# Holiday Inn owner criticised for expanding in Xinjiang amidst Uyghur genocide allegations



Calls for a reassessment of operations in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) have intensified, following revelations that InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), the parent company of Holiday Inn, is continuing to expand its presence in the region. Senior parliamentarians, including former Conservative leader Sir Iain Duncan Smith, have joined forces in a cross-party letter urging the hotel chain to reconsider its business within a context fraught with allegations of genocide against the Uyghur Muslim population.

The Xinjiang region has become a focal point of international concern due to systemic human rights abuses reported by multiple human rights organisations. Analysis by the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) highlights that IHG operates four hotels in Xinjiang and plans to open at least 16 more in the coming years. Such expansions occur in a backdrop of severe critiques of the Chinese government’s actions, which include mass surveillance, religious repression, and forced labour targeting Uyghur and other ethnic minorities.

Members of Parliament, from a variety of political backgrounds, have voiced their apprehensions about IHG's activities. In their letter, the signatories articulated that foreign companies may unwittingly entrench human rights violations in their business practices. They noted that to operate in Xinjiang poses intrinsic risks—not only to the companies’ reputations but also to their ethical standing, as they may appear to endorse state-led abuses.

Concerns over multinational corporations operating in regions with well-documented human rights violations are not unique to IHG. In July 2021, a U.S. congressional commission urged Hilton to withdraw from a hotel development project on the site of a razed mosque in Xinjiang, fearing it could be seen as tacit approval of the region's oppressive policies. Similarly, a 2021 United Nations working group found links between over 150 companies and reported human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including forced labour and human trafficking. This mounting pressure reflects a broader expectation that companies conduct thorough human rights due diligence to avert complicity in abuses.

Highlighting the disconnect between corporate interests and human rights concerns, Luke De Pulford, Executive Director of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, stated that only those indifferent to the human cost would seek to expand in such a context. He positioned consumer power as a crucial avenue for holding companies accountable, encouraging customers to "vote with their feet."

IHG has faced scrutiny not only in Xinjiang but also in other contentious regions such as Tibet. In an incident from 2014, civil society group Free Tibet accused IHG of failing to prevent complicity in human rights violations concerning a planned hotel in Lhasa—a charge that emphasized the difficulties faced by multinational corporations in ensuring ethical operational standards in geopolitically sensitive areas.

Amidst these criticisms, IHG appears committed to continuing its expansion in Xinjiang, recently highlighting a new InterContinental Hotel set to open in Ghulja City later this year. According to the UHRP, this trend of installing international hotels is not simply about business; it risks whitewashing the ongoing campaigns against Uyghur identity and culture, effectively boosting Beijing’s narratives while undermining the gravitas of the humanitarian crisis.

The company’s recent marketing strategies have also drawn fire. A promotional webpage—now removed—previously advertised its Xinjiang properties with overt appeals to tourists, portraying the region as an enticing travel destination. This messaging, juxtaposed with the realities of state-sponsored repression, underscores a disturbing narrative where hospitality chains might contribute to the normalisation of the region's political situation.

Dr. Henryk Szadziewski, co-author of the UHRP report, articulated the moral quandary, stating that the mere presence of international hotel chains in Xinjiang during a genocide is "morally indefensible" and challenges any industry assertion that it adheres to corporate social responsibility. He emphasised, “By portraying the region as a normal travel destination, international hotel chains risk enabling the ongoing persecution of the Uyghur people.”

As the international community continues to grapple with human rights issues in Xinjiang, the pressure on IHG and similar corporations to take a definitive stance on their ethical obligations grows. With public sentiment increasingly aligned with human rights advocacy, the path ahead for these hospitality giants will likely hinge on their ability to navigate this complex interplay of profit, responsibility, and ethics.

**Reference Map:**1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14695385/Holiday-Inn-owner-accused-profiting-Uyghur-genocide-expands-operations-controversial-Chinese-region.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)2. Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/china-intercontinental-fails-to-prevent-complicity-in-human-rights-violations-in-relation-to-its-planned-hotel-in-lhasa-tibet-says-civil-society-group/)3. Paragraph 5: [[3]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2021/07/30/us-congressional-commission-calls-hilton-cut-link-chinas-xinjiang/), [[5]](https://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/xinjiang-chairs-ask-hilton-end-hotel-project-on-site-of-destroyed)4. Paragraph 6: [[4]](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3127537/un-panel-warns-well-known-global-brands-may-be-linked-xinjiang-human)5. Paragraph 8: [[6]](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/ihg-hotels-resorts-statement/), [[7]](https://www.traveldailynews.asia/asia-pacific/tibet-protest-at-paris-hotel-caps-bad-week-for-intercontinental-hotels-group/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14695385/Holiday-Inn-owner-accused-profiting-Uyghur-genocide-expands-operations-controversial-Chinese-region.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/china-intercontinental-fails-to-prevent-complicity-in-human-rights-violations-in-relation-to-its-planned-hotel-in-lhasa-tibet-says-civil-society-group/> - In August 2014, the civil society group Free Tibet alleged that InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) failed to prevent complicity in human rights violations concerning its planned hotel in Lhasa, Tibet. The group criticized IHG for not meeting international corporate responsibility and human rights standards in relation to the project. IHG responded to the allegations, but the specifics of their response were not detailed in the available information. This incident highlights the challenges multinational corporations face in ensuring their operations do not contribute to human rights abuses in sensitive regions.
3. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2021/07/30/us-congressional-commission-calls-hilton-cut-link-chinas-xinjiang/> - In July 2021, a U.S. congressional commission called on Hilton Worldwide to withdraw from a hotel project in China's Xinjiang region. The project was located on the site of a mosque demolished by Chinese authorities in 2018. The commission expressed concerns that Hilton's involvement could be seen as endorsing China's actions in Xinjiang, where human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims have been reported. Hilton did not immediately respond to the request, raising questions about corporate responsibility in regions with documented human rights violations.
4. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3127537/un-panel-warns-well-known-global-brands-may-be-linked-xinjiang-human> - In March 2021, a United Nations working group reported that over 150 companies, including well-known global brands, might be linked to human rights abuses in China's Xinjiang region. The report highlighted concerns about Uyghur workers being subjected to arbitrary detention, human trafficking, forced labor, and enslavement. While the report did not name specific companies, it underscored the need for businesses to conduct thorough human rights due diligence to avoid complicity in such abuses.
5. <https://www.cecc.gov/media-center/press-releases/xinjiang-chairs-ask-hilton-end-hotel-project-on-site-of-destroyed> - In July 2021, the Chairs of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China urged Hilton Worldwide to halt construction of a hotel in Hotan, Xinjiang, on the site of a mosque destroyed in 2018. They expressed concerns that the project could be perceived as endorsing China's actions in the region, where human rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims have been reported. The Chairs called for Hilton to disassociate itself from the project to avoid complicity in these abuses.
6. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/ihg-hotels-resorts-statement/> - In June 2022, IHG Hotels & Resorts issued a statement addressing human rights due diligence amid the war in Ukraine. The company emphasized its commitment to respecting human rights in accordance with international standards and outlined its approach to human rights due diligence. The statement also referenced IHG's responses to the conflict in Ukraine, highlighting the company's ongoing efforts to support its teams affected by the situation.
7. <https://www.traveldailynews.asia/asia-pacific/tibet-protest-at-paris-hotel-caps-bad-week-for-intercontinental-hotels-group/> - In September 2014, protests by Free Tibet and Students for a Free Tibet occurred outside InterContinental hotels in London, New York, and Paris. Demonstrators criticized the company's planned hotel in Lhasa, Tibet, arguing that it would serve as a propaganda tool for the Chinese government amid reports of severe repression and human rights abuses in the region. The protests highlighted the challenges faced by multinational corporations operating in sensitive geopolitical contexts.