

December 7, 2021

Mr. Brian Chesky
Chief Executive Officer
Airbnb, Inc.
888 Brannan Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear Mr. Chesky:

I write to express serious concern with Airbnb's shameful decision to feature rental properties on land owned by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), a Chinese state-owned paramilitary organization complicit in the ongoing genocide of Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious groups in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). By maintaining these listings, Airbnb is complicit in enriching an organization facilitating horrific human rights abuse and risks violating U.S. sanction law that prohibits such transactions from occurring.

On July 31, 2020, the Trump Administration imposed sanctions on the XPCC for their links to serious human rights abuses in the XUAR. As Treasury officials stated at the time, the XPCC enhances the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) control over the XUAR by assisting the CCP to realize its vision of "subordination to central planning and resource extraction." As a paramilitary entity, the XPCC has a martial internal organization helmed by First Political Commissar and XUAR Communist Party Secretary U.S.-sanctioned Chen Quanguo, who oversaw repressive security operations in Tibet before moving to the XUAR to lead efforts surveilling, detaining, and otherwise brutalizing Uyghurs and other groups there.

Today, the XPCC exercises administrative authority over several cities, towns, and farms in the XUAR, where it runs many of the notorious mass internment camps that serve as detention, torture, sterilization, and indoctrination facilities for Uyghurs and other ethnic groups. The XPCC controls a majority of the region's economy and facilitates the transfer of Uyghur forced labor to Chinese companies. The organization also owns significant property holdings across the XUAR, some parcels of which your company, Airbnb, is evidently comfortable featuring as available for rent. A recent Axios investigation revealed that, as of November 18, 2021, Airbnb's website has 14 listings on XPCC-owned land. An Airbnb spokesperson downplayed the extraordinary nature of such an arrangement and its dubious legality per U.S. sanctions law, noting that Airbnb "screen[s] all hosts and guests against global government watchlists." How a paramilitary organization complicit in heinous human rights abuses could pass such a screen is beyond comprehension. By continuing to allow these listings, Airbnb is implicitly endorsing and encouraging travel to Xinjiang, a region host to an ongoing genocide.

Further comments from Airbnb stated that while the small percentage of company revenue comes from China, Airbnb believes “China is an important part of our purpose to connect people from around the world.” This is immaterial to the greater concern at hand, which is about whether it is legal or ethical for a United States company to be doing business, directly or indirectly, with a foreign entity sanctioned for human rights abuses. Given Airbnb’s history of involving itself in debates putatively related to human rights in Israel’s West Bank, as well as its commitment to causes related to racial and ethnic justice in the United States, it is surprising that the company has decided that listing rental properties on XPCC land is acceptable.

In the same vein, Airbnb’s continued support of the 2022 Winter Olympic Games in Beijing remains alarming. In a hearing before the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC) on July 27, 2021, David Holyoke, Airbnb’s Head of Olympics and Paralympics Partnerships, stated in his testimony that Airbnb is “constantly working to improve, and we plan to build on our commitment to anti-discrimination and other important human rights issues by ensuring our policies and procedures continue to respect human rights.” Yet Uyghur, Tibetan, and Hong Kong advocacy groups have made clear that the 2022 Winter Games are at diametric odds with this sentiment, pointing out that they face severe restrictions to their freedom of movement in China that may preempt them from being able to view the Beijing Winter Games in the first place. Airbnb bills itself as “using technology to facilitate human connection,” but by supporting the Beijing 2022 Winter Games as part of its partnership with the International Olympic Committee, Airbnb risks doing just the opposite and legitimizing Beijing’s actions.

Airbnb should back up its prior statements with regard to its support for human rights and immediately delist rental properties in XPCC-owned land, publicly acknowledge the CCP’s ongoing genocide against Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious groups, and withdraw its support for the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing.

I appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Rubio", written in a cursive style.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator