



July 21, 2008

OHCHR Submission on Uzbekistan

- 1) Uzbekistan's government continues inciting gross human rights violations against the freedom of religion and expression of its people. We submit the following case information to be used by the OHCHR in its submission to the Universal Periodic Review.

Concerning Religious Freedom and Freedom of Expression:

- 2) Many are imprisoned for peacefully practicing their religion, often labeled extremists or terrorists (Eurasia Insight). Since the 2005 Andijon massacre, a delicate balance exists between energy and political gain and addressing human rights violations. Unfortunately, the human rights violations have often not been recognized for what they really are and treated accordingly.

- 3) Norboy Holjigitov, a 60-year-old activist was imprisoned in June 2005 for a 10 year sentence based upon allegedly false charges. Eurasia Insight describes Uzbek prisons as "notorious for the mistreatment and torture of prisoners and rights groups suspect(ing) that Holjigitov has also been subject to severe beatings and other forms of ill-treatment." According to HRW, at least 11 rights activists remain in Uzbek prisons, while at least one other is being held in a psychiatric hospital, "simply because of their peaceful human rights work and criticism of the government."

- 4) Improvements such as the abolition of the death penalty, the introduction of habeas corpus, the ratification of an International Labor Organization child labor convention and the February release of four political prisoners have been positive changes for Uzbekistan.

- 5) A large cause for concern is the leverage surrendered by the West because it has lifted the sanctions on Uzbekistan before the country met the EU's criteria to lift them. The conditions were the permission to probe Andijon for its past, releasing imprisoned rights defenders, accrediting a Human Rights Watch representative in Uzbekistan, cooperating with United Nations special rapporteurs and removing restrictions on non-governmental organizations (Lillis, Joanna Eurasianet).

A Vital Voice for Those Suffering in Silence

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- 6) Uzbekistan officially allows freedom of religion, but growth is on the government's terms—registered mosques must be loyal to President Karimov. Any potential opposition is shut down immediately, whether from journalists, schools, or fundamental Muslims, known as Wahabists. The regime claims to be moving towards democracy, but people arrested and jailed for praying in unregistered mosques and denouncement as Wahabists.

- 7) No dissent is allowed by the secular state representing a heavily Islamic population. Human Rights Watch estimates thousands have fled to Kyrgyzstan for refuge and fear being sent back to Uzbekistan to face the consequences of imprisonment, torture, and sometimes certain death. Many must resign themselves never to see their families again.

- 8) Asylum seeker, Erkin Holikov, is serving four years for crossing into Kyrgyzstan without reporting a crime. He was not forced to go with Uzbekistani government officials since his case was pending, but returning him would have violated article 3 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, signed in 1997, prohibiting the return of a person facing the risk of torture (Amnesty International).

- 9) Uzbekistan released human rights activist Mutabar Tadzhibaeva on June 2, 2008, a prisoner sentenced to eight years in jail March 6, 2007 for being a member of an “illegal organization” and being a “threat to public order and security” for using Western materials (Amnesty International).

- 10) Also recently released was 83-year-old Ahmadjon Odilov, Uzbekistan's longest-serving political prisoner. Naubet Bisenov from the Institute for Economic Strategies in Central Asia argues the releases are "in no way an indication of an improvement in human rights" (Lillis, Joanna Eurasianet) because Uzbekistan continues to imprison others and fails to drop the convictions. Some estimate that Uzbekistan's prisons may house 7,000 to 10,000 detainees imprisoned for practicing religion outside state-controlled bodies (Lillis, Joanna Eurasianet).

- 11) The façade of human rights improving will blind the effort to eradicate human suffering for our beliefs and our rights if we do not act strongly and boldly. Jubilee recommends the United Nations holds Uzbekistan accountable for its actions against humanity and human freedoms. We foresee change happening and ask Uzbekistan's government to act boldly towards allowing freedom and step away from fear of fundamentalism.

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