

United States, Allies Sanction Chinese Officials for Human Rights Abuses

March 23, 2021

On March 22, 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced new sanctions on two officials from the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in connection with human rights abuses against ethnic minorities in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang). These actions were coordinated with the United Kingdom, European Union (EU), and Canada. Their joint statement can be found [here](#).

Specifically, OFAC designated as Specially Designated Nationals (SDNs) Wang Junzheng, the Secretary of the Party Committee of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, and Chen Mingguo, the Director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau.

The U.S. State Department released a concurrent statement on the designations, which expressly refers to the human rights abuses in Xinjiang as "genocide." The statement specifically reads as follows: "Amid growing international condemnation, the PRC continues to commit genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang. The United States reiterates its calls on the PRC to bring an end to the repression of Uyghurs, who are predominantly Muslim, and members of other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang, including by releasing all those arbitrarily held in internment camps and detention facilities."

OFAC's sanctions were issued pursuant to the 2017 Executive Order (EO) 13818, which implements the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act for persons involved in serious human rights abuses or corruption. As a result of the designations, all of Wang's and Chen's properties and interests in properties that are in the United States or in the possession or control of U.S. persons are blocked and

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must be reported to OFAC. U.S. persons also are generally prohibited from engaging in transactions with these individuals, as well as any entities 50% or more owned by one or more designated persons. Further, any foreign person who materially assists or otherwise provides goods, services, or support to any of these persons risks being sanctioned.

The United States' actions reflect the Biden Administration's commitment to work with allies to address the PRC government's mistreatment of ethnic and religious minorities and build upon prior U.S. government efforts to address these issues. The moves come as Secretary of State Antony Blinken is in Brussels this week to participate in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Foreign Ministerial. According to the State Department, Secretary Blinken will "emphasize the strength of the Transatlantic relationship, NATO's ongoing success in safeguarding the Transatlantic community, the Alliance's adaptation to new security challenges, and the Administration's desire to repair, revitalize, and raise the level of ambition in U.S.-EU relations."

The EU's forthcoming sanctions represent the first time that the EU has sanctioned PRC entities for human rights abuses since the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. China responded by immediately imposing sanctions on 10 EU politicians.

OFAC also made additional SDN designations for human rights violations in Burma following February's military coup. OFAC designated Than Hlaing, Burma's Chief of the Burma Police Force and Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Aung Soe, a Bureau of Special Operations commander, as well as the 33rd Light Infantry Division of the Burmese Army (33 LID) and the 77th Light Infantry Division of the Burmese Army (77 LID) pursuant to EO 14014, "Blocking Property With Respect to the Situation in Burma."

Wiley continues to closely monitor the U.S. government's efforts to address national security and trade policy issues related to the PRC and Burma. Should you have any questions on the new sanctions, please contact one of the attorneys listed on this alert.

Nicole Hager, a Law Clerk at Wiley Rein LLP, contributed to this alert.