



Chinese official: claims of racial targeting are 'reasonable concerns'

Guangzhou authorities accused of discriminating against black people with Covid-19 measures

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Helen Davidson

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A senior Chinese official has acknowledged accusations of authorities discriminating against black people in the city of Guangzhou as “reasonable concerns”.

Amid an increased focus on people with coronavirus arriving in mainland China from abroad, health authorities in Guangzhou have been accused of racially targeting Africans, including with forced evictions, repeated testing for Covid-19 without providing the result, and refusing service or business.

The south-eastern city is known for its African community but also has a troubled history of discrimination, and the wave of allegations - accompanied by videos and photographs on social media - have drawn strong rebuke from the international community.

Tony Mathias, an exchange student from Uganda, told Agence France-Presse he was forced from his apartment.

“I’ve been sleeping under the bridge for four days with no food to eat ... I cannot buy food anywhere, no shops or restaurants will serve me,” he said.

Thiam, an exchange student from Guinea, said: “All the people I’ve seen tested are Africans. Chinese are walking around freely but if you’re black you can’t go out.”

On Saturday a group of African ambassadors in Beijing wrote to the state councillor, Wang Yi, the Chinese government’s top diplomat, “immediately demand[ing] the cessation of forceful testing, quarantine, and other inhuman treatments meted out to Africans”.

A foreign ministry spokesman, Zhao Lijian, said on Sunday the department was staying in close communication with Guangdong authorities and would “continue responding to the African side’s reasonable concerns and legitimate appeals”.

In a lengthy statement, Zhao said the government had “zero tolerance for discrimination” and that the Guangdong authorities were “working promptly to improve their working method”. He did not reference the ambassadors’ letter.

In text messages seen by the Guardian, a purported Guangzhou resident said they and seven other Africans in their building were taken to a hotel by police. “They [the police] said they will do some test after the quarantine,” the message said.

“I have explained to them, I have not left China since October of last year and I have already done my Covid-19 test ... which I brought to the police station yesterday for registration.

“I did everything correctly. Now I seriously don’t understand why I’m here at this hotel and they are asking me to pay.”

A Canadian man said he was “mandated to stay indoors because I am black”.

On Sunday the US state department accused the Chinese officials of “xenophobia” towards Africans, and said the abuse and mistreatment showed how “hollow” the China-Africa partnership was.

The US consul general in Guangzhou has advised African-Americans or those who Chinese officials may suspect of having contact with African nationals to avoid the area “until further notice”.

It said the “escalating scrutiny of foreign nationals”, including mandatory testing and quarantine, was occurring “regardless of recent travel history or previous quarantine completion”.

“Without advance warning, officials might require such individuals to submit to a Covid-19 test and undergo 14 days of supervised quarantine at their own expense,” the consulate warned.

Despite the acknowledgement from the foreign ministry spokesman, responses from Chinese officials over the weekend have been mixed.

The Chinese embassy in Zimbabwe dismissed the accusations, saying foreigners and Chinese people were treated equally and it was “harmful to sensationalise incidents”.

In an article on Saturday on China’s English-language state media outlet, the Global Times, the accusations were labelled “a western trap to stir enmity”.

“Chinese analysts said that twisted reports were stoking a long-existing controversy over Africans in Guangzhou to a new high, and urged the local governments to be more transparent and to respond to controversies in a timelier manner to avoid the issue being exploited by the west to damage China-Africa relations,” it said.

The director of the foreign ministry information department, Hua Chunying, said the China-Africa friendship would “never be shaken by [a] wedge-driving attempt”, and asked the US state department to explain the documented acts of racism against Asian Americans.

Eric Olander, the managing editor of The China Africa Project website and podcast, said China was struggling to respond to the crisis because the usual tactics of dismissing allegations as “rumours” do not hold up in the face of video and photographic evidence on social media.

“Furthermore, the accusation that western media is behind this also isn’t gaining much traction, because the vast majority of the news coverage about the crisis is taking place in Africa, and not in the US or Europe,” Olander said.

“The problem here is that the Chinese are using a technocratic approach to respond to a hugely emotional issue for Africans who feel betrayed and disrespected by the sight of so many migrants being forced to sleep on the streets and endure maltreatment by landlords and local authorities.”

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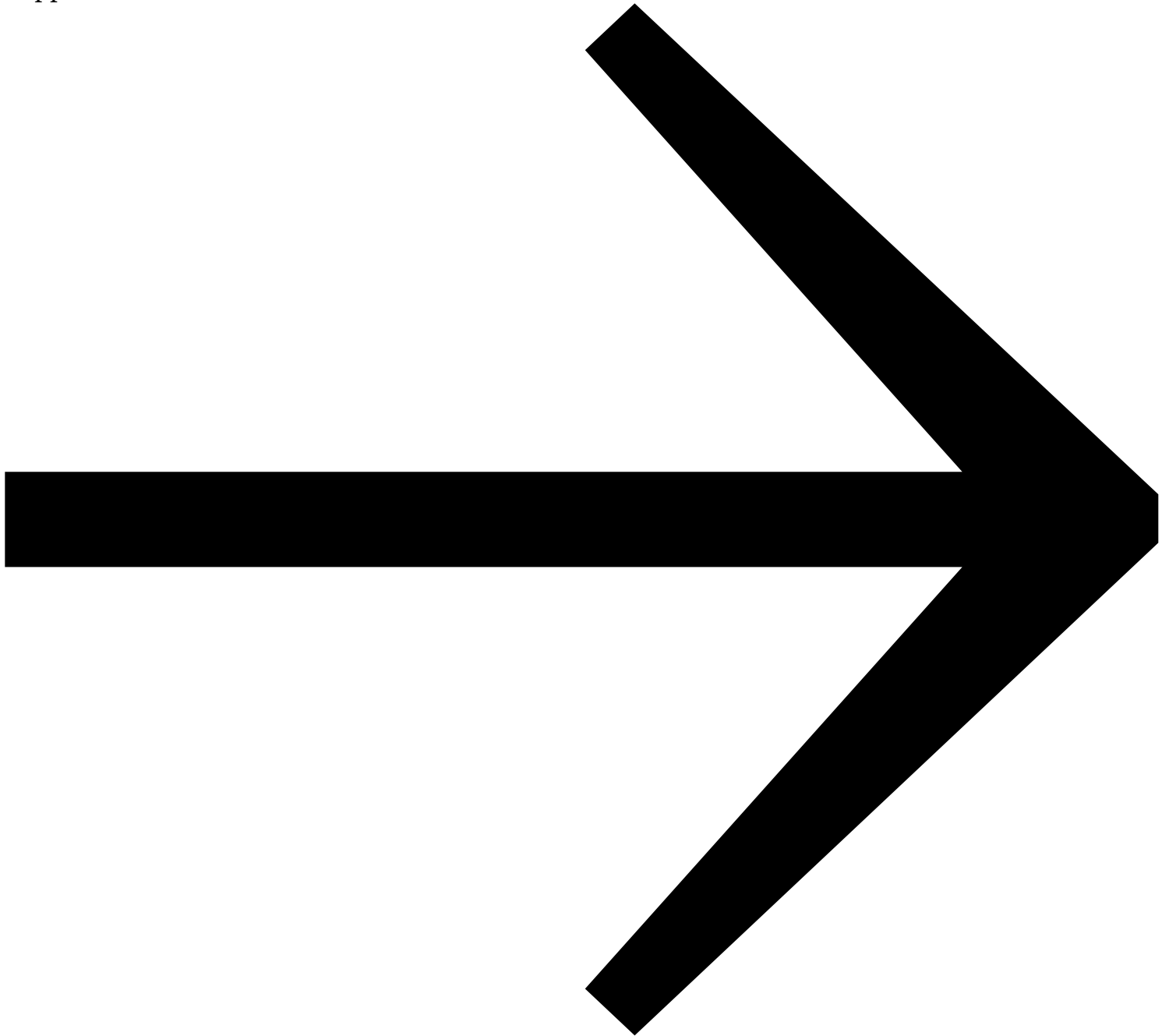
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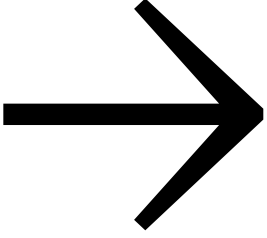


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