

# SANTASADŌ

## Ahmedjan Kasim - The Uyghur Dream

My fight against Chinese oppression

HISTORY



East Turkestan is the homeland of the Uyghur people, which is annexed by China in 1949, when China makes a deal with the Soviet Union. It becomes the most north-western and largest Chinese province, and the 'gateway to the West', once China uses force to annex an area larger than the country of Iran (independently, it would be the 16th largest country in the world).

It was called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, but its residents were assigned a 're-education program' twenty years ago, to adapt its people to the Chinese culture. Now there are over 1,200 re-education camps with a few million Uyghur prisoners, who are being tortured and brainwashed, and women that are being sterilized.

Ahmedjan Kasim (b. 1996) is fifteen years old when he follows his mother and flees to the Netherlands. In this

book, he reports on the hardships of his family. He chose to fight for the recognition of the rights of the Uyghur people and the realization of the Uyghur dream: the right for self-determination for thirteen million Uyghurs and liberating them from Chinese oppression.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Ahmedjan Kasim** is born in Urumchi in the Uyghur region in China. He flees the country at age fifteen to the Netherlands to be reunited with his mother. His father was taken into a concentration camp in China in 2017 and since then, Ahmedjan has lost all contact with his family over there. He studies Law at the University of Utrecht and is involved in local politics in his hometown. He has been committed to speak out against the Uyghur situation since 2020.

## PROLOGUE

Sunday 5 July, 2009, in Urumchi, the capital of Xinjiang, the land of the Uyghur. This would be or last normal summer holiday. The previous weeks had been worrying because a violent video had gone viral, showing Uyghurs from Shaoguan, a city near Guangdong, being beaten to death. There had been great anger and outrage within the Uyghur community, and people wanted to protest in a peaceful manner. Like usual, I was playing in the street with my best friend Azmat that day, while our mothers, who used to work, had already gone to town to get something to eat with their friends.

In the afternoon, we also went to get something to eat, until Azmat got a phone call that would change our lives forever. His niece called him and I can clearly remember how he answered and how his face faded as the call continued. He had answered happily, saying, 'Hi Acha,' followed by a string of 'okay', 'oh', and 'really?'. I saw his hands shaking, his face go pale, and the disconcert growing on his face. I asked what was going on when he hung up, and he said: 'My niece called and told me that from now on we cannot go outside anymore, keep the doors and windows closed, and don't make a sound.'

I could not believe it, but before he could finish his story, we heard BOOOOMMMMM, a loud explosion, and the clear-blue skies we used to get on summer days in Urumchi haven't been blue since. The Urumchi skies were suddenly dark and overcast, followed by the screaming of people, and even though we lived in a well-sheltered place, well-protected, the sound could be heard in the entire city. It was impossible to describe how Azmat and I felt at that time, especially knowing that our mothers were somewhere in the city then.

It grew darker and darker, and the shouting of the people kept growing louder. Azmat and I didn't know what hit us, we were boys of thirteen and fourteen and thought we would grow up in a perfect world. When our mothers returned a few hours later from the city, they knew what was going on and we could only cry. By 9 pm the internet, the telephone, and all electricity was shut down by the authorities. The lively streets of Urumchi were dark now, no sound could be heard, no Uyghurs singing together, nobody brought food to their neighbors, nothing but silence.

Azmat and I could not stand the tension or hold back our tears. Filled with fear for intruders and murderers we spent the night, with only a few candles to shine a light in the darkness.

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