

Speaker: Philippe D... 6



Human Rights Watch
Item 6: UPR Outcome Report on Uzbekistan

20 March 2009

Human Rights Watch considers the UPR of Uzbekistan a crucial opportunity to bring to spotlight the abysmal state of human rights in the country, with a view to seeking concrete improvements in the many pressing areas of concern the Uzbek government needs to urgently address.

Human Rights Watch therefore finds it all the more regrettable that the Uzbek government's approach to the UPR process has been characterized by a refusal to accept any real criticism of its human rights record, and even an outright denial of the existence of a number of well-documented problems.

In particular, we lament the Uzbek government's decision to reject as "unacceptable because factually wrong" the numerous recommendations made urging the release of imprisoned human rights defenders and an end to the harassment and intimidation of civil society activists.

As has been documented in numerous reports by multiple actors, governmental and nongovernmental, Uzbek authorities have a longstanding record of repressing independent civil society, detaining and threatening human rights defenders, journalists and others with prosecution for their peaceful activism. The government continues to hold at least 11 human rights defenders in prison for no reason other than their legitimate human rights work. Many other activists, independent journalists and political dissidents are also behind bars on politically motivated charges, with at least two new arrests just in the period since the UPR took place.

The government also continues to place undue restrictions on civil society activism, and has refused to allow any of the previously expelled international human rights organizations to return to the country. Indeed, Human Rights Watch itself was forced to suspend its activities in Uzbekistan in July last year after the government denied work accreditation to, and then outright banned its researcher from entering the country.

We urge the Uzbek government to acknowledge the existence of these well-documented patterns of abuse, and to accept and implement the well-justified recommendations made by so many of its partners to remedy these abuses as a matter of urgent priority.

We further regret the Uzbek government's continued refusal to accept responsibility for the May 2005 massacre in the eastern city of Andijan, in which government forces killed hundreds of protestors, most of them unarmed. A number of states rightfully raised concern during the UPR about the Uzbek authorities' failure to ensure accountability for what

happened, and urged the government to accept an independent, international inquiry, as recommended by the (former) High Commissioner for Human Rights and many others. Unfortunately, the Uzbek government's reaction was to simply reject these concerns as "unfounded" and to declare the "issue as closed for Uzbekistan." It is plainly shocking to see it treat concerns relating to a government massacre of hundreds of individuals as "not [being] part of Uzbekistan's obligations under internationally agreed human rights standards."

We also regret the Uzbek government's decision to reject the recommendation that it stop pursuing the forcible return of Uzbek asylum seekers and refugees in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and other parts of the region, once again basing its rejection of these concerns as "unacceptable because factually wrong." Just weeks ago, Uzbek authorities sentenced one such Uzbek refugee, Haiatjon Juraboev, to 13 years in prison. Juraboev "disappeared" in September of last year, after being stopped in Bishkek by unknown individuals whom witnesses said introduced themselves as security officials, only to emerge in an Uzbek prison several months later. Human Rights Watch has documented more than a dozen cases of forced returns of Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan alone – so far from being "factually wrong," we can attest to this being a very real problem.

We note that even in those areas where the Uzbek government undertook to consider the recommendations addressed to it during the UPR, including that it grant access to the country for UN special mechanisms, take effective measures to combat torture, respect freedom of religion, and end forced child labor in the cotton fields, its written replies and comments, as reflected in the addendum to the Working Group's report, make clear that it views itself as already being in compliance with these calls made – an assessment which borders on the absurd when contrasted with the reality on the ground.

Mr. President, we consider the manner and tone in which the Uzbek government has chosen to react to well-founded criticism and concerns voiced by its international partners as not just deeply disrespectful, but also a sad reflection of its lack of political will to engage in a good faith effort to improve its atrocious rights record. We urge the government of Uzbekistan to reverse its approach, and to accept and genuinely implement all recommendations addressed to it during the UPR.

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