Communist Party. Consequently, the resulting conflict and its enduring repercussions—marked by systemic oppression and egregious human rights violations against the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region—have elicited strong reactions and condemnation from various parties. Among the parties with the strongest reactions are the NGOs, whose operations do not revolve around the maximisation of profit but are focused on assisting individuals and groups in need across multiple domains, including but not limited to the alleviation of poverty, educational initiatives, political awareness, environmental activism, and humanitarian efforts. Particularly in the advocacy of human rights within the framework of international politics, NGOs have gained increasing recognition from world governments for their roles in shaping policies, employing strategies such as public advocacy, policy lobbying, petitions and protests, media engagements, grassroots mobilisation, workshops and trainings, investigative research, and many more, to support oppressed communities.

It is not surprising then that NGOs are regarded as vehicles for conveying the voices and aspirations of the grassroots populace to higher authorities, particularly given their recognition by the United Nations (UN) as essential platforms.¹⁷ Thus, the involvement of local and international NGOs in tackling the challenges faced by residents of developing regions, such as Xinjiang in China, is undeniably vital. This stems from the reality that media platforms are often unable—or at times deliberately unwilling—to raise awareness about the challenges facing the Uyghur people, with much of the available information

13. Brennan Davis, “Being Uighur . . . With ‘Chinese Characteristics’: Analyzing China’s Legal Crusade against Uighur Identity,” *Indian Law Review* (2019): 90.

14. Sarah Tynen, “‘Keep Withstanding’: Territory in the Body, Home, and Market in Xinjiang, China,” *Political Geography* 84, no. 12 (January 2021): 102310.

15. A. R. M. Imtiyaz, “Mapping Crisis and Mapping Solutions: Uighur National Question,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 32, no. 1 (December 2020): 56.

16. *Ibid.*, 57.

17. *Ibid.*, 55.

being subject to distortion and manipulation.¹⁸ As vital as they may be, due to the limitations of reach, amount, magnitude, and influence in the aids provided by NGOs, the hardships endured by the oppressed Uyghurs persistently remain. At the same time, however, these circumstances present an opportunity for NGOs to enhance their organisational capacities in delivering humanitarian assistance to the Uyghur population.

Literature Review

It is essential to acknowledge the importance of human rights and the protection of these rights for all individuals, regardless of their background, ethnicity, or religion.¹⁹ Human rights are intrinsic to every individual and should be protected from infringement, allowing every human being to live their life to the fullest without interference or discrimination.²⁰ Accordingly, the situation of the Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region of China represents a grave human rights concern that demands immediate attention and action from the international community.²¹ The Chinese government's detention of many Uyghurs in the so-called "re-education camps" has drawn global condemnation.²² Unfortunately, despite substantial evidence and scientific studies documenting the violence faced by the Uyghurs, political complexities often hinder the implementation of effective measures. Reports of human rights abuses—including mass arbitrary detentions, forced labour, religious and cultural restrictions, and extensive surveillance—are profoundly alarming and highlight the urgent need for international intervention.²³ Such actions blatantly violate the principles of human rights; hence, it is essential that the perpetrators be held accountable. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, established by the UN in 1948, serves as a cornerstone for the global promotion and protection of human rights.²⁴ It outlines the fundamental rights that every individual should enjoy without

18. Zunyou Zhou, "Chinese Strategy for De-Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 31, no. 6 (June 2019): 1187–1209.

19. Edo Afriandi and Adinda Permata Hati, "Telaah Kritis Organisasi Kerjasama Islam (OKI) Dan World Uyghur Congress (WUC) Terhadap Pelanggaran HAM Yang Terjadi Pada Etnis Uighur China," *Himmah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 6, no. 1 (July 2022): 520.

20. Berliana Pundilaras, "Analisis Peran PBB (Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa) dalam Menangani Isu Pelanggaran HAM Etnis Muslim Uighur Di Xinjiang Pada Tahun 2018–2022," Master's thesis, Yogyakarta: Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2022, 53.

21. *Ibid.*, 3.

22. Ondřej Klimeš, "Advancing 'Ethnic Unity' and 'De-Extremization': Ideational Governance in Xinjiang under 'New Circumstances' (2012–2017)," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 23, no. 3 (February 2018): 413–36.

23. Joanne Smith Finley, "Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-Terrorism Evolved into State Terror?" *Central Asian Survey* 38, no. 1 (March 2019): 1–26.

24. *Ibid.*, 18.

discrimination, including the rights of minorities. In this context, international NGOs and communities play a pivotal role in advocating the protection of Uyghur Muslims' rights.²⁵ Constructive dialogue with governments is essential to address these violations effectively and to develop solutions. Nations must uphold the principles of human rights to ensure that all citizens, including minority groups, are treated with dignity and respect.²⁶ The international community also has a vital role to play. Through diplomatic efforts, the imposition of sanctions where necessary, and the raising of global awareness, pressure can be exerted on governments to take meaningful steps towards addressing human rights abuses. These measures are crucial to ensuring the protection of Uyghur Muslims and their rights. Protecting human rights is not only a moral obligation but also the foundation for building a just and peaceful global society. This imperative calls for increased research and action to address the ongoing crisis. It also highlights the need to shed light on the positive contributions of the Uyghur community to China's development and to advocate the rights of Uyghur refugees. Unfortunately, the sensitive nature of the issue has resulted in limited academic research, posing a significant challenge to a full understanding and resolution of the problem.²⁷

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the roles of NGOs and the experiences and challenges faced by Uyghur Muslims. The researchers chose qualitative methods to allow for a thorough and nuanced investigation of the topic. As outlined by Creswell, qualitative data can be sourced from four key approaches: observation, interviews, document analysis, and audio-visual analysis. For the purposes of this study, the researchers employed two primary methods: interviews and document analysis. The interview process incorporated both semi-structured and unstructured formats, alongside group interviews conducted with several focus groups. These in-depth interviews facilitated interactive dialogues between the researcher and the participants, aiming to capture detailed insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of the interviewees.

25. Mettursun Beydulla, *Experiences of Uyghur Migration to Turkey and the United States: Issues of Religion, Law, Society, Residence, and Citizenship, Migration and Islamic Ethics*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 174; Ross Holder, "On the Interrelatedness of Human Rights, Culture and Religion: Considering the Significance of Cultural Rights in Protecting the Religious Identity of China's Uyghur Minority," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 25, no. 5 (February 2020): 771; and Wei Guo and Isabelle Attané, "Social Mobility of Uighur Population in Mainland China: A Comparative Perspective," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 39, no. 4 (December 2019): 522.

26. Ibid., 523.

27. Megan Mooney, B.A., "Our Collective Failure: Why the International Community Has Not Intervened to Protect China's Uighur Muslims," *Journal of Phi Beta Delta Honor Society for International Scholars* 11, no. 1 (2021).

In the context of this research, the interviews were conducted with representatives of NGOs, who involved themselves directly in this issue and therefore whose experiences provided valuable and diverse perspectives on the challenges faced by Uyghurs, the role of NGOs, and the response of the Chinese government to humanitarian efforts. The interviews were conducted in both Malay and English, a bilingual approach that likely enabled the researchers to engage with a broader range of participants and obtain a more nuanced understanding of the issues. To facilitate the interview process, the researchers utilised various communication platforms—such as WhatsApp, Zoom, and Facebook—depending on the comfort and preferences of the respondents. The incorporation of modern communication tools, including WhatsApp and email, likely accelerated the study's progress, enabling more efficient engagement between researchers and participants in a remote setting.

Data analysis began with a thorough evaluation of all successfully collected data sources, which were meticulously listened to, read, and transcribed. The data were then systematically organised and categorised to aid in the identification of recurring themes and patterns. For sensitive data requiring protection, careful identification was crucial in highlighting key issues deserving of further exploration. The presentation of data and subsequent conclusions were structured to ensure clarity upon the completion of the research. The analysis followed a three-stage process: descriptive statements, category construction, and theory construction. Continuous analysis was maintained throughout the data collection phase, allowing for ongoing refinement and insight.

Data analysis is undoubtedly a complex endeavour that demands creativity, diligence, a profound understanding of the data, and a high level of intellectual acumen from the researcher.²⁸ Accordingly, continuous data analysis was undertaken to process the data as it was collected. The three stages of analysis—descriptive statements, category construction, and theory construction—were framed within an inductive analytical approach. In conclusion, the data analysis process is critical for ensuring that all necessary data is analysed through either a deductive or inductive lens, depending on the research objectives. The inductive analysis of the data involves a comprehensive examination of the research context, ultimately leading to the development of explanations that form the conclusions in the final section of this article. The researcher's inductive approach commenced with broad observations, with specific findings emerging in the concluding stages of the study. To enhance the reliability of the qualitative research, triangulation was utilised. In this regard, the researcher compared multiple data sources, including observational data, interview data, and information from the literature review.

28. Othman Lebar, *Penyelidikan Kualitatif Pengenalan Kepada Teori Dan Metod*, 2nd edition (Tanjung Malim: UPSI Press, 2018), 285.

Results and Discussions

The results of this study provide a comprehensive insight into the role of NGOs in supporting the Uyghur community, with a particular emphasis on data derived from network analysis. The research involved ten participants representing diverse groups, including five international NGOs (they are the International Business Council (IBC), Save Uyghur, Malaysia4Uyghur (M4U), Muslim Volunteer Malaysia (MVM), and Global Peace Mission (GPM)), two Uyghur individuals, and three active volunteers. Selection criteria for the research participants included (1) their willingness to share information and (2) their expertise and knowledge pertinent to the subject matter. These participants are directly engaged in the processes and have had first-hand experiences addressing conflicts related to the Uyghurs. Among the five international NGOs involved in the study, three are based in Malaysia, one in Türkiye, and another one in the United States. Data were collected through interviews with key representatives from these organisations—the chairman of IBC, representatives from Save Uyghur and M4U, the Deputy Chairman of MVM, and the Chief of Human Resource Management at GPM. These interviews were expected to provide valuable insights into the support and activities undertaken by the NGOs to assist the Uyghur community. A complete list of all relevant respondents is presented in Table 1.

Figure 1 List of respondents.

Organisation / Individual	Label	Number of Representatives / Individuals	Position
IBC International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation	(IBC)	1	Partnerships Manager
Justice for All	(Save Uyghur)	1	Chairman
Malaysia4Uyghur	(M4U)	1	Chairman
Global Peace Mission Malaysia	(GPM)	1	Chief Human Resource Management
Muslim Volunteer Malaysia	(MVM)	1	Deputy Chairman
Respondent 1	The Uyghurs	1	-

Respondent 2	The Uyghurs	1	-
Respondent 3	-	1	M4U Volunteer
Respondent 4	-	1	MVM Volunteer
Respondent 5	-	1	GPM Volunteer
Total: 10 People			

Forms of Assistance Provided by NGOs

Humanitarian aid can only be effectively delivered through collaboration between nations and NGOs. NGOs serve as key stakeholders, playing a vital role in implementing initiatives to support the oppressed Uyghur people. Acting as intermediaries, they facilitate the distribution of information and humanitarian aid to the relevant parties.²⁹ The successful implementation of any policy or initiative depends on the support and involvement of all stakeholders, including the broader community. NGOs operate independently to address various humanitarian issues and have garnered substantial support from government agencies. Findings from interviews with respondents revealed a range of successfully implemented activities and assistance as well as their positive impacts on the overall landscape of volunteerism and the wellbeing of the Uyghurs.

An exemplary case is the Muslim Volunteer Organization of Malaysia, widely recognised as Muslim Volunteer Malaysia (MVM), which is among the most trusted NGOs in providing volunteer manpower and humanitarian relief both domestically and internationally. One of their notable initiatives, the “Educational Assistance and Livelihood Mission: Save Uyghur 1.0,” has made significant positive impacts on all stakeholders involved, including contributors, volunteers, and aid recipients. For the beneficiaries specifically, the programme has contributed to improvements in various aspects of their well-being, such as personal development, economic stability, health, education, and other intangible or immeasurable dimensions. This initiative was carried out in collaboration with Aksi Cepat Tanggap (ACT) to provide educational and livelihood assistance to Uyghur families who are refugees residing in Istanbul and Kayseri, Türkiye. The aid distributed included food packs for 100 Uyghur Muslim families. Additionally, the sponsorship efforts focused on

29. Atika Shafinaz Nazri, “Penglibatan Dan Sumbangan NGO Malaysia dalam Isu Kemanusiaan Palestin: Aman Palestin Berhad,” *Sains Insani* 7, no. 1 (May 2022): 11.

educational support, including funding for taḥfīz education for 280 students from Uyghur Muslim families and orphans, as well as educational sponsorships for 60 support teachers. MVM's pioneering efforts in promoting humanitarian values and raising awareness about the oppression of Uyghur Muslims have served as a catalyst for subsequent aid initiatives aimed at enhancing the welfare of the Uyghur community. Another notable initiative, the "Winter Aid Mission Campaign: Save Uyghur 3.0," focused on providing essential support to Uyghur Muslim families to help them endure the harsh winter months. This aid included food packs and essential supplies, such as kitchen supply kits, winter kits containing sweaters, socks, and shoes, as well as fuel or diesel for heating purposes. Additionally, general-use sponsorships were made available to address broader needs. MVM's efforts for the Uyghur community are primarily aimed at education and livelihood support, particularly in providing food and clothing—rights that are enshrined as inalienable in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.³⁰

The International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC), in collaboration with Penny Appeal and the Isa Yusuf Alptekin Foundation, has extended comprehensive support to Uyghurs residing in the Zeytinburnu, Küçükçekmece, and Bayrampaşa districts of Istanbul. This assistance covered dimensions such as health service projects, psychosocial support, and legal advocacy for their rights. All services are provided free of charge to Uyghurs facing challenges in accessing healthcare, social rights, and meeting their basic needs. These initiatives were founded by a group of altruistic entrepreneurs committed to enhancing the lives of vulnerable and distressed individuals, particularly those belonging to the most disadvantaged communities worldwide. Every January, IBC expanded its operations by launching an emergency relief project for Uyghurs in Türkiye, providing clothing and winter food supplies to those who fled China two years earlier and settled in the suburbs of Istanbul, Kayseri, Eskişehir, and Ankara. During the month of Ramadan, IBC distributed food packages to 1,000 Uyghur families in Zeytinburnu, Sefaköy, and Selimpaşa, prioritising families struggling to obtain basic necessities due to the lack of employment permits. These packages included flour, rice, pulses, pasta, lentils, oil, salt, tea, and sugar. In addition, IBC conducted education and advocacy campaigns to raise public awareness and inspire support for the Uyghur cause.

Another NGO, Justice for All (Save Uyghur), has also been actively involved in supporting Uyghurs through its "Save Uyghur Campaign." As part of their efforts, they have invited the public to sign a petition demanding the immediate halt of a Hilton hotel project being constructed on the site of a mosque destroyed by the Chinese Communist Party—a development widely regarded

30. Atika Shafinaz Nazri and Nidzam Sulaiman, "Partisipasi NGO dalam Bantuan Kemanusiaan terhadap Pelarian di Malaysia dan Sumbangannya ke Arah Penyatupaduan Masyarakat," *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies* 47, no. 3 (December 2020): 215.

as an affront to both the Muslim faith and the broader community. Justice for All also launched a campaign employing hashtags such as “#SaveUyghur” and “#BoycottMadeinChina” to discourage individuals from indirectly supporting the genocidal treatment of the Uyghur people through the purchase of clothing manufactured in China. Reports indicate that Uyghurs unjustly detained in “re-education” centres are coerced into forced labour, producing 80% of clothing made in China under conditions likened to slavery.³¹ A notable protest was organised to demand that W. Craig Jelinek, former CEO of Costco, issue a formal apology for allegedly leveraging Uyghur detainees in concentration camps to produce baby clothes sold by his company. Furthermore, a solidarity campaign was launched during Ramadan, encouraging individuals to fast rather than purchase products from China, in light of the restrictions and punitive measures imposed by the Chinese government on Muslims practising fasting. In addition, Justice for All initiated a petition and called for a boycott of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics as part of their advocacy for Uyghur rights and to draw global attention to the ongoing human rights violations.

The Malaysia4Uyghur (M4U) movement, an alliance of 24 NGOs encompassing both Muslim and Christian organisations, advocates the human rights and dignity of the Uyghur people through diverse initiatives, including advocacy campaigns, petitions, and acts of solidarity. Upon its inception, M4U submitted a memorandum of protest and a call to action to the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Kuala Lumpur, demanding an immediate end to the persecution of the Uyghur community and the recognition of their religious freedom and fundamental right to live. The memorandum urged China to release all individuals detained in the so-called “de-extremisation and transformation education camps” or similar facilities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), unless credible and admissible evidence exists to prove their involvement in internationally recognised offences. In addition to these efforts, M4U actively organises webinars to raise awareness of the Uyghur plight, addressing topics such as “Malaysia: NGOs of Different Faiths Condemn China for Uyghur Repression” and “Press Release: For Love and Defence of the Realm.” These initiatives aim to foster understanding and solidarity across faiths and communities while advocating justice and accountability. Another initiative aimed at educating Muslims in Malaysia about the Uyghur issue involved distributing stickers to vehicles, particularly e-hailing vehicles operating in the Ampang region, as part of a broader awareness campaign. In an innovative approach, naan bread, a traditional Uyghur dish, was incorporated into the campaign to draw attention to Uyghur culture and struggles. A dedicated webpage, titled “NaanTime,” was developed to further

31. Adrian Zenz, “Coercive Labor in the Cotton Harvest in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Uzbekistan,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 56, no. 2 (May 2023): 3.

this effort, providing detailed instructions on preparing naan bread in various intriguing and distinctive styles while also highlighting the culinary traditions of the Uyghur people. Additionally, during Ramadan, Malaysia4Uyghur distributed naan bread to traffic police in the Kuala Lumpur area, combining cultural appreciation with acts of goodwill to foster awareness and solidarity for the Uyghur cause.

Then there was GPM. Among the various forms of assistance provided by them was to support Uyghur refugees in Türkiye through the Uyghur Care Fund, whereby an estimated total of over 5,000 individuals received aid packages containing iftar meals, sacrificial meat, and winter necessities such as sweaters, blankets, shoes, socks, gloves, and hats. Additional forms of support were provided, including food aid and daily necessities, to help the Uyghur community maintain some semblance of normalcy in their lives as refugees in foreign countries. Through campaigns such as Winter Aid for the Needy 2022, Iftar for the Needy 2021, and Sacrificial Meat Distribution 2022, GPM has promoted various programmes and disseminated information to the community while gathering funds to assist the oppressed Uyghurs. The organisation is committed to consistently enhancing its effectiveness in humanitarian aid at the national and international levels. In conclusion, the various forms of assistance offered by the NGOs differ in direction and purpose based on their respective missions, visions, and available resources. Such aid serves as a crucial means for the community to meet their fundamental needs, improve their quality of life, and advocate their rights, thereby resisting oppression. The role of NGOs is vital in ensuring the well-being and safety of these populations.

The Different Approaches of the NGOs

NGOs have played a pivotal role in the distribution of humanitarian aid and facilitation of response to the myriad humanitarian issues faced by Uyghur Muslims.³² Naturally, due to the different natures of issues, NGOs vary in their identification and execution of strategies, particularly operational or advocacy approaches. Operational NGOs implement development projects targeting specific populations, such as the impoverished, disabled, elderly, and marginalised, and areas in urgent need of assistance.³³ NGOs typically require various resources, including financial support, equipment, and volunteers to carry out their projects and missions effectively. In contrast, NGOs engaged in

32. Özge Zihnioğlu and Müge Dalkıran, “From Social Capital to Social Cohesion: Syrian Refugees in Turkey and the Role of NGOs as Intermediaries,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 11 (March 2022): 2455.

33. Khadijah Amira Abdul Rashid and Mohd Mahyeddin Mohd Salleh, “Garis Panduan Pendekatan Syariah terhadap Pengurusan Komisen Dana Awam oleh Pertubuhan Bukan Kerajaan (NGOs),” *Journal Al-Abqari* 25, no. 1 (August 2020): 156.

advocacy work focus on influencing governmental or corporate policies that align with their mission statements. These advocacy organisations strive to assert positions that garner public favour at national and global levels. Contemporary advocacy NGOs are increasingly perceived as possessing substantial influence over the public discourse concerning universal welfare. According to J. C. Scott, advocacy NGOs are characterised by their efforts to “make public interest claims either promoting or resisting social change that, if implemented, would conflict with the social, cultural, political, or economic interests or values of other constituencies and groups.”³⁴

The definition provided encompasses both advocacy and operational dimensions. For this investigation, three global NGOs utilising an operational humanitarian aid framework were identified. This framework covers assistance across various sectors, including education, livelihood, and health. The NGOs examined are the IBC), GPM, and (MVM. MVM’s operational approaches specifically address the needs of the Uyghur community, focusing on educational support and subsistence aid, which comprises food packages, essential supplies, and winter clothing. The NGO is able to perform all these operational approaches effectively by virtue of its diverse membership, which includes individuals with experiences and expertise in education, economics, and social work, all of whom are actively engaged in humanitarian efforts. MVM has cultivated a robust network of partnerships with various other NGOs and governmental organisations, a factor that has contributed to the effective mobilisation of support for the Uyghur community. The diverse methods of aid collection have been proven successful, and fundraising efforts have been timely and efficient, mainly due to the involvement of numerous volunteers aligned with MVM’s overarching mission. Similarly, through its operational framework, GPM focuses solely on daily necessities such as food, distribution of sacrificial meat, winter clothing, and medical equipment. It boasts numerous active volunteer members who contribute ideas, energy, and financial support. To enhance public awareness regarding the challenges faced by individuals affected by war, poverty, natural disasters, and humanitarian conflicts, these active volunteers ensure that fundraising campaigns for the aid missions conducted by GPM consistently attract diverse contributors. Conversely, while the IBC adopts a similar operational model to those of GPM and MVM, which involve health services and assistance with basic needs, there are notable distinctions in the IBC’s strategies, which include legal aid for Uyghur Muslims and psychosocial support. The IBC is supported by two legal entities recognised in Türkiye, and its membership is comprised of idealistic influential businesspeople. Aid and funding are obtained in a direct and sustained manner.

34. Emanuela Girei, “Managerialisation, Accountability and Everyday Resistance in the NGO Sector: Whose Interests Matter?” *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* 29, (2023):2.

In the present study, two NGOs, M4U and Justice for All, have adopted an advocacy approach, implementing various campaigns, solidarity efforts, petitions, and debates to foster social awareness. M4U has embraced this advocacy strategy due to the benefits of a coalition comprising influential academics from both Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds. The voices raised through this coalition significantly impact public perception. Similarly, Justice for All has utilised the Save Uyghur campaign model. Previously employed in governmental roles, members of this organisation contribute to the formation of a knowledgeable and dedicated group of consultants responsible for organising the campaign. At the same time, there exist contrasts between the approaches of NGOs regarding long-term assistance as opposed to short-term emergency ones. In this study, international NGOs provide health care, food and clothing packages, and other forms of emergency aid. Long-term support is facilitated by implementing various initiatives to continuously benefit oppressed victims, such as education, vocational training, and career development. Their involvements in these diverse strategies represent a vigorous and comprehensive effort to raise awareness of human rights violations in Xinjiang and deliver essential contextual information.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis, it can be concluded that the conflict involving the Uyghurs is not a recent phenomenon. Since Xinjiang came under the control of the Chinese Communist Party, there has been a persistent conflict in the region. Currently, this conflict continues to evolve dynamically. In the absence of a lasting resolution, the intensity of the conflict fluctuates daily and expands, resulting in significant human rights violations and humanitarian crises. Numerous tragedies affecting Uyghur Muslims have included acts of homicide, rape, unlawful detention, and other human rights abuses. As awareness of the conflict and the humanitarian challenges faced by Uyghur Muslims increase, various international NGOs have mobilised their strengths to assist with diverse initiatives and forms of relief, including such organisations as MVM, Justice for All, GPM, IBC, and M4Uyghur.

Given the range of humanitarian actions implemented, encompassing both long-term and short-term emergency relief efforts, the researcher has discerned that the organisations in this study tend to prioritise operational activities over advocacy. The types of aid provided include necessities such as food packages, clothing, healthcare, formal education, psychosocial support, and legal rights services. The researcher posits that assistance focused solely on addressing immediate basic needs is inadequate. This is due to the necessity of identifying further needs and requests based on an analysis of the humanitarian conditions faced by the Uyghurs. Consequently, the researcher recommends

that NGOs expand the scope of their efforts to include provisions for temporary shelter and employment opportunities to support the daily livelihoods of Uyghur individuals. The operational frameworks established by MVM, Malaysia 4Uyghur, and other international NGOs, particularly those involved in this study, merit commendation for their emphasis on initiatives that enhance public awareness and understanding of the humanitarian issues confronting Uyghur Muslims, thereby facilitating ongoing efforts to promote humanitarian assistance for this community.

Although there are significant challenges that the Chinese government must address to sustain this humanitarian mission, such obstacles do not deter the NGOs involved from diligently executing well-planned humanitarian activities until they achieve success. To restore the fundamental human rights of the Uyghurs and to mitigate the conflict between them and the Chinese government in Xinjiang province, the researcher advocates increased activity among international NGOs engaged in Uyghur humanitarian issues in disseminating awareness regarding the cruelty and oppression experienced by the Uyghurs, irrespective of their religious affiliation. As articulated in the Qur'ān: "And you should help each other to do good deeds and be righteous, and you should not help each other to commit sin (disobedience) and aggression. And fear Allah because Allah is severe in His punishment (for those who break His command)."³⁵

35. *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* (5):2.

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