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International Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Humanitarian Aid for Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan

SITI MULIANI ABDUL GHANI*, ASYRAF AB RAHMAN & SYAHRIN SAID¹

ABSTRACT

Repressive and discriminatory oppression and tyranny against the lives of Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan caused various violations of human rights. Therefore, multiple non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came forward to provide this vulnerable group with various forms of humanitarian assistance. The main objective of this study is to identify the forms of assistance and the role that international NGOs have successfully implemented. Based on a qualitative approach involving in-depth interview methods with six international NGOs. These NGOs were chosen because they are active in Uyghur Muslim humanitarian missions and have extensive networks with various other NGOs. The study's findings show that various forms of humanitarian aid have been given to international NGOs selected in this study involving basic needs, education, support, consultation, and so on. The form of aid given shows that NGOs are always trying to help ease the burden faced by Uyghur Muslims. In addition, brings awareness to the community about the real humanitarian situation in East Turkestan. In the context of the international NGO arena, this study contributes from the point of view of improving ISO 9001: 2000 standards in providing a positive impact on the quality and credibility of the humanitarian aid sector, to refocus activities involving international humanitarian aid organizations on humanitarian needs to stimulate aid agencies to meet the quality needs of each recipient.

Keywords: East Turkestan, humanitarian aid, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Uyghur Muslims.

Uyghur Muslims are one of the ethnic minorities in China that have experienced humanitarian violence conflicts, such as discrimination, oppression, and persecution since the 1990s. According to Ismail and Anuar (2023), various assimilation policies introduced by the Chinese government, including the anti-extremism law in 2017, worsened this crisis and led to genocide (Roberts

¹ **Siti Muliani Abdul Ghani***, (*Corresponding Author*). M.A., Center for Basic and Advanced Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, MALAYSIA. Email: ctmuliani19@gmail.com [ORCID iD: 0009-0005-6163-9689].

-**Asyraf Ab Rahman** Ph. D., is a Professor at the Dept. of Government and Civilization Studies, Center for Basic and Advanced Education, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, MALAYSIA. Email: asyraf@umt.edu.my [ORCID iD: 0000-0003-3667-9265].

-**Syahrin Said** M.A., is a Lecturer at the Department of Government and Civilization Studies, Center for Basic and Advanced Education, University Malaysia Terengganu. 21030, Kuala Nerus, Terengganu, MALAYSIA. Email: syahrin@umt.edu.my [ORCID iD: 0000-0002-9489-3078].

2020). Humanitarian issues have had a profound impact on the lives of Uyghur Muslims, leading to the emergence of international NGOs to help Uyghur Muslims continue their lives. International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become some of the most influential players in the effort to provide humanitarian aid to affected Uyghur Muslims.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role at the global level, acting as a moral force that strives to improve the quality of human life holistically (Schmelter 2019), in line with establishing an NGO to implement a diverse vision, mission, and humanitarian activities. The involvement of international NGOs reflects a responsive action to represent the voice of the local community in fighting for the rights that should be obtained in the fields of education, health, and humanitarian aspects; it is not solely based on profit (Masdar & Shariff Abdul Kadir 2019). Therefore, NGOs not only influence the government at the domestic level but also involve the international level. Abdul Rahman and Muhamad Shah (2020) state that the cooperation of all parties, whether individuals, families, communities, the government, or other organizations, in shouldering responsibilities within society indirectly serves as a barrier to the emergence of various conflicts, especially involving human rights issues in the international political arena through the implementation of demonstrations and street campaigns to assist oppressed people.

This study uses a qualitative approach involving case studies, which aim to understand and search for humanitarian aid provided by international NGOs in more detail, as stated by several figures before. Each data set was successfully collected through semi-structured and unstructured interviews with six selected international NGO representatives. The analysis of documents from scientific journals, books, and official NGO websites is also used as additional secondary data. The overall data analysis method applied in this study is thematic analysis to report themes through the data that have been collected most understandably. Therefore, this study focuses on the involvement of six international NGOs that have actively helped through various forms of aid to Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan since their establishment.

History of International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Associated with Uyghur Muslims

Humanitarian issues involving violations of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as the riots that took place in the capital of East Turkestan. A major international Islamic body, the OIC took the first steps to present its charter principles in defense of oppression. Involving Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan (Ismail & Anuar, 2023). It started with the actions of the Secretary General of the OIC taking an efficient approach by having immediate contact with the Chinese government after the events that occurred on July 5, 2009, in East Turkestan. Dalillah (2021) states that the Chinese government has invited the Secretary General of the OIC to visit and personally examine the situation in East Turkestan.

Before getting the actual invitation date from the PRC, OIC country representatives held a meeting on July 22, 2009, at the OIC Headquarters in Jeddah, discussing issues related to the human rights of Muslims, especially Uyghur Muslims, as well as problems shared with Muslim communities outside the OIC (Dalillah 2021). In addition, the Secretary General of the OIC also established relations with Member States and experts of the United Nations (UN) on human rights to immediately help Uyghur Muslims, and the OIC tried its best to ensure the maintenance of good historical relations with China (Nations, 2022). Therefore, various international NGOs are moving to help Uyghur Muslims in various aspects based on the vision and mission their NGO wants to achieve. Among the international NGOs involved in this study are as follows:

Table 1: Profiles of International NGOs

Organization/Individual	Position	Date
Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM)	Secretary-General	23/6/2023
Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGO (ACCIN)	Chairman	3/7/2023
Global Peace Mission Malaysia (GPMM)	Exco Secretariat	17/8/2023
International Union of East Turkistan Organizations (IUETO)	Secretary-General	13/7/2023
World Uyghur Congress (WUC)	Fundraising and Distribution Coordinator	15/8/2023
Center for Uyghur Studies (CUS)	Program Manager	15/9/2023

Forms of Humanitarian Aid

The humanitarian crisis and growing persecution of Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan have led foreign nongovernmental organizations to extend their aid. Based on the findings of interviews with officials representing each international NGO body, the researcher has succeeded in identifying and identifying several forms of dominant humanitarian assistance:

Basic Requirements

Basic needs are essential and indispensable for human beings to continue living. For this reason, international NGOs are implementing various mechanisms to ensure that Uyghur Muslims receive appropriate assistance, especially involving operations. This is because there are still many Uyghurs Muslims who are refugees who cannot afford to buy or have food. International NGOs are responsible for distributing donations. The aid was mobilized through a fundraising campaign involving a certain period by the international NGOs involved.

Then, the donated funds are used to purchase food aid packs, winter kits such as sweaters, blankets, shoes, socks, gloves and hats, and iftar sets. Among the campaigns held are as follows:

Table 2: Fundraising Campaigns

Program	Name	Date	Place
Campaign	"Uyghur Care Fund"	End (1/4/2024)	Portal GPMM
	"Winter Aid for The Needy 2023"	End (1/4/2024)	Portal GPMM
	"Iftar For the Needy 2021"	End 15/5/2021	Portal GPMM
	"East Turkistan Brotherhood Iftar Program"	2/4/2023	Osmali Banquet Hall

Table 2 shows that GPMM was responsible for three relief campaigns, whereas IUETO was responsible for one. Additionally, GPMM pointed out the effectiveness of its aid, stating,

"It is estimated that 5000 Uyghur refugees in Turkey have been assisted in terms of iftar, qurban, and winter assistance. The aid is distributed to encourage the Uyghur people to continue to live their lives even as refugees to other countries."

Researchers observed through interviews with NGO representatives that they provided operational assistance to Uyghur Muslims within a short period. Operational assistance is also

poorly implemented by study informants, while it is also indispensable assistance for Uyghur Muslims. Therefore, it is not surprising that the basic needs provided by international NGOs are only able to focus on Uyghur Muslim refugees in third countries. Although there are still many Uyghurs Muslims facing conflict in East Turkestan, they also need the same help to survive.

The NGO should provide necessary support to all Uyghur Muslims, regardless of their location. It is consistent with the beliefs of Islam, which include supporting one another in all spheres, including providing food and alms. Supplying housing and other necessities, so long as they don't go against morality or religion and don't hurt anyone.

Education

International NGOs have also taken the initiative to assist in the field of education. This is to ensure that Uyghur refugees have access to proper education. One way that has been done is through the education system of schools in Turkey, which provides flexibility and offers Uyghur Muslims the opportunity to continue learning their language and culture. This approach helps identify the talents and abilities possessed by Uyghur Muslims and helps them develop those potentials to higher levels.

In addition, the Uyghur community in Malaysia is also supported in the context of university education but so far only involves a small group that is not very significant. This was done in the hope that Uyghur Muslims would have the spirit to rebuild a new life. There are also other efforts mobilized by international NGOs involving education as shown in the following table:

Based on Table 3, the contribution to the publication of books on Uyghur was made, which involved translation into various languages. This effort was made to help Uyghur Muslims get information quickly and easily for international NGOs to implement. Publications produced many marked the date, an important event in Uyghur history in response to China's genocidal policy. This is because China has been actively orchestrating efforts to influence public opinion in Arab countries, to ensure that voices against the genocide in East Turkestan are suppressed.

Table 3: Contribution of Educational Publications

Publishing	Name	Year of Publication	Place
Book	"East Turkistan and the Uyghurs"	30/9/2022	Portal CUS
	Get to know the Uyghurs and East Turkistan: A Brief History	10/2022	ABIM PRESS
Report	"Islamophobia in China and Attitudes of Muslim Countries"	29/4/2023	Portal CUS
	"The Uyghur Genocide"	26/4/2023	Portal WUC
Scientific Investigation	"Why Were the Uyghurs, Victims of Genocide, Left Alone?"	4/3/2024	Portal CUS
	"The Unspoken Tragedy: China's Brutal Separation of Uyghur Children and Families"	6/3/2024	
Youtube	"Uyghur Sot Kolligeyesi de Mutexessis Abdulhakim Idris"	20/5/2023	Portal CUS
	"The BRI & Sino Colonialism Global Implications & the Uyghur Genocide Book Release for Menace"	20/5/2023	

Thus, the bold efforts of international NGOs to help the Uyghur diaspora to raise awareness and oppose the genocide in East Turkestan, are sometimes misinterpreted as a mere Western ploy or an attempt to prevent China's resurgence. The researchers also succeeded in identifying that CUS informants contributed the most towards the educational assistance, through the dissemination of information about Uyghurs on social media and the publication of written materials to create awareness among the public. This is because CUS is building good relations with various Islamic NGOs, human rights organizations, academics, and Islamic leaders in Australia, Azerbaijan, Canada, Indonesia, Malaysia, Türkiye, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UK to raise awareness about the Uyghur Genocide and encourage support for the Uyghurs.

Negotiations

International NGOs also assist Uyghur Muslims through the implementation of several consultations via dialogue programs, seminars, and international forums involving cooperation networks with various other NGOs. These programs are arranged to make it easier for scholars to obtain information and plan the best strategies to help Uyghur Muslims. In addition, this initiative aims to spread humanitarian issues to society. This effort is clearly stated by WUC:

“They regularly meet with German politicians to brief them on the evolving situation in East Turkestan to ensure that Uyghur-related issues are raised in the Bundestag and other governmental bodies.”

Researchers can see that WUC has always been active in collaboration with other civil society groups, working collectively toward a common goal to support every human rights-related matter. Rustam and Meilani (2021) also stated that regarding the WUC to realize the enforcement of human rights for ethnic Uyghurs, emphasis is placed on two methods: non-violent methods in a moderate way and a lobbying approach to Western countries. Representatives of each international NGO also actively attended and provided perspectives on Uyghur issues at various conferences and events organized. The following details about the programs organized by international NGOs in the study are shown in the table:

Table 4: Dialogue Programmes, Seminars and Forums

Program	Name	Date	Place
Dialogue	Xinjiang: THE HOLOCAUST?	9/1/2019	International Da'wah Institute - PERKIM, Kuala Lumpur
	Dinner and Dialogue session with Mr. Hidayetullah Oğuzhan	4/9/2022	Furuma Hotel, Bukit Bintang.
Seminar	Capacity Building Training Seminar for Uyghur Youth Activists	25-27/3/2022	Bursa, Turkey
	International Conference, “Uyghur Rights: The Road Towards Accountability,”	12-14/11/2021	Prague
Forum	ABIM Global Forum - “The Plight of Uyghur Muslims: THE FACT, THE TRAGEDY, THE RESOLUTION”	7/1/2019	ABIM Development Hall, Kuala Lumpur

Based on Table 4, the implementation of these various programs has a positive impact that can strengthen cooperation between international NGOs and raise deeper awareness of the atrocities committed by China against Uyghur Muslims in the name of 'stability,' 'de-radicalization,' and 'counterterrorism.' For example, each NGO dialogue discussion will feature survivors of internment camps and share the reality of being a Uyghur Muslim. The effort aims to inform the public about the specific issues faced in East Turkestan and to raise awareness in the international community to play a role in ending the atrocities against ethnic Uyghur Muslims.

In conclusion, studying the history of the Uyghurs in East Turkestan is a responsibility. In line with Wang (2022), NGOs should take advantage of their power to guide, liberate minds, and tell the world that Uyghurs are a talented and capable ethnicity. More concrete efforts to support NGOs are needed to address this genocide, and this is the moral obligation of the global community. As various programs are carried out involving dialogues, seminars, and forums, many are mobilized by the WUC.

This is because the WUC actively meets and collaborates with stakeholder groups such as the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), and the United Nations to forge relationships with other civil societies collectively towards a common goal of supporting human rights-related matters. Yaacob and A. Rahman (2021) state that the Uyghur genocide has been recognized in many countries, including the US, UK, Canada, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania

Support and Advisory Services

The concerns raised by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that mobilize support and provide advisory services are recognized as a form of assistance to Uyghur Muslims who are refugees. The United Nations (UN) has instituted policies aimed at the protection and promotion of human rights globally, which include efforts to provide support to those in vulnerable situations (Pundilaras 2022). This is particularly pertinent for individuals who encounter difficulties while situated in a third country, where they face the risk of being repatriated to China. Thus, leveraging the advantages afforded to them, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are endeavoring to assist Uyghur refugees in their attempts to escape to safe countries, offering legal and advisory services to the Uyghur community.

This initiative arises from the fact that some Uyghurs have successfully fled China and entered other nations. However, upon arrival, they often face apprehension by immigration authorities or police, resulting in legal cases that necessitate court proceedings. While the efforts of Muslim Uyghurs to escape represent a quest for liberation from oppression and tyranny, they simultaneously seek an improved quality of life. During an interview, ABIM highlighted their involvement:

"I was contacted by the Government of Malaysia and the police for legal advice, utilizing my role as a lawyer for the Uyghurs. They informed me that certain individuals within the Uyghur community had fled China to reach Malaysia. Initially, they traversed through Thailand before eventually entering Malaysia.

Unfortunately, they were apprehended by law enforcement for lacking valid passports and identity documentation, leading to a police case that will be adjudicated in court." This account from ABIM underscores the challenge faced by Uyghur Muslim individuals in substantiating their identities due to the absence of valid documentation. While their lack of official documents reflects a defensive strategy to protect themselves as Uyghur Muslims, it simultaneously poses significant risks, including deportation back to China, where they might face severe penalties or even execution. Consequently, ABIM's reputation in Europe and the broader diaspora is largely attributable to its noteworthy contributions. However, a critical analysis of the barriers obstructing the involvement of international NGOs in addressing the humanitarian crises faced by Uyghur Muslims reveals that their suffering is multidimensional.

The researcher identifies ABIM as the most prominent international NGO providing comprehensive support to Uyghur Muslims, albeit primarily through advocacy rather than

operational engagement. Notably, operational methods are essential for delivering basic assistance to Uyghur Muslims in their daily lives. This limitation is partly due to the NGO's focus, which is not aligned with those engaged in humanitarian conflicts in Palestine, Syria, and Yemen. According to Che Soh & Tumin (2017), NGOs can be categorized into operational and advocacy or campaign-oriented organizations. Operational NGOs typically rely on the objectives outlined in their programs, which may address various issues, including environmental concerns, education, public welfare, or emergency relief, and require significant fundraising initiatives. Conversely, advocacy NGOs necessitate a cohort of proficient professionals to facilitate activities aimed at influencing public policy within a given country.

To achieve a balance in aid strategies that have thus far favored advocacy, international NGOs addressing the Uyghur Muslim plight should enhance their fundraising efforts to secure the necessary resources for any aid missions (Abdul Rashid & Mohd Salleh 2020). In pursuit of the objective of directly assisting Uyghur Muslims affected by conflict in East Turkestan, international Uyghur NGOs may benefit from adopting strategies employed by NGOs supporting Palestine, such as Aman Palestine. The establishment of Aman Palestine's branch office in Gaza in 2009 (Nazri & Sulaiman 2020) has facilitated the direct distribution of aid to victims embroiled in the oppressive conflict in Gaza, Palestine. Consequently, various strategies and initiatives of each international NGO will be progressively implemented in response to the evolving needs of the community.

NGOs' Aspirations for the Future of Uyghur Muslims

However, various efforts have been made by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on a humanitarian basis to assist Uyghur Muslims; nonetheless, these efforts remain insufficient to address the significant humanitarian crisis at hand. The ongoing humanitarian crisis exhibits no signs of resolution. Uyghur Muslims earnestly hope that all Muslim countries, human rights organizations, and other NGOs will unite to enhance their efforts in addressing human rights violations. This urgency arises from their identity as Muslims, which compels them to call for justice, as well as their inherent status as human beings who require equitable rights to thrive.

Consequently, the oppression of Uyghur Muslims must be halted and prevented. The future of Uyghur Muslims remains promising due to several factors, including the fragility of China's communist system, the increasing willingness among Muslim activists to advocate for the rights of Uyghur Muslims who have been adversely affected by the manipulation of mainstream media and social media algorithms, and the readiness of Uyghur youth in the diaspora to collaborate while simultaneously raising global awareness of the critical issues in East Turkestan. These factors indicate that, although the struggle of Uyghur Muslims requires time, it is a meaningful and enduring endeavor. This perspective is echoed by CUS, GPMM, ABIM, and IUETO, which assert that:

"Uyghur Muslims are facing an existential threat and are experiencing the darkest period in their history. Nevertheless, we believe that tyranny and oppression will end sooner or later because the future for East Turkistan is still bright if many Islamic fighters remain optimistic about helping rebuild their country."

NGOs are consistently perceived as exhibiting a positive attitude and are resolute in their commitment to raising awareness about issues in East Turkestan, particularly within the archipelago. Buntinx & Colli (2021) elaborated on the efforts of NGOs to integrate problems, policies, and political trends to elevate awareness of human rights violations and disseminate valuable information. Various initiatives have been successfully identified, including the continuation of collaboration with Western countries to hold China accountable for its atrocities. Furthermore, advocacy activities in East Turkestan are ongoing to elevate this issue to the prominence of other significant global concerns, such as the situations in Palestine and Kashmir. Among these initiatives is the establishment of the Uyghur-Malaysia Relations Organization

(UMRO), which focuses not only on advocacy but also on capacity-building for the Uyghur community, ultimately aiming to create a lasting impact at the international level.

Moreover, ACCIN's perspective on the future of Uyghur Muslims diverges slightly from that of other international NGOs, as it primarily emphasizes their right to autonomy as articulated in the Chinese Constitution. This viewpoint does not adequately address the need for liberation from the constraints imposed by the Chinese government, which could provoke decisive action from governmental authorities. Additionally, the role of mediating in policy-making on this issue is crucial, as each country possesses its own human rights commission or mechanism that actively supports marginalized populations, including Uyghur Muslims.

Actions such as condemnation, boycotting, and sanctioning the oppressors are anticipated as future efforts to safeguard the Uyghur Muslim community before it is too late. According to Oviedo (2022), the number of NGOs committed to aiding Uyghur Muslims in resisting oppression by the Chinese government is on the rise. This escalation is a response to the Chinese government's propensity to undertake measures solely for self-preservation while perpetuating atrocities against its population. The human rights mechanism represents a reliable and available tool to halt the ongoing genocide and address all related issues.

To conclude, the prolonged humanitarian suffering experienced by Uyghur Muslims in East Turkestan has attracted considerable global attention to their plight. Numerous international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have stepped forward to provide various forms of assistance aimed at alleviating this suffering, recognizing the vital role that NGOs play as mechanisms for grassroots community support. Consequently, NGOs are positioned to address the needs of groups frequently marginalized by government and private services, as well as to fulfill the aspirations of the community. International NGOs have delivered diverse forms of humanitarian aid through advocacy and operational initiatives designed to mitigate the burdens borne by Uyghur Muslims. Advocacy efforts encompass the dissemination of memoranda, demonstrations, support, and advisory services, along with consultations facilitated through dialogue, forums, and seminars. In contrast, operational assistance includes support for basic needs and educational opportunities. All assistance provided through these programs is executed by the objectives of each participating NGO.

The perspectives espoused by each NGO are markedly distinct. For instance, the Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGO (ACCIN), which focuses on aid to Muslim civil society, tends to prioritize dialogue and the promotion of understanding among Muslims, as well as efforts to attain autonomous power. This approach may emphasize issues uniquely pertinent to the Muslim community and strategies for enhancing their societal position. Conversely, the International Union of East Turkestan Organizations (IUETO) shares a focus with organizations such as the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM) and the Global Peace Mission Malaysia (GPMM) on fostering a platform for conservative organizations within the diaspora of Uyghur Muslims, concentrating on fundamental welfare issues. This indicates a preference for addressing concerns directly related to the needs and security of the Uyghur Muslim community, particularly those situated outside their homeland.

Similarly, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) and the Center for Uyghur Studies (CUS) exhibit differences in their strategies and objectives regarding the promotion of democracy, human rights, and freedom for Uyghur Muslims, which informs their respective visions for the political future of the community. Such variations are shaped by the strengths, resources, and frameworks available to each organization. While the approaches and focal points of each NGO diverge, they may nonetheless converge on the shared goals of justice, equality, and freedom in their advocacy for Uyghur Muslims. Each approach embodies significant values and objectives within its specific context. Therefore, collaboration among international NGOs, irrespective of whether they are Islamic or non-Islamic, is essential for achieving a more substantial impact in advocating for the rights and welfare of the Uyghur community. The researcher recommends that NGOs intensify their efforts to provide direct assistance to Uyghur Muslims currently residing in East Turkestan, as present aid primarily targets Uyghur refugees in third countries such as Turkey, Malaysia, Thailand, and others.

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