

GOVERNMENT

US imposes sanctions on Chinese officials over Xinjiang

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Image credit: U.S. Department of State

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

The United States is sanctioning Chinese government officials for their actions in repressing members of ethnic and religious minority groups inside China.

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In a statement on March 21, the U.S. Department of State announced it is imposing visa restrictions on Chinese officials, but did not specify which individuals would be impacted. Human rights groups as well as fashion and retail trade organizations have repeatedly condemned the alleged use of forced labor affecting ethnic minorities in China's Xinjiang province.

New sanctions

Concerns about forced labor of Uyghurs in Xinjiang have grown in recent years.

In 2020, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute issued a groundbreaking report that identified 27 factories in China using the predominately Muslim ethnic minority group under coerced conditions and named more than 80 global brands tied to them. China continues to deny the accusations ([see story](#)).

"Today's action imposes visa restrictions on [People's Republic of China] officials who are believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, policies or actions aimed at repressing religious and spiritual practitioners, members of ethnic minority groups, dissidents, human rights defenders, journalists, labor organizers, civil society organizers and peaceful protestors in China and beyond," said U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a [statement](#).

"The United States reaffirms its support for those who bravely speak out despite the threat of retaliation," he said. "We call on the PRC government to end its ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, repressive policies in Tibet, crackdown on fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong, and human rights violations and abuses, including violations of religious freedom, elsewhere in the country."

This is not the first measure the U.S. has taken against China in response to reports from Xinjiang.



The U.S. has already banned cotton imports from Xinjiang. Image credit: Kering

In January 2021, the Department of Homeland Security issued an order to deny imports of cotton products grown or produced by entities operating in Xinjiang.

The American Apparel and Footwear Association, National Retail Federation, Retail Industry Leaders Association and The United States Fashion Industry Association issued a joint statement expressing support for the order and a commitment to eradicating forced labor within supply chains ([see story](#)).

The latest round of sanctions comes days after President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping held a video call to discuss Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Chinese officials have expressed concerns about sanctions against Russia amid the war ([see story](#)).

Luxury brands have also gotten caught in the crossfire concerning Xinjiang.

Last March, the U.S., U.K., Canada and EU traded sanctions with China over the treatment of Uyghur individuals. As a result, Chinese actor Zhou Dongyu terminated her ambassador relationship with British fashion label Burberry as a result of the sanctions, as more consumers shared support for boycotts against Western brands on Chinese social media ([see story](#)).