

Human Rights – Conversations Across Generations

Episode: Jewher Ilham

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MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:04

Hi, welcome to our podcast, Huma Rights, Conversations Across Generations. I'm Meredith Lockwood, founder of Lockwood Creative, a purpose-driven creative agency. And I'm here with my dad.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:16

And I'm Professor Bert Lockwood, the director of the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights at the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:27

Together, we are your father-daughter co-hosts.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:29

For over 50 years, I've had a front-row seat to the evolution of international human rights.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:35

And now, we're sharing that expertise with you by connecting to the powerful stories and insights of human rights voices from around the world.

BERT LOCKWOOD 0:43

We bridge the past and the present, making complex human rights issues more approachable and understandable.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 0:50

So, pull up a chair and join our table as we speak with Nobel Peace Prize recipients, political leaders and the world's leading human rights scholars and activists.

Hi, listeners. Today, my dad and I have a very special story that highlights the unbreakable bond between a father and daughter and the incredible strength it takes to fight for justice. Our guest is Jewher Ilham, a human rights activist and the daughter of the Ugar professor, Ilham Tohti, who was unjustly sentenced to life in prison for his peaceful advocacy by the Chinese Communist Party. conversation is a tribute to his legacy and we expose the ongoing Ugar human rights crisis around the world. Join us now as Jewher shares her personal journey as well as the powerful documentary, All Static and Noise.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:46

We had the honor of getting to meet you earlier this year at the University of Cincinnati, hosted at the Urban Morgan Institute of Human Rights. And you were able to do a screening of

the documentary, All Static and Noise. It is so wonderful to have you here today. Welcome, Jewher.

JEWHER ILHAM 2:04

Hi, Meredith. Thank you so much for having me. And hi, Professor Lockwood. So nice to see you both again.

BERT LOCKWOOD 2:11

it's, it's Bert. So.

JEWHER ILHAM 2:13

Okay.

BERT LOCKWOOD 2:15

Let me see you.

JEWHER ILHAM 2:15

It's going to be hard for me to call your first name in my language. It's like, uh,

BERT LOCKWOOD 2:20

whatever, whatever, whatever you're comfortable with. It's fine.

JEWHER ILHAM 2:22

It's, it's, my family's going to haunt me in my dreams. Like, did you call him?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 2:29

Well, in that case, you can call me Madame Lockwood. No, I'm just kidding. and on that note, for our listeners, um, we always like to just go over pronunciations to make sure that we are always uplifting different cultures and languages and communities. Would you have the honor of just going over pronunciations for us and our listeners?

JEWHER ILHAM 2:49

Of course. Uh, well, first, my name is Jewher Ilham. as many of you all know that the Chinese government has been, I would say culturally genociding our, people, our culture and our We're trying all kinds of ways to disconnect Uyghur people from our roots, our identity, and our language. And, and slowly, if we don't do something, Uyghur people will eventually vanish from the society. An so it's incredibly crucial and important for Uyghurs in the diaspora to try our best to maintain our, uh, you know, uh, our connection to our roots, our identity, and our language, and our culture. and I really appreciate, and I know many Uyghur people will appreciate, you know, uh, everyone else from outside of our Uyghur community to also help us preserving our culture and our language and our identity as well, because it is actively being erased right now in China and in our homeland. So one way that you could do by supporting us, uh, is to help pronouncing, our names and in our mother tongue. And basically the most accurate way of pronouncing it will be Uyghur. Uyghur.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 4:07

Uyghur.

JEWHER ILHAM 4:09

Uyghur.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 4:10

Uyghur.

JEWHER ILHAM 4:12

You're doing so good. Oh my goodness. It's so much better than the first time.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 4:16

A C plus, a C plus, but we're doing it.

JEWHER ILHAM 4:18

Good job! I know, like, lots of media, they would pronounce it as Uyghurs. It's technically not wrong, but it is the pronunciation in English, but it would be more meaningful if people can, you know, start pronouncing it in our mother tongue, like, the most accurate way, which is Uyghur, in Chinese, the Chinese government like to call us Uyghur, and that is not the way that we would like to be called, and, many people would like to call our homeland, uh, as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and that is also a way that we would not, not prefer to be called for our homeland, because Xinjiang is a Chinese term, which means new territory in Chinese. It literally means new territory, which is a colonial term, and it reminds us of how we're occupied and how this land has been, you controlled by the Chinese government. So, many Uyghurs in the diaspora, they have two ways of, three, two or three ways of calling it. Um, I usually call it the Uyghur region, which is, you know, the majority of the population, predominantly it's Uyghur population living in that land for hundreds, for probably thousands of years, and, um, many Uyghurs in the diaspora like to call it East Turkestan, which is the historic name of the when it was an independent state in the 1940s, and before the Chinese government occupied it, uh, and turned it into Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. So, you welcome to call it the way you would like to, um, but I just wanted to, you know, explain the background stories behind the pronunciation and different terminologies.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 6:02

Absolutely. We really appreciate that. And I think, you know, for listeners, I always like to get advice of just do your best, make the effort. It goes such a long way. And, you know, to start off the podcast, I just also wanted to make a quick note of how meaningful it is to have you here. The theme of this podcast is a father and Dotto duo talking about human rights and sharing stories of justice. Um, one of our goals is to have multi-generational conversations for not only our guests, but our community. um, in general, um, friends, and knowing that you are here to represent yourself and your father, I only wish he was here with us. And we're going to talk all about your dad. Um, and we're going to do our best to just make sure that your dad is

spotlighted throughout this conversation. Um, and you know, being a daughter of an academic and a professor, and I know your dad is an economist, a professor, and an academic, and having grown up among them, it just means so much personally as a daughter that you're here with us.

JEWHER ILHAM 7:05

honestly, in the beginning of our call, when, before we started recording, I honestly teared up a little bit because I was so jealous, you know, seeing you and your father on this call together. This is like my dream. Um, I don't need to be doing anything, you I don't even need to be doing anything extra, extraordinary with my Just the chance able to be on the same screen with my father again, it's like a dream. Um, it's a dream I haven't had the chance to experience for over past more than 12 years so far. And, it is heartwarming to see this, the world together. And I hope one day we can make it a four people conversation together. And, and I, I've been more than happy to share about what kind of person my father and um, work and his vision for our people.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 7:58

That would mean so can. and you know, with that, anything you need in the work you're doing so that we can make it a reality for you and your dad, my dad and myself to be together. We are here to fight alongside you and to raise our voices.

and one thing that would be really wonderful, is I would love to go back in time and talk about your early life and what it was like growing up with your dad and the formative years, as well as with your family. if you could paint a picture of your childhood, that would be a wonderful place for us to get started.

JEWHER ILHAM 8:36

Of course. Um, so I was born and raised in Beijing instead of my motherland in the Uyghur region. So the Uyghur region is very, very far away from Beijing. It's on the west side of China that's near the border of Pakistan, India and all the Central Asian countries. And my father moved to mainland China. Uh, he moved to, to Beijing Dongbei when he was 15 years old because he got into college that young. I know. I'm so jealous of him. he, since then he just started, you know, he graduated. He, he, he did his master's and he started teaching at the university. He did his master's in, and he met my mother in school, um, and 1994, I was Um, but growing up, uh, I didn't have too many Uyghurs in my life because there weren't many Uyghurs who had the opportunity and privilege to be able to, uh, schools in Beijing pretty discriminatory educational system there where it's incredibly difficult for any, not only Uyghurs for any ethnic, uh, minorities to be able to go to mainland, to go to a prestigious university like my father. You have to be like my father's intelligent level to be able to be even get into, um, okay university because, the, as I mentioned, the, the inequalities and discriminatory, uh, system, uh, educational system in China that prevents Uyghurs and other people from outside of those major cities to be able to even, you know, survive and in, in their career or in their future. so growing up, yes, not many Uyghurs were, were in my life. So I didn't really have a chance to have an environment of learning my identity. Um, um, my identity, my culture, what

does Uyghur mean? What does that mean? Besides I look not Chinese,uh , what does that even mean? Um, why do I not eat pork? Why do I not drink alcohol? Why do I listen to this language that is completely different from Chinese language? Why do we eat this type of food that is completely different from this, the lunch meals that my, my, my classmates been bringing that look completely alien to me and why? it's, nobody had explained to me my parents were also divorced when I was very little. So that also added to, you know, many things unexplained and, my father kind of raised me. Uh, he was acting both as a father and a mother who would braid my hair and wash my clothes. And, uh, although he had the most questionable fashion sense when it comes to girls clothing, but he would dress me up every day to school.

Yeah. I

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 11:31

If there's any photos, I'm requesting to see some of those photos

JEWHER ILHAM 11:36

I would have that actually when the Chinese government raided my family, they confiscated all the paper including, like, old photos. So

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 11:45

Oh my goodness,

JEWHER ILHAM 11:45

I have very little photos left besides a few that I have from my old Nokia phone from 2011.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 11:53

I have one.

JEWHER ILHAM 11:54

Yes. But yeah, it was very strange being an Uyghur who was born and who grew up in Beijing because everyone made sure, tried their best to make sure that, you know, you're different and that you are not like that. One of them. Everyone made sure of doing that. And, and always was very confused. Why were people treating me differently just before they even got to know me. And they, they would instantly treat me different because they knew how I looked different, that I was not one of them. And I was always confused. And whenever I got a chance to go back to my hometown to, to visit my grandmother during the summer vacations, everyone treated me differently again, because I was not fluent in my mother tongue. And I did not behave like a traditional Uyghur, but I did not dress like a traditional Uyghur. um, I did not blend in anywhere. And, so I always had, um, identity crisis growing And

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 12:50

Thank you.

JEWHER ILHAM 12:50

coming to the U. S. actually was the first time I felt like I found a place where I can belong, which was kind of odd that it is very, somewhere very far away from home and very far away from my family. And, coming to the U. S. also gave me the opportunity to study and learn my mother tongue as well. So I did not speak my mother tongue before, but I studied it at Indiana University. So for people who are interested in learning the language, you can take the class at Indiana There are a few other universities who offer the same

BERT LOCKWOOD 13:21

how did you happen to go to Indiana?

JEWHER ILHAM 13:23

I know, right? It's, uh, a lot of people ask me why Indiana out of all the places. So, in 2013, um, actually 2012, my father received an invitation by Indiana University as a visiting scholar because they have the best Central Eurasian Studies Department at Indiana University. And, um, they have the Tibetan studies, the Uyghur studies.

BERT LOCKWOOD 13:47

Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 13:47

An, um, and so my father was invited for a one to two professorship in the university. And so in 2000, so it would start in 2013. And he, my father asked me, did I want to come with him? I said, no, absolutely no. I never heard of this place. And I was a, you know, a silly teenager who knew nothing. And all I wanted to do was to attend this random ball that you get to dress up. And I always watched people attending balls and, um, proms in, in American films. And we didn't have that in China. It wasn't a thing. So when I knew that was something that I could attend, I was more excited about that than going to Indiana with my dad. so my father took maybe three or four months to convince me to go with him. One of the lines he used was like, you're not going to see your old man for a year or even two years. Aren't you going to miss him? Don't you want to spend at least a couple more weeks? The ball probably will come back another summer or in the winter. You can come. I just, and then guess what? If you come to America, you can brag it to your classmates. And that's, what's a selling point at that time, you know? And I was like, oh, think about?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 15:04

what do you Yeah.

JEWHER ILHAM 15:05

did agree to come with my father as a.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 15:10

know how to pull at our heartstrings. You know, I will say, I'll give that credit. And somehow, now that we're older and wiser, I think we can tell to our dads. My dad at this, around 15, we

moved back to England. We had moved, we had lived there in 1994. And then he went to teach at University of Essex in the Human Rights Department. And I was 15, my sister was 16, and we did not want to go. We didn't want to leave high school. We didn't want to leave our friends, our soccer teams. And, you know, we didn't really have a choice. But truly, that time away for about a year changed my life. So looking back, I'm so grateful

JEWHER ILHAM 15:45

Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 15:45

for it.

JEWHER ILHAM 15:45

Yes. You know, parents, especially when we're younger, parents always know what's actually worth the best, you know, for us. And we wouldn't understand back but yeah, I felt at that age, I felt like I did my father the biggest favor by agreeing to come with him to America. But it ended up becoming the best decision my father had ever made for me and our family.

2013, February 2nd, when we departed from Beijing International Airport, my father and I were trying to leave the country. I was the only person in my family that was able to make it on the plane. And I was the only, and still, after 12 years, I'm the only person who made it out of the country, my family. And the rest of my family are still back in China. And they're not even allowed to have passports. And I'm the only one.

Who's here and who, who, who has the freedom of expression and be even working on human rights, which is a thing that you don't even learn. You don't even have. So there's no classes in China, in universities that's called human rights. There's no, like, there's no major that's, that's dedicated to human rights. There might be like classes that you could audit that's, like, um, you will have visiting professors that would talk about, but there's not a single university that has major in human rights. because it's not a career that people can develop in. A majority of the people in China don't even understand what human rights mean because it's such an abstract idea. And it's not something that people can be granted very easily unless you're ultra from government family, government bureaucratic family.

BERT LOCKWOOD 17:31

So, Jewher, I'm, I'm curious, um, sort of almost involuntarily, involuntarily, uh, certain trigger remembrances and, and I'm curious, does that happen with you with respect to your father? I mean, unexpected places like you'll be something and something will, you know, remind you of, of, of.

JEWHER ILHAM 17:53

Oh, of course.

BERT LOCKWOOD 17:54

What, what kinds of things would that be?

JEWHER ILHAM 17:57

So, um, it's kind of like ironic, uh, I work in labor rights, so I deal with, in my day-to-day work, I deal a lot with CBP folks like Custom Border Protection people because of the confiscation of goods, etc. However, I am also most traumatized by Customs as well because when my father and I were tempted to leave the country in Beijing, we were stopped at the Customs. And that was the last moment I saw my father was at the Customs. And so, until now, whenever traveling anywhere, at the customs, I cannot feel relaxed. I cannot feel not anxious. There's not a single time that I will not bring back every single second that happened in 2013, on February 2nd, that day. There's not one time that I passed the border. I do not think of that moment. And there's not a single time I go to the airport without thinking about my father because airport, police cars, government buildings, Chinese embassies, all these are triggering for me, triggering locations for me I sweat intensively every time I pass these places or even hear about those places. And I can't help it. I hope that will stop when my father is free and we will visit those places together and start criticizing them together. But yeah. And also, even on a call like this, now seeing you two, this, you know, wonderful, beautiful duo together, it also brings back memory as well. I mean, I didn't, I never got on Zoom with my father. It was not a thing yet. Back home when I was still with my father in Beijing. But just, just that I could, you know, thi brings back memory of where I used to be able to call him. And we did use Skype. When I first came to the US, we were able to chat via Skype, and he would just in front of the desk for me to get online, for me to finish my English courses. And he would be online anytime when I message him. I always found it so odd because he tried to adjust his time zones to meet with mine. S he would not sleep all night. Like 12 hours difference. So

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 20:12

Wow.

JEWHER ILHAM 20:12

he could, you know, be able to communicate with me. And every day, you know, as I mentioned, he always had the questionable fashion choices for, for girls' clothing. And even at the age of 18, doing a remote, he would still like, what socks did you match with your dress? What hairpin are you going to use? the age of 18,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 20:32

At

JEWHER ILHAM 20:32

he would still give me his unnecessary advice.

and via Skype. that's, I was very close to my father. Very, very, very close. yeah, as I mentioned, he braided my hair in like a horrible way, but he would still do it. And he would dress me up in the most horrendous dinosaur tank, you know, helicopter shape, like, you know, those patterns. That's not, you know, not very common I can't

BERT LOCKWOOD 21:02

cool.

JEWHER ILHAM 21:02

believe for, you know, a shop for girls. He, he would get, got me all this.

BERT LOCKWOOD 21:06

Right.

JEWHER ILHAM 21:07

he would try to bring me everywhere. He jacket

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:11

had

JEWHER ILHAM 21:11

that's reek of the smell of pee.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:14

a

JEWHER ILHAM 21:15

that's for me.

U, he would,

he would bring me to work every single day

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:27

and

JEWHER ILHAM 21:27

and, and I would just pee in his leather jacket and, and, and, and yeah, it's, it's just, um, tha how close we were. Where everyone knew, like, even when I was in high school, in middle school, in high school, I went to boarding school. So I'd come home once a week, it was a common routine for us to go for a walk together after dinner and the entire campus knew it. There's that father daughter duo. They're here. again.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 21:56

Around

JEWHER ILHAM 21:57

My dad's arm, I would just like walk for like an hour and sometimes even two hours. Um, we'd go to the, what is it called in English? Where people run, like run around track. Yeah. walk around and then, um, and we never run. We were lazy and, but we would just walk, you know, a few, few rounds. And that was our routine. And all the students would, would recognize us and we look so much alike as well. So.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 22:23
you do.

JEWHER ILHAM 22:24
Yes.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 22:25
Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 22:25
I'm not with my dad. People would new, would, would already know that I'm his daughter because of basically like with, uh, Ilham Toki with a wig and.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 22:35
Yes. Yes. Yeah. I take, I take after my mom more on the Sicilian side. And I remember I went to watch one of my dad's, um, classes, uh, one of his human rights seminars. And, um, my dad like put his hand on my shoulder and handed me a piece of pizza. Cause remember at the screening, we always have Adriatico's pizza, shout out Cincinnati, uh, best pizza. but I kind of like saw a couple of students looking cause my dad had introduced me to his class. An they're probably like, who is that? And I was like, his daughter, daughter. And they're like, Oh, hi. Nice to see you. You know? Cause I'm like, I think one of our favorite things when we were kids. Um, going to my dad's university, is the faculty staff lounge has like notebooks and colorful post-its and pens. And we would think it was like a free for all. So we would get so excited when he'd take us to work. Cause we would like leave with like an armful of like some notebooks and pens. And we thought it was the coolest thing ever. So even as an adult, I'm like, Hey dad, can we stop at the faculty lounge? I need like another legal pad. Um, but now that we're on computer so much, I, I still do try to get my notebook. and staying on the theme of your dad's incredible work. Um, I would love for our listeners to really get a distinct understanding of two things, your dad's legacy for your people and your culture and why him teaching about the culture was such a threat that they had to detain him and arrest him. Um, and give him a life sentence.

JEWHER ILHAM 24:08
Um, so first of all, my dad for undergrad, he studied, uh, geology and geography and for his master's he did economics. so he combined what he studied when he was teaching, he, he was teaching about the, not only the You know, um, the, in historical context, like the development of the Uyghur society, why the Uyghur region was so full of resources, yet the people were so poor. So he was teaching about the history, both with economic context, but also political

context. And, and, and he tried to explain, um, those, which revealed the, in, you know, the very discriminatory, uh, policies that the Chinese government had been implementing in the region for like decades. And many people did not realize that, um, with, uh, the Chinese state-backed medias where, where people have, usually have the stereotypes of Uyghur people being uneducated. As I mentioned earlier, it was very difficult for Uyghur us to get into a prestigious college in, in mainland city. And people just assume that Uyghur people are lazy and dumb, and that's not hardworking at all. But that is not the truth at all. So in his teachings, he would tell people, oh, first of all, in, because of the lack of, uh, in the structure, uh, lack of educational support by the government, the most Uyghur people in the Uyghur region do not even get to learn, study A, B, C, D, E, F, G, li the alphabets until they're in high school. Yet they're expected to take the same college exam, exam for English. So how are you going to, you know, be able to get into college when you are expected to perform the same level, yet you're not provided with the same level of educational resources at the first place. a lot of people with their stereotype of Uyghur people don't have jobs. If they have jobs, oft they're restaurant owners and that they're working in like low income, low skills jobs, and they're not taking over, you know, even if they're educated, they're, they're oftentimes in a position of, you know, high, high level, high skilled, those jobs. Workplaces. And so my father explained as well even you know, well, first of all, Uyghur people, even they get into college or a good college, often times there are extremely discriminatory job policies and hiring policies in place where actively you will see on newspapers and, and job fairs that says you are not allowed to hire. Like we have, let's say 20 counts, 20 positions open, and only one position is open for ethnic minorities. And there 55 kinds of ethnic minority groups in China.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 26:51
55.

JEWHER ILHAM 26:53
groups in total. One of them is Han Chinese, so kinds of ethnic minorities. So imagine one position, but all ethnic minorities will have to compete for that one position.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 27:03
Wow .

JEWHER ILHAM 27:04
So it's extremely unfair. and even with that, when Uyghurs have to compare with other, have to compete with other ethnic minorities, we're even in more disadvantage because of language barrier as well. Because Uyghur language is completely different from Chinese language where, you know, i a completely different language system. It's a Turkic language. It's like 90% the same as Uzbek language. Many people actually don't know that. And it's about 60% the same as Turkish. And it's a, it's a very different language. It's not related to Mandarin Chinese in any ways at all. And so, it's harder for Uyghur people to learn Mandarin Chinese, you know, in a proficient level. even though they're expected to be fluent in it. and on top of that, they have to, you have to have like English language skills as well to be able to get a job, which Uyghur people oftentimes don't even get to study it until their high school. and, and

even they study, it's like, hi, how are you? I'm fine. Thank you. And you, you know, that's kind of very basic conversational terms. So, all of those requirements that sets back Uyghur people compared to other ethnic groups who are, uh, you predominantly they reside in Han Chinese dominant, uh, cities. And so that makes a major difference as well. And also because Uyghurs are very easy to be singled out, as I mentioned, I never felt I could fit in because people could immediately treat me differently just based on how I look. They would know, even though I sound just like them, I acted just

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 28:37
them.

JEWHER ILHAM 28:37
like

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 28:37
Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 28:38
Because I did not look Han Chinese. Urghur people did not look Han Chinese. We're ethnically Turks. We're not, we're not, you know, in us, like racially. So when people could easily identify us, they will be at the job force. It's not oftentimes a very, you peop will be put in a kind of disadvantage because they will immediately know, oh, this person is Urghur. I assume this person is uneducated. I assume this person cannot speak English. I assume this person's Chinese is not good. I assume this person is not hardworking. And I assume this person will need like, almost like a uh, so there's a hukou system, which is a residency paper system in China. It's kind of like a visa system. So, you know how here in the U. S uh, when employees, they always say, oh, you have to have a green card or. You have to have a U. S. residency to be able to hire you. So in, in, in, in Beijing, in major cities, it's the same thing. You have to have the local residencies to be able to get a job a lot of times. And for Uyghurs predominantly living in the Uyghur region, we will not have, uh, residency papers from those mainland cities. A it will be so much harder for, for Uyghur people to obtain a job. And in the Uyghur region, which is our homeland, it's still difficult. People think, oh, well, then why don't you find jobs in your own homeland? Well, even that. Well, if you look at, um, the Chinese government's own release, the population, data. In 1970s, the population of Han Chinese were about five to six percent in the Uyghur region. The Uyghur region and Uyghur's were over 75 percent. And now that that's close to 50 percent. Um, Uyghur people are about, uh, 40-something percent. Han Chinese are more than 40-something percent. the Uyghur people are not only have to compete with each other, but they have to compete with Han Chinese who have migrated into the Uyghur region. And job forces oftentimes would prioritize hiring Han Chinese workers. So that resulted in many, many, disputes among Han Chinese and Uyghur's because Han Chinese will be, would think, why aren't you guys grateful? The Chinese government would help you guys in so many ways and this and that, you have so many benefits. Why aren't you guys not happy? And Uyghur people are like, would feel like you take away our resources, you take away our jobs, you take away our land, you, you, you prevent us from practicing our culture and our

religion. And you still portray us as a villain on social media and on state-backed media. So then you see the conflict, ethnic conflict, conflicts between the two groups only rise up. So my father, my father, try, uh, in order to try to promote ethnic understanding between different, uh, between different groups were, that he created this website called Uyghur biz.com. Also, as you know, there are only four countries in the world that ban the use of, know, Facebook and, and, and Twitter, which is like Cuba, North Korea, Iran and, and, and, and China. So, and if social media platforms where, where people cannot freely, you know, post about things, discuss things, there's not a free space for people to freely engage with each other and communicate with each other. And that means people don't understand each other and especially the Uyghur region is so far away from mainland China. People never get to meet an Uyghur person in their life. So they will believe what the state-backed media says as, as the truth. So my father wanted to create a platform where people could freely exchange with each other and can have conversations and communicate with each other. My father always believed that the reason that you just, you know, you hate, you have hate between people is because you do not have understanding. You

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 32:22
do.

JEWHER ILHAM 32:23
And

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 32:23
Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 32:23
the other side, when you're afraid of other people, that's because you are not understanding what they're thinking and how, what they can do to you. So my father wanted to provide this platform where people could, you know, have dialogue. That was his key goal. Dialogue, dialogue, dialogue.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 32:40
Mhm.

JEWHER ILHAM 32:40
Sort of very threatening because that would be opposite of what the Chinese government want. And, and will create doubts when it comes to what the Chinese government, those messages, propaganda that's been putting out by the Chinese government and people will start, will be questioning the state-backed media the authorities of, what the Chinese government has been saying. And my father intentionally, bought the server of this website in the U. S. So it would not

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 33:10
get.

JEWHER ILHAM 33:11

Forcibly shut down by the Chinese government.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 33:13

So smart.

JEWHER ILHAM 33:15

They still did, after a few years, they still managed to shut down the website. um, we have the archived version now up on Google. So for people who are interested in seeing the articles and the discussions that were exchanged uh, you know, when my father was, uh, was managing the website, please feel free to go, uh, Google, you know, uyghurbiz. to, you know, see all very intriguing discussions and, and where Han Chinese and Uyghurs for the first time came. Had a mutual understanding that they were not each other's enemy.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 33:45

make, I'll add that for our listeners to our show notes. I'll make sure to link that so they can look at that. Um, you know, this reminded me of this wonderful documentary I saw back in 2009, 2010, um, called Tibet. Tibet in Song. Did you ever get to see that documentary? I'll forward it to you. Um, I was living in New York at the time and they have a wonderful Tibet center. And the premise of the documentary is. An exiled Tibetan and former Fulbright scholar. he returns to Tibet in 1995 to videotape traditional music and dance. He travels throughout his country recording music, um, secretly and to allow viewers around the world to understand the impact Chinese Chinese communist rule on everyday Tibetan culture and everyday life. Um, because Chinese authorities were, and still are trying to repurpose Tibetan traditional music, for their own agenda and their own propaganda. And that film and that story in hearing from Tibetans has always stayed with me. and I see a lot of parallels from your upbringing, your people in your culture and your father's work, to ensure it's not eradicated.

JEWHER ILHAM 35:01

Yeah, actually, uh, Uyghur and Tibetans really, we're not only share the border. We also share very similar fate. you know, both Tibetan children and Uyghur children have been suffering from fate of, u, uh, fate of being sent to state-owned orphanages where uh, they're forbidden from practicing their culture and their religion, speaking their mother tongue, where they have to only learn and speak Mandarin Chinese, where their parents have been sent to work in very low, you know, uh, income, way below minimum wage jobs. Uh, and, and, where our land has been exploited. Our people have been exploited. And, and also we have another common area, which is that both Tibet and the Uyghur region are so full of natural resources. So, for example, like the Uyghur regions accounts for, uh, the, the, the, the energy resources in the Uyghur region accounts for more than 20% of China's total energy, uh, reserves. And Tibet, I, I believe it, I, I'm not sure if I got the statistic correctly. I think it, it has more than 60% of the water energy and wind energy for China. And, and they produce, uh, so, um, so much of lithium um, aluminum, I do not remember the exact, uh, statistics. So I don't want, I don't want to give people the wrong information, but I do remember it's a significant amount. And

the Uyghur region produces, you know, co, gas, gold, uranium, solar panels, um, cotton, silk, wool, and, um, also like livestock, including like cows, lambs and much more. Uh, but oftentimes, as I mentioned, Uyghur people and Tibetan people are not the beneficiaries of uh, resources, uh, abundance of resources that we have in our land. And it's oftentimes the Chinese government and also offspring of Chinese military, uh, that migrated to the Uyghur region in the 1930s and 40s.

BERT LOCKWOOD 36:58

is there a counterpart, to the, uh, Dalai Lama for the, Uyghur region?

JEWHER ILHAM 37:03

No, uhm, because we, uh, Muslims are, uhm, you know, Uyghur people are Muslims and, we do not worship a, a, a, you know, like idolize a figure, uh, it's, uh, we worship God, uh, which is Allah. And we do take, uh, take on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad and different prophets, you know, their, teachings, we, we do follow those. Um, but no, we don't have like one specific figure that's religious figure that's significant like Dalai Lama. but we, we do have like leaders among us, you know, among the society, among the communities that's not related to religion, uh, but it's just simply like community leaders. Uh, and, um, my father was one of them that, that he, you know, inspired lots of youth, Uyghur youth

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 37:54

mm-hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 37:55

who really wanted the best, not only for their own future and, but also for their people. Um, many Uyghur youth wanted to be like my father who could ended up becoming in a university in Beijing and teaching and get a respectable job and not being seen as backwards, barbaric people. Many people wanted to know, how is that going to be achieved? And one, what, what do we have to do? What more do Uyghur people have to do be treated as normal than not secondary or even

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 38:25

be

JEWHER ILHAM 38:25

third, uh, level citizens and, and human beings in, in, in, in China. and, and there aren't, my father was not the only one we have. Uyghur people are very, you know, we're as diverse, just like in America. People in America, you know, we have, famous poets who write beautiful poetry. We uh, you know, delicious food. We have like cooks, chefs, that's, that would be, um, you know, invented the most unique Uyghur dishes. We have, uh, beautiful artists and dancers who would create the most unique, um, traditional, uh, dances, music, songs, and calligraphy. So yeah, we have leaders in different aspects of our society and our communities. And everyone is trying, especially in the diaspora now, everyone is trying their best to make our

culture and our society, our own little society thrive as much as we can. I live in Virginia and just in Fairfax, V, we have the Uyghur school, Uyghur center.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 39:22

Wow.

JEWHER ILHAM 39:23

Every Sunday, parents, Uyghur parents will gather. You'll see hundreds of them. And they leave their kids there and they study Uyghur language, Uyghur music, Uyghur poetry. They write Uyghur scripts. And, and, and you'll see all those Uyghur children, you know, cultivate relationship, friendship with each other. And they form the little, their own little community, their own little,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 39:44

oh,

JEWHER ILHAM 39:45

society themselves. And they try their best to speak Uyghur to each other. And it's a very beautiful, you know, uh, phenomenon. When I, when I look at it, my heart warms up because that's not what I experienced when I was in Beijing. I know it's not what I got to experience. I did not have a community center that allowed me to learn Quran, that taught me Uyghur poetry, Uyghur songs, to learn how to write my, my name in my mother tongue. I never got to experience that. um, and it really warms my heart, but also makes me feel so sad that we have to do this on the other side of our homeland that's far away. And that's away from our, you know, extended families. But now we were people in the diaspora. We are each other's families and we're a very closely bonded, um, community. Everybody knows everybody.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 40:38

Yeah.

JEWHER ILHAM 40:39

It's like we're each other's cousins and uncles and aunts.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 40:42

Yeah. I love that you guys call each other like sisters and brothers. and Um, and in the incredible documentary, All Static and Noise, all the brave community members that were sisters and brothers and cousins and friends, um, how brave they were to share their story. know, somewhere in other countries that had a little bit of a safety net to be able to be vulnerable and share and others took great risks to be part of that film. and for our listeners, we will have the link in our show notes. it is one of the most profound documentaries I've ever seen. It will stay with me for the rest of my life. Um, want to thank not only you yourself bringing that to the world stage, but also the director, David Novak, as well as the producer, Janice Englehart. I want to take a minute to talk about this incredible documentary. Could you share the origin story of how it came about?

JEWHER ILHAM 41:40

Uhm, so, in 2018, when Janice and David, came together, they wanted make a film about human rights violations in China. So it wasn't a film about the Uyghurs, uh, it was about all the violations and, and, and they wanted to talk about the Tianmen, they wanted to, the, the June 4th student protests, and they also, wanted to talk about the Hong Kong protests because when, when they wanted to make the film, one of our uh, people, uh, from our film crew were in Hong Kong. We have footages of, literally, in the middle of the protests at that time. And they also wanted, to include stories of the July 09th, where hundreds of human rights, Chinese human rights lawyers being all detained together. And so, they wanted to make a film about all the significant, you know, human rights violations together, including the Uyghur storyline father. but they did not decide on my father yet. So they wanted to come with, they wanted to know which Uyghur individual is happy to be, you know, public, uh, public testify on their storyline. in 2018, not many Uyghurs were doing advocacy work, uh, actively yet because they're worried about, that was a time when, um, you know, hundreds of thousands of Uyghur families started disappearing and people didn't know what was happening to them. And they were too afraid of speaking up at the moment before, bef they can figure out what's exactly happening. And so 2018, you'll see very minimum, maybe like their total of 10 of us, 10 of us in total. That's out there doing advocacy work among the community. And so when Janice and David were, trying to figure out who's willing and they wanted someone young and preferably women to, you know, be presenting the storyline and preferably someone who speaks English because it will make the editing so much easier. because, um, you know, our, our director and our producer didn't speak Uyghur language, uh, so when they ask around, people are saying, Hey, there's this Uyghur girl, her father, was incarcerated. It's one of the most prominent case out there. And she has been very public since 2014. So they reached out to me and I was still in school in Indiana and they asked me and I said, sure. Um, this will be just another project that I will be part of. And my contribution of the film was supposed to be very minimum. It will just be an interview of me talk about my father and I, that was supposed to be my contribution, but it completely turned and later my. Minimum of contribution became later became, I'm an associate producer of the documentary. So your associate translator, associ fundraiser, associate producer, associate protagonist and everything.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 44:27

S you're, you're multi hyphenated and multi talented.

JEWHER ILHAM 44:33

I wouldn't say I'm talented, but, uh, you know, like we had very limited resources though. And, uh, so it ended up becoming what it is now. Um, that, well, one reason was also because, lack of funding. So, back then, uh, when we were trying to do a fundraising, people did not want to invest in this film, if it had a higher, focus on the Uyghur storyline, people were more interested in Hong Kong. And, but then, um, There were already films about Hong Kong out there, so we didn't know if it was worth, creating another film about Hong Kong and minimize the contribution of the Uyghur storyline. And then in 2019, we learned, a massive amount of reports coming out and, you know, journalists started reporting about, the concentration

camps, expansion of the camps, and the disappearance of the families. And that time, Janice and David realized, no, we cannot be only maybe spending 5% off the film on this. If we lose funding, we lose funding. We will figure out the funding, some, some one way or another, and we should do a film about the Uyghurs. And they asked if I wanted to be more involved. And I said, Okay, sure. I'm graduating. So I have more time and that's when I decided to complete power for, for this film. And, I moved to DC in, in, in June, 2019. And that's immediately, I started jumping into, um, interviewing, camp survivors a people who, had previously been in prison and people whose parents, families who have been, incarcerated. and, and the more people we started interviewing, we realized, oh my God, this story is so much bigger than just Ilham Tohti. We need to include, you know, it just, things keep developing, things, th can keep developing. up until like 2022, we're still figuring out what are we going to do about the main theme of this film? because 2019 was about, uh, what was about Ilham Tohti, about this

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 46:38

uh,

JEWHER ILHAM 46:38

one story. And then it expanded about, the concentration camps. then now it's, it's what you see because every year the Chinese government come up with a unique, creative way to torture and,um , make my people suffer more.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 46:52

Mm-hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 46:53

it was very, um, difficult to have to give up on some footages, In order to, to be able to shed light on, um, you know, the bigger issue we had to give up on some of the storyline that we spend lots of time, Translating

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:08

know.

JEWHER ILHAM 47:09

and filming, uh, But it's worth it.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:11

yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 47:11

And we've, we've interviewed hundreds of people. looked, we've filmed in 37 locations in to eight different countries.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:19

T incredible.

JEWHER ILHAM 47:21

Because, you know, refugees are scattered. Uyghur refugees are scattered everywhere. they, they're just trying to find a place where they can survive. And so we got to find them and not everybody was comfortable with coming out and testify. we, we had to find people. So we traveled everywhere

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:36

Absolutely. And, you know, I was really happy to see in the news last week on MSN, um, you can pronounce his name for me. Because I don't think I'll do it justice is one of your fellow prominent activists. Abderham G-H-E-N-I.

JEWHER ILHAM 47:51

Reni.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 47:52

Heni. he got interviewed in the Netherlands in Amsport, because his father was captured and sent to a Chinese concentration camp September 16th, 2024. And he just had a huge protest on May 13th. So, I love that we're getting more media attention around the world, but it does remind me how spread out so many refugees are.

JEWHER ILHAM 48:16

Yes. Yes. I, I'm grateful for people who are willing to come out. But also, I like to remind people that there's so many more who could not get their stories told and who are not comfortable yet to tell their stories because parents, their, their, their, their sisters, their brothers are still held hostage against them by the Chinese government. If they dare to speak a word, they risk losing their family members. So, so many, many more still could not speak up yet. And those are, those we interviewed are only tip of the iceberg. It's crazy. it's,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 48:50

Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 48:51

the situation is so much more severe. Some of the footages that we Been able to, get and had some interviews we have gotten later. We did not have the right release them. We were not able to release them because, sometimes things got out of hand and people are not comfortable with sharing it. And, the many testimonies, people might not, might not even be able to handle it. So we. Able to include

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 49:18

Of course.

JEWHER ILHAM 49:19

and it was very important for us to make this film, not about trauma dumping. Um, we tried our best to not portray Uyghurs as the victims, but we wanted to portray us as resilient fighters who are trying our best to survive, but also rescue our loved ones, but also try our best to thrive in whatever environment that we're in. So if you look um, the, the, you know, uh, pieces of, of the film, you'll see people are always trying to, like in, in Norway, you uh, that they have the language center where they teach Uyghur children,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 49:52

uh,

JEWHER ILHAM 49:52

you know, the Uyghur language and about their identity. You see people speak at parliament. You see all kinds of things that Uyghur people trying their best to do to thrive and to survive. And, we, we had to make some decisions of letting go of some very important footages. Hopefully one day they will be surfaced, resurfaced, and, and we, hopefully some footages, we will regain the disclosure, right? So pe will be able to hear, hear their stories, those, the unfortunately buried, uh, temporarily. And those people's names deserve to be told. and, Uyghur people, I really hope people do not just refer us. Oh, it's just some poor little Muslims who are persecuted. and no, we are just like everyone else. We have our loved ones. We have career, we have, uh, you know, hobbies that we're passionate about. We a subject in school that we love. have, everyone has their loved ones from their, you know, love to their father, to, to their mother, to their aunt, their brothers. We all have someone that we care about just everyone who is listening to And we're not just some numbers on the papers, on the newspapers. We're not just some digits and some, you know, people from remote area that you will never get to meet in your life. In fact, it might caught you by surprise that in your own household, there might be a series of products that's been touched by the hands of the Uyghur people. because of the intensive and expensive and rampant forced labor practices, state-imposed forced labor practices in China, that, more than industries have been linked to Uyghur forced labor. More than 47 industries have tainted and complicit Uyghur force labor practices. up ending up in the global supply chains and in people's households. So we're not far away. We're right here. We'r right next to you. We're right in your home, in your closets, in your TV, everywhere. And in your classrooms, we're everywhere. And just like you. And we hope that you know, whoever's listening to this, could treat Uyghur people as equal human beings. And we're not a storyline in a film or in a book, in a fiction. We're real. We're very much real. And Uyghur, we are going to continue being resilient and we're continuing to fight and to thrive and survive to the best ability we can.

BERT LOCKWOOD 52:24

Historically, one of the many of the human rights things has, where there companies and corporations involved, has been to try to get shareholder resolutions that focus on the human rights problem. Has that part your efforts at all to try to influence corporations?

JEWHER ILHAM 52:48

So, um, I work for a labor rights organization called Worker Rights Consortium. What we do is we call on international corporations to urgently cease all their to know, from the Uyghur region at every level of their supply chains because of the intensive and expensive links of global supply chain to Uyghur forced labor. So we do, uh, encourage, uh, you know, international brands to not source from the Uyghur region, but also when, when they are factories in Vietnam, Bangladesh, in, in Mexico, in, in India that make sure that their raw materials are not sourced from the Uyghur region because very much of those raw materials could be picked, handpicked by Uyghur forced labor workers who are not getting paid and who are being tortured in forced labor camps. And in fact, like Chinese government has been very proud of its forced labor practices. They even issue white papers, um, the Chinese state council issue white papers proudly state that each year they put 1.29 million people in the Uyghur region into mandatory vocational trainings. So that's, if that statistic is even accurate, that means more than 10% of the population in the Uyghur region, uh, in, like of Uyghur people are going through mandatory vocational trainings. And from the leaked documents that came outside of the Chinese, uh, police stations, we've seen like thousands of pictures and headshots of Uyghurs. And the youngest detainees were like nine years old. The oldest was 76 or 73 years old. They would explain the reason why they were detained. It's either because they went to listen to a Quran studies in the masjid or they own a book, a copy of Quran in their homes, or they have studied abroad in Turkey over the summer, or, you know, the most random reasoning, or they wore a headscarf and refused to take it off. so those are, uh, common reasons for why the Chinese government could target someone. And the Chinese government is actually very proud of it. They also issued documents helping Chinese, uh, citizens to identify, there's a document saying 77 ways of identifying religious extremists. I'm one of the ways is to wear long clothing, wear hijab or grow a beard and it's very ironic and kind of, funny that in the advertisement or like the, uh, the, not commercials, but like, uh, sign boards that they would, uh, showcase, uh, what is considered religious extremism. They use Keanu Reeves picture had a

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:18

uh,

JEWHER ILHAM 55:18

long beard in that

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:18

Oh,

JEWHER ILHAM 55:18

picture. And they did a big X, red X in Keanu Reeves picture and saying that's considered like, yeah,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:28

What?

JEWHER ILHAM 55:29

yeah.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:29

What?

JEWHER ILHAM 55:29

So it's a very that, uh, I don't know if they intentionally chose. Because he

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:36

Yeah.

JEWHER ILHAM 55:37

looked Uyghur or? Sure.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:39

Yeah. Uh, and, and, and he himself is a humanitarian, so, you

JEWHER ILHAM 55:43

I, I,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:43

know.

JEWHER ILHAM 55:43

if I'm not mistaken, I think he spoke out on Tibetans before. I guess.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:49

Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 55:49

That's what. To be

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 55:52

Mm-hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 55:52

so childish and use his photo as an example, for that. yeah, uh, Chinese government, sometimes I feel like they're very sophisticated and sometimes at the same time they operate in a very childish way for sure.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 56:06

Well, on this, it's being sophisticated. one thing that continues to just stick out in my mind and I want to give our listeners a little insight into it. and we really hope that everyone will go

watch the film All Static and Noise, is the concentration camps. I have two questions. And I first wanted to ask, as we continue to make sure that we are providing our listeners as much educational overview on this crisis is. If people go on Google and start doing their own research, they'll see a lot of different articles about what's happening for forced labor. But there's many different names. They're calling these camps. Some are re-education camp. Some are detention centers. Some are internment camps. And then you have concentration camps. to make sure that we are best representing the culture and the crisis. What do you, in your activism, when you go speak at the United Nations, when you, talk to European Parliament, what do you use as the correct term?

JEWHER ILHAM 57:13

Um, I wouldn't say there's a correct term or not because all of these facilities exist at the So it's

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 57:19

same time.

JEWHER ILHAM 57:19

not

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 57:19

Mm-hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 57:20

that one replaced the other. So there are forced labor camps. There are concentration camps and there are re-education centers. Vocational training schools. All of them exist at the same time and they have different treatments. Some of them are very similar. So you could use all of them, but they are just describing different facilities.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 57:39

I see. The different facilities in the documentary. Um, and this, I believe was one of the concentration camps was the modern day technology. It was absolutely mind blowing that the different. Innocent persons that were imprisoned, they would sit on a floor. and they were forced to sit for hours and look straight ahead. And there's even rules of where their, if they're, if they're, if they sneezed or if they turn to the left or a slight turn to the right, you could see inside the monitoring room with all cameras that were, I mean, it must've been 30 cameras. And then the red lights would go off if somebody even blinked or turn a small direction. I mean, I had no idea the state of art technology that they're using in these camps.

JEWHER ILHAM 58:36

So, I, I know exactly which scene you were talking about were, oftentimes they use those, uh, technologies to detect whether someone is praying or not. So when, when Muslims are praying, in like, almost in the end of the prayer, we would look left and look right. And then basically it's like greeting the angels. And, and then, it's not allowed. Uh, you're not allowed to practice Islam at all. Not inside this facility, not outside of the facility. And, some people might

try to pray by moving their eyeballs and those technologies will be able to, uh, detect even if you're not moving your head at all, but just by looking sideways, it will be able to detect the movement. And also on the streets as well, they are able to use, um, uh, technologies detect your face shape. your bone structure. So even if you cover your face, it will be able to identify whether you're Uyghur or not because Uyghurs and Han Chinese have different, uh, bone structures and their facial, different distinct facial structures. So even if you have a completely covered face mask, they will be able to identify whether you're Tibetan or Uyghur or you're Mongolian or you're Uyghur, uh, you're Chinese. And, um, they use that on the streets to control people's flows. So Uyghur people are all assigned to go to pass through those kind of like airport TSA-like gates, uh, checkpoints. And you have to pass through um, and you have to deposit your phone to the police at the checkpoints. But Han Chinese will know. And it's only Uyghur. And when you're passing through those checkpoints, you will see a bunch of screen. It will immediately show up where were you the past, you know, two hours or like it will immediately show, uh, 20 screens of with like timelines of the, under the bridge, under the shop. It will immediately pop up. That's the, how intensive, uh, the, the technology they use to control people's moves. And it's not only inside those detention facilities, but even outside of the facilities and every Uyghurs, when you live in apartments, you have to scan your face to get inside your apartment building, for Uyghur people. And you not only have to scan, uh, ID to go in and good luck. If you forgot your ID that

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:00:50

Wow.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:00:50

day, forget about going home without a police escorting you. and they will also scan your face as well, your, your eyes as well. And, and, and it will be able to tell, you know, how much, you use, how much water you used, and it will be able to detect any of those information. How many people are there in your What's the coming out and the entrance flow of your household? You'll be able to detect every single of your move and including your phones as well. So when, as I mentioned, you're, uh, asked to deposit your phone, they will upload this, um, application called, uh, Jingwang Weishi, which is a, a, a surveillance tool that has access to every, it's like a bugging surveillance, tool that has access to every single information you have in your phone. And we'll be able to detect who you're talking to, what you're talking about, what photos you have, what pictures have you liked on social media, everything, everything. There's hiding spot at all. It's complete transparency for the, um, on the Chinese police. No privacy.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:01:50

this is truly out of the book 1984 written by George Orwell. He published that book in 1949 and it talks about the consequences of totalitarianism, mass surveillance. I mean, this, I hear you and I understand it, but being so far removed from it, it doesn't seem real. Like, it doesn't seem like people can, A, live that way, nor that a government could do this.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:02:18

Yeah. It's surprising. Even like people in China, Chinese people in China did not think it was real, did not think it would come to them. Guess what? Uh, the Chinese government tested on the Uyghur people first, and they started during COVID. How did you think the Chinese government was immediately able to

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:02:34

Right.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:02:34

expand all those facilities to contain all those patients that had COVID? people were surprised by the speed. That's because the Chinese government had years of practice of building concentration camps in short amount of time. And how were they able to detect people's flows with QR codes? And how were they able to track every people's moves and flows? That's because they were tested out in the Uyghur region first. And people were just, oh, wow. Impressive how they were able to do that. That's because they did it by practice for years and on people. And when they were able to get vaccines so fast, even though it might not

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:07

Mm

JEWHER ILHAM 1:03:07

work,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:07

hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:03:08

but they were able to invent all this medicine. They said, oh, well, did you test on people yet? Yes, of course, they tested out Uyghurs in the Uyghur region first. All the Uyghur people were, it was mandatory for them to take a dose of medicine, from the local police during the COVID time to test out those medicines. And,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:03:25

Mm hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:03:26

and, and, and those vaccines for the Chinese government. and then it was later implemented in the, uh, pas their medical test or later got started using in, in, in, in mainland China. So it is only a matter of time that it's going to other countries. Cause you know, during the COVID time, China offered to give, uh, vaccines to other countries as well. The Chinese government also, uh, set up police stations in other countries, even in Canada. So you will see that the Chinese government surveillance operations are not only limited to the Uyghur region, not only limited to mainland China, and not only to, Asian countries that's nearby, China at all.

Eventually, it will continue to let it happen. We never know. So one day, those surveillance cameras will end up in your home.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:04:15

Oh, absolutely. Our next part of the podcast, is called Thoughts and Reflections. I wanted to ask many, many listeners are going to be so moved by this podcast and I know that they're going to think, how can I help? Are there some concrete actions they can take to raise awareness as well as support your work, your fellow activist work? and also the work that you're doing at WRC.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:04:44

Yeah, um, oh my God, this is my favorite question. What can we do to help? Because I'm a very practical person, right?

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:04:49

Me too. I like a call to action.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:04:51

there's so many things.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:04:53

Yes. Give me a

JEWHER ILHAM 1:04:54

um,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:04:54

to-do list.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:04:55

yes, um, well, first of all, people can start by visiting our coalition's website. It's called Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labor. Just Google Coalition to End Uyghur Forced Labor. You'll be able to see, any question you will have on the Uyghur issue, it's probably going to be answered. We have a report page that has landed over like 20 or 30 reports from different universities, different experts and think tanks that offer you all the evidence that you will need to answer any of your questions on what companies, what brands have been linked to Uyghur Forced Labor,

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:05:27

Okay.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:05:27

what are some of the surveillance tools that's been used by the Chinese government, et cetera. Any related reports is landed on that page. We everything at one place. And also,

people are free to, if you're from a university and your university hasn't been affiliated with the worker rights consortium, a, I very much suggest people to do that. Um, you could ask the university, um, you could ask the university, have you been affiliated with worker rights consortium yet? Because what we do is we work with collegiate apparels. when people are, let's say university of Cincinnati, your goods, your sweaters in the school, sweaters, the cap, the socks, when it says university of Cincinnati, people oftentimes don't, don't think about the question. We work with a question of who made them under what condition, how much were they paid? Um, what are they doing so those are the questions that we help you ask and we help make sure that collegiate apparels that, and your tuitions are not going through, to benefit a genocide or a human rights violation or crimes against humanity. that's, that's basically our job to do that. So if your university hasn't been affiliated with the worker rights consortium, this is something that you could advocate for the school administration to do. And it is really not like, uh, it's, it's a very affordable option, to be honest, sure, make sure that the students can be at peace of mind that not, their universities are not involved in, sweatshop movements. And also, people can donate to Uyghur organizations, any Uyghur organization of your choice, because I assure you all of the Uyghur organizations are struggling. um, as I mentioned, like, until, up to, until very recently, many Uyghurs, uh, were only very few Uyghurs were in the advocacy field. And, and actually, until very recently, people weren't even able to have passports to, to leave the country. So in the diaspora, there's very limited groups of people who are Uyghur advocates. And therefore, a lot of those Uyghur organizations are grassroots and they're very young. And they will need the support as much as, you know, people can offer, whether it's through internship, helping with the translation, helping with, like, English, know, publishing statements. And, um, and helping connecting to, to different resources and by donations, you know, that's the most straightforward way and the

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:07:41

Mm

JEWHER ILHAM 1:07:42

quickest way for people to be involved. So, and just pick your favorite one there. All of them are doing tremendous work. Just, And you could also support my organization, which we dedicate to advocate for, workers' rights in 24 countries, inclu China and other countries in the world. So you could, you could do so much more. And on top of that, you could also, uh, whatever city you are living in, you could ask to bring our film into your communities. We could screen in, you know, local communities. We can do private screenings, public screenings, and university screenings, church screenings, message screenings, synagogue screenings. We are open to all, and we, our goal is to have this film be brought to every, know, potential viewers in the world in different corners of the world so more people can hear the stories of the Uyghurs. And so Uyghurs are no longer just, some names that you hear on the news, that people probably not even pronouncing it correctly. you will be able hear from every single individual.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:08:43

Yes. I'll make sure to include in our show notes, all of these links, all of these direct actions, websites, you name it. There also is an Amnesty International petition for your father to demand that he is released from prison. so I'll make sure that we can get more and more eyes and signatures on

JEWHER ILHAM 1:09:03

Thank you.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:09:04

to round out this incredibly moving and powerful conversation. What is your vision for the future for your people yourself as an

JEWHER ILHAM 1:09:18

My hope is very simple. I'm actually- I have very simple needs. I just want to be able to sit back home on my couch, not having to do advocacy work anymore in my life, again. That's my very simple wish, but a very difficult to accomplish wish, and I one day my father can be free, all innocent Uyghurs can be free. I'm also involved in other advocacy work as well, a very, um, complicated world that we are living in right now, and I hope not only the Uyghurs will be able to, live freely one day, all the other persecuted communities in the world can be able to live freely, have the respect and life a, like any other decent human being, and I hope for everyone, I hope all the parents and children can be able go on a call like this and

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:10:11

hmm.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:10:11

see each other freely. I do wish one day I can be on the same screen as my dad, but hopefully I will be sitting next to him on one screen, and you'll be looking at us

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:10:23

Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:10:23

together,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:10:24

Y.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:10:24

and I can eventually go back to art. I know I probably didn't mention this here, but I grew up. I was trained in Since I was four, started learning dancing, singing, painting, and so that's art is something I'm passionate about.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:10:40

Oh, my goodness. I did. I didn't know

JEWHER ILHAM 1:10:42

When I first came to the U. S., I didn't even speak English. Now I have to work in, like, human rights and politics. This is completely out of my interest zone, completely out, um, I'm still struggling with grammar and English, um,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:10:53

Oh, you're phenomenal.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:10:54

hopefully, I can one day be able to just bury myself in the studio without having to feel guilty about being the only survivor in my family. and I hope no, Uyghurs have to experience that guilt. Of us will be able to enjoy our passion and our courage to work in a career that we chose to be in, not forced labor.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:17

Absolutely. Absolutely. my dad and I, we are here alongside you. Any support we can give to make that vision a reality. we will continue to hold space that we can have another recording conversation, but this time your dad will be present with us.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:11:31

Hopefully, hopefully.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:11:32

I know your dad would very proud of you and all you've done. And our, our fervent hope is, um, that the two of you can be reunited.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:11:42

Thank you. I don't need him to be proud. I just need him to be free. He can scold, come, come to me and scold me and pick on me all he wants

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:50

And

JEWHER ILHAM 1:11:51

and

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:51

get

JEWHER ILHAM 1:11:51

say,

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:51
you new, get you a whole new wardrobe.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:11:53
yes, criticize me on this and that. He

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:55
Yes.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:11:56
can do all that.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:11:57
Yes, Yes, absolutely. but truly like the honor is ours. and if you ever want to come back, I'm deeply passionate about talking about workers rights around the world. know, ending fast fashion, providing factory workers, the rights and the dignity they deserve. So if you ever want to come back for conversation on that, you know, the doors always open.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:12:16
Happy to do that.

BERT LOCKWOOD 1:12:18
you. This has been wonderful.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:12:20
Thank you both very much.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:12:22
Yeah. Thank you so much. And for being so generous with your time.

JEWHER ILHAM 1:12:25
Of course, and I appreciate both of you for spending this time with me as well. And please stay in touch and I hope to see you both soon.

MEREDITH LOCKWOOD 1:12:37
Hey, listeners, we hope our conversation today with Jewher inspired you to fight for the rights and freedom of the Uyghur people as well as her father, Professor Ilham Tohti. we encourage you to watch the moving documentary, All Static and Noise. You can go to their website, www.allstaticandnoise.com, to learn more. My dad and I are deeply committed to the campaign to free Professor Ilham Tohti wrongful in China. In our show notes, I will add the link by Amnesty International to sign the petition for his immediate release. We thank you so much for joining this powerful and moving conversation. If there's any topics you'd like to hear from us, p reach out. Our email is humanrightsconversations@gmail.com. You can also visit my website,

meredithlockwood.com, to learn more about the podcast. We're excited to see you back next time.