Chinese leader Xi defends record to UN human rights chief

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Chinese leader Xi Jinping defended his country's record to the top U.N. human rights official on Wednesday, saying each nation should be allowed to find its own path.

Xi, who heads the ruling Communist Party that allows no political opposition and strictly limits speech, criticized countries that he said lecture others on human rights and politicize the issue.

“Through long-term and persistent hard work, [China](https://abcnews.go.com/alerts/Taiwan) has successfully embarked on a path of human rights development that conforms to the trend of the times and suits its own national conditions,” Xi told U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet in a video call, according to an online report by state broadcaster CCTV.

Bachelet is in the middle of a six-day visit to China that includes stops in Xinjiang, a remote northwestern region where the Chinese government has been accused of human rights violations and genocide against Uyghurs and other ethnic groups. Her trip has been criticized by the U.S. and others, who think that China will limit whom she can talk to, stage manage her trip and use it for propaganda purposes.

The CCTV report didn’t mention Xinjiang or the Communist Party’s often harsh treatment of dissidents and activists and ethnic groups in Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

Xi laid out the Communist Party’s long-held position on human rights, which argues that China should find its own path and not completely copy the models of other countries and rejects outside criticism as interference in its domestic affairs. It also says that bettering the lives of people is the most important human right for developing countries, and points to China’s success in lifting people out of poverty.

“On the issue of human rights, there is no perfect ‘utopia,’” he was quoted as saying. “We don’t need ‘masters’ that dictate to other countries, let alone politicizing and turning the human rights issue into a tool, practicing double standards and interference in the internal affairs of other countries under the pretext of human rights.”

Bachelet, the U.N. high commissioner for human rights, said it had been valuable to have direct talks with Xi and senior Chinese officials on human rights issues and concerns in China and globally, a tweet from her U.N. office said.

“For me, it is a priority to engage with the government of China directly, on human rights issues, domestic, regional and global," she said in her opening remarks at the meeting. “For development, peace and security to be sustainable – locally and across borders – human rights have to be at their core.”

China's Foreign Ministry and CCTV quoted Bachelet as telling Xi she admired China’s efforts and achievements on poverty and human rights, but her office said she didn’t say that.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price said Tuesday in Washington that the United States does not expect China to allow the access Bachelet would need to get an unmanipulated view of the human rights situation in Xinjiang.

“We think it was a mistake to agree to a visit under these circumstances where the high commissioner will not be granted the type of unhindered access, free and full access that would be required to do a complete assessment and to come back with a full picture of the atrocities, the crimes against humanity, and the genocide ongoing in Xinjiang,” he said.

Bachelet started her trip in Guangzhou, a city in southeastern China, where she met Foreign Minister Wang Yi and had a video conference with Du Hangwei, the vice minister of public security. Her itinerary also includes the cities of Kashgar and Urumqi, both in Xinjiang.

In a speech to students at the Institute for Human Rights at Guangzhou University, she noted that young people are influencing debate on issues such as equality, climate action and human rights and are holding governments and businesses accountable for their actions.

“A fundamental ingredient for youth to be able to play that role is an open civic space where they can voice their opinions and seek change,” she said, according to a U.N. text of her speech.