

**China official vows 'iron fist' crackdown in Xinjiang**  
**By BBC News**  
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A top Chinese official has pledged a crackdown on "separatist forces" in Xinjiang, three years after ethnic violence there, state-run media report.

Zhang Chunxian vowed to use "iron fists" on separatists in the region, Xinhua news agency says.

The warning comes on the anniversary of deadly ethnic riots that saw almost 200 people killed in 2009.

Rights group Amnesty International has accused China of intimidating the ethnic Uighur minority.

Xinjiang province is the country's most westerly region and borders former Soviet states.

China witnessed its worst ethnic violence in decades when riots erupted between the majority Han Chinese and the minority Uighurs in the capital city of Urumqi, says the BBC's Martin Patience.

'Iron fists'

Mr Zhang, who is Communist Party secretary of the Xinjiang committee, urged soldiers to remain vigilant against hostile forces and strike separatists, terrorists and extremists with "iron fists", Xinhua says.

"We should leave terrorists no place to hide," he said, adding that the region was stable but faced "severe challenges".

London-based rights group Amnesty International (AI) issued a statement saying that Chinese authorities "continue to silence those speaking out on abuses" in the region.

"The general trend toward repression that we see all over China is particularly pronounced in Xinjiang," Catherine Baber, AI Asia-Pacific director, said in a statement.

She urged the Chinese government to reveal the whereabouts of those who have disappeared and end the persecution of family members seeking answers.

On Monday, there were reports that two Uighur men who allegedly tried to hijack a plane in Xinjiang had died.

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