

## China's treatment of Uighurs 'awful': Pompeo

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Children on Aug. 31 play outside the entrance to a school ringed with barbed wire, security cameras and barricades near a sign that reads "Please use the nation's common language" in Peyzawat in China's Xinjiang region.

**Photo: AP**

The US on Friday denounced China's treatment of its Uighur Muslims in unusually strong terms, adding to a growing list of disputes in increasingly turbulent relations between the two nations.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo voiced alarm after a UN report described the mass internment of Uighurs under the pretext of preventing extremism in the Xinjiang region, where the minority group is concentrated.

"Hundreds of thousands and possibly millions of Uighurs are held against their will in so-called re-education camps where they're forced to endure severe political indoctrination and other awful abuses," Pompeo said in a speech on the state of religious freedom around the world.

"Their religious beliefs are decimated," Pompeo added.

In a letter to Pompeo and US Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin, Republican and Democratic members of the US Congress late last month called for sanctions on Chinese officials implicated in the internment of Uighurs.

Pompeo did not say whether the US would take punitive measures.

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Even so, the remarks were striking for their tone, with US President Donald Trump's administration putting human rights on the back seat in relations with allies such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Pompeo also expressed concern about the fate of Christians in China, who he said had been targeted in a government crackdown.

The government has been "closing churches, burning Bibles and ordering followers to sign papers renouncing their faith," he said.

In an interview earlier in the week, Pompeo described China as a greater threat to the US than Russia, saying that Beijing was a "non-transparent government."

"It treats our intellectual property horribly, it treats its religious minorities horribly," he told Fox News.

China has rejected the findings of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Hua Chunying (华春莹) last month said that the report was "based on so-called information that is yet to be verified and has no factual basis."

China was doing what was needed to combat extremism and terrorism on its western frontier, Hua added.

The Uyghur Human Rights Project has estimated that 10 percent of the population has been detained as part of an indoctrination campaign.

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