



EUROPEAN UNION

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EU statement on Uzbek Human Rights Defenders Elena Urlaeva and Azam Farmonov

The European Union shares the concerns raised by the United States in the Permanent Council on 4 June about reports that the human rights defender Elena Urlaeva was detained for more than 10 hours and subjected to an excessive and humiliating treatment by local authorities in the city of Chinaz in Uzbekistan on 31 May. The incident happened when she was gathering evidence of possible forced labour in the cotton sector. Ms. Urlaeva was subsequently detained again on 5 June and subjected once more to a physically invasive and humiliating search. We call on the government of Uzbekistan to properly investigate the official complaint of Ms Urlaeva about her mistreatment and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable.

We similarly share the concern about the case of human rights defender Azam Farmonov, whose case was highlighted by the United Nations Committee Against Torture in 2013 and has been raised by the EU in its annual human rights dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan. Although Mr. Farmonov was due to be released in April 2015, following an additional sentence under Article 221 of the Criminal Code for violating prison rules, his term was extended by 5 years. We call on the government of Uzbekistan to release Mr. Farmonov immediately. And we urge them to end the practice of arbitrarily applying such additional sentences, which has become a disturbing pattern in cases of those imprisoned for religious reasons or for defending human rights.

Human rights defenders and civil society activists have an important role to play in all societies and should be able to work unhampered, without fear of harassment or imprisonment. Sadly this is not the case in all OSCE participating States, including Uzbekistan. We urge the government of Uzbekistan to implement in good faith its

national and international human rights obligations and commitments, including those of the OSCE.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, ICELAND+ and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA country NORWAY, member of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.