



AFL-CIO

AMERICA'S UNIONS

**American Federation
of Labor and
Congress of Industrial
Organizations**

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March 12, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State
Lobby Harry S. Truman Building
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The AFL-CIO calls on the Administration and Congress to act urgently to block imports of solar products that contain polysilicon from China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

The AFL-CIO has long spoken out against China's systematic and well-documented violations of worker and human rights. Right now in the XUAR, the scale and scope of China's program to eliminate the Uyghur community's identity and way of life through government orchestrated suppression and repression of their rights fostered, in part through internment and forced labor requires immediate and concerted action. The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) policies and programs are unacceptable, violate the Uyghurs' human rights, and amount to genocide. Rebuilding a global economy that works for working people, requires that we eliminate forced labor and egregious worker rights violations from the global economic model. The CCP policies demand U.S. and global responses.

Unfortunately, global supply chains in various industrial sectors are deeply embedded in this troubled region. The region's outsized role in the global solar energy product supply chain and convincing evidence of systematic forced labor in the Uyghur region's solar production demands immediate focused action. As the U.S. seeks to address climate change, we must not allow the CCP to use forced labor to meet our nation's needs.

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Since 2019, the AFL-CIO and an international alliance of human rights, labor and investor organizations have focused our efforts to end these abuses in the cotton, textile and garment sector, since 20% of the world's cotton comes from the XUAR region. Due to the impossibility of executing due diligence in this region, our alliance has advocated for governments to block imports of these goods and called on garment and textile companies to end business relationships with companies compromised at any point in their supply chain by these systematic abuses.

On December 2, 2020, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) issued a Withhold Release Order (WRO) against cotton products made by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), a state-owned economic and paramilitary organization that has long played a dominant role in strategic industrial production in the XUAR. On January 13, 2021 CBP expanded its actions when it issued a WRO requiring that all cotton- and tomato-based imports made wholly or in part from inputs from the XUAR be blocked at US ports.

Along with global cotton supply chains, the global supply chain of the strategic, growing and high value solar panel supply industry is tainted by forced labor. Thirty-six percent of the global supply of polysilicon--the first input in the solar energy product supply chain--currently comes from the XUAR. Recent research has documented that polysilicon production in the XUAR participates in the same so-called "poverty alleviation" and pairing assistance" programs that China has used to implement forced labor in the cotton and tomato sectors.

Moreover, the largest Chinese solar companies have documented ties in polysilicon production to the XPCC, which has been named in not only the December 2020 Cotton WRO but also in the July 2020 US Treasury sanctions for serious rights abuses against ethnic minorities in the XUAR. These designations included Sun Jinlong, the former Commissar of the XPCC. Meanwhile, the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act as reintroduced in the House of Representatives on February 18, 2021 added the polysilicon sector to a list of priority industries needing enforcement. The CBP should follow up these actions in the solar industry and issue and enforce a WRO on the solar energy products that have inputs from the XUAR.

Along with its dominant position in polysilicon production, Chinese industrial policy has moved up the value chain in the solar product industry. China currently exports nearly two-thirds of the global supply of solar cells and panels. Adding products that use inputs from the XUAR and produced at plants in third countries such as Vietnam and Malaysia that are usually owned by Chinese firms that remain untouched by tariffs on unfairly-traded Chinese exports, increases China's share of the global solar industry to 80%.

As national, state and local governments in the United States--and our global allies like the EU--invest taxpayer money and act to increase the role of renewable energy in our energy systems, we must all ensure that the renewable energy jobs of the just transition we are fighting for are not based on inputs produced by slave labor.

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As the United States resumes its role in meeting the commitments and goals of the 2016 Paris Agreement, we must note that the CCP lead of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment charged with negotiating at the COP is the above-named XPCC director Sun Jinlong who oversaw the XPCC roles in cotton and solar production from 2016 to 2020 -- the very years in which the repression in the XUAR increased dramatically in violation of international labor and environmental standards and the goal of the COP. Both in the United States and in the European Union the solar energy industry has been decimated by a combination of core labor violations, subsidized dirty energy and low environmental standards and unfair practices by the Chinese government.

The Biden administration and Congress must act to block imports of solar products that contain polysilicon made with forced labor; these products must have no place in our efforts to fight climate change. Meanwhile, CBP should take immediate and focused action by issuing a WRO on polysilicon from the XUAR.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Trumka", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard L. Trumka
President

RLT/BF/jp
opeiu#2, afl-cio