Overview of Xiyue Wang Matter, a Princeton Student Unjustly Detained by Iran

Mr. Xiyue Wang is a Ph.D candidate at Princeton University, specializing in late 19th and early 20th century Eurasian history. Xiyue was unjustly detained by Iranian officials and has been imprisoned for almost two years since August 2016. He is being held in the notorious Evin prison in Tehran.

He is passionate about the study of governance practices across national boundaries in Central Asia. His doctoral work is an ambitious project, but one that grew out of his longstanding respect for Islam and his love for Persian culture. His studies require him to sift through mundane documentation of day-to-day governance of the Qajar dynasty from a century ago, to look for common threads and to understand how and when good governance practices emerged.

After being granted approval from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to study Farsi and conduct archival research for his Ph.D. dissertation, Xiyue visited Iran between January 25, 2016 and March 10, 2016, to study Farsi at the Dehkhoda Lexicon Institute & International Center for Persian Studies. After completing this language studies, Xiyue returned home to Princeton to visit his wife and child. On May 1, 2016, he traveled to Iran again for dissertation research and to continue his language studies.

Xiyue's work is scholarly, and the documents he needed to peruse are definitely not confidential or classified by any government. However, due to the age and historical significance of the documents, Xiyue need obtain permission to access the archives. He submitted his research plans in advance to all relevant Iranian authorities. To Xiyue's delight, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs approved his research plan and wrote him a letter of introduction.

On July 21, 2016, a day before his return to Princeton, Xiyue was approached by men who claimed to be members of Iran's Diplomatic Police. They confiscated his laptop and passport and forbade him from leaving Iran without further instructions. On August 7, 2016, Iranian authorities arrested Xiyue and kept him in solitary confinement in Evin Prison for 18 days.

On July 16, 2017, Iranian Judiciary Department reported that an Iranian court had sentenced Xiyue to ten years in prison for "infiltration," based on spurious allegations that Xiyue had "gathered secret and top secret [intelligence]" for the U.S. State Department, among other foreign government entities. A month or so later on August 17, Iranian authorities denied Xiyue's appeal, upholding his 10-year prison sentence.

On November 26, Iran hardline TV station IRIB2 released a video of Xiyue, depicting him as a "foreign agent" "infiltrating" Iran under the guise of a scholar. It further attempted to draw connections between Iran's opposition fronts and the Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies at Princeton University, which provided funding for Xiyue's research. In response to this video, Xiyue's family and Princeton University officials affirmed that he has no connection to any government or intelligence agency, and that he only traveled to Iran as a part of his own dissertation studies.

As of today, Xiyue is still being held at the notorious Evin Prison. He has been imprisoned for two years (including over one year at political ward 209 under the direct control by the Intelligence Department). During his wrongful detention he has experienced exceptionally difficult conditions and declining health. Xiyue went through two hunger strikes. He is under immense mental stress.

Xiyue Wang is an American citizen (not a dual national). His five-year-old son is a Chinese American dual national and his wife is Chinese. Mr. Wang is the only American detainee without Iranian descent. All other six detainees are Iranian American dual nationals. Mr. Wang was targeted solely on account of his US citizenship and the fact that he is a Princeton student. Moreover, he is trapped by the deteriorating relationship between the US and Iran, and a victim of Iran's hostage-taking policy.