

28 September, 2007

## Human Rights Platform of Uzbekistan:

### Representatives of civil society call on the European Union to extend sanctions against the government of Uzbekistan

*On the eve of the forthcoming decision of the European Union on the fate of sanctions against the Karimov regime representatives of the civil society of Uzbekistan, supported by colleagues and friends across the world, urge EU to extend these sanctions and, at the same time, reinforce efforts to establish a dialogue on human rights with the government of Uzbekistan.*

*Below we summarise the situation in Uzbekistan and outline the most urgent steps to be taken by the EU, from the point of view of civil society of Uzbekistan.*

#### Lack of cooperation with international structures on Andijan

In **May 2007** EU decided to extend for another term the sanctions introduced in 2005 in response to the events in Andijan, which led to the numerous deaths of civilians. **All attempts of EU to establish a constructive dialogue on human rights with the regime of Islam Karimov have not met a positive response.** The Uzbek Government has ignored all calls for conducting an independent international investigation of these events and for an improvement of the human rights situation in the country.

#### Crackdown on independent voices since Andijan

In the period following the Andijan events, as well as over the last few months, the regime of Islam Karimov has not demonstrated any readiness for real concessions in the sphere of human rights. The investigation by the Uzbek authorities into these events resulted in a series of biased Stalinist trials, the majority of which were closed to the public, leaving defendants without access to legal defence and justice.

Since the Andijan events the ruling regime in Uzbekistan has also **subjected many civic and human rights activists to intimidation, harassment and persecution. Beginning in 2005, hundreds of NGOs were forcibly closed down, a number of international organisations and mass media have lost their accreditation in the country.** The most recent example is the decision of the Ministries of Justice and Foreign Affairs in June 2007 to deprive the staff of **Human Rights Watch** of their accreditation and entry visa. Since May 2005 state censorship has been hardening on an unprecedented scale.

**Dozens of human rights defenders and journalists have been imprisoned or were forced to flee the country** in the observable period. For the moment, thirty two civil society activists are being in prison (their list can be sent upon request).

The **machine of fabricating cases against devout Muslims** and people with independent religious beliefs shows no sign of abating. The authorities do not make any distinction between moderate Muslim activists and Islamist radicals; between leaders and ordinary members of Islamic

organizations; between pious believers and political Islamists, equally applying cruel repressions, long terms sentences and torture, to all of them. Thousands of innocent Muslims still languish in prison. By these inflammatory methods the regime **antagonises a significant part of society** provoking it to radical actions.

In recent months the regime has also enforced its **repressive restrictions on the representatives of Christian parishes** such as the Grace Presbyterian Church, Baptist congregation, the Jehovah's Witnesses, God's Love Pentecostal Church and Full Gospel Church. Their leaders and members have suffered harassment and punishment for their religious activity.

### **Systemic torture in prisons; violation of rights of movement; child labour**

Even after the report produced by the UN Special Rapporteur Theo Van Boven in 2003 **the use of torture in Uzbekistan remains systemic**. Recent cases include those of imprisoned dissidents Djamshid Karimov, Dilmurod Muhiddinov, Muhammad Bekjan. Mamadali Mahmudov, Isroil Holdarov, who are relentlessly being tortured.

Their health and the conditions of other prisoners of conscience has substantially deteriorated due to torture and inhuman treatment in prisons (the list of those prisoners who need urgent medical assistance is attached). They are denied the right to meet with their lawyers and close relatives. Meanwhile, **the authorities have prevented the International Red Cross from accessing prisons in order to carry out its humanitarian mission**.

Keeping with the practices of the former Soviet regime, the Uzbek authorities **use psychiatry as a means of punishment and persecution**. **Human rights activist and journalist Djamshid Karimov is still forcibly kept in a psychiatric clinic in Samarqand city**.

**Freedom of movement of citizens also remains restricted and permit is required to exit the country**. Uzbekistan is one of only two countries (along with Turkmenistan) to retain the Soviet-style mechanism of permission for exit from the country, the so-called exit visas issued only for two years. A growing number of civic activists and journalists are being denied even this exit visa, for instance, Alo Hodjayev, Yadgar Turlibekov, Kamil Ashurov, Yelena Urlayeva, Ahtam Shaimardanov, Jahongir Shosalimov, Agzam Turgunov, Shuhrat Ahmedjanov, Saida Kurbanova, a number of Protestant activists, and others.

Another category of the population whose rights are violated systematically is children. As in Soviet times, **each autumn school children in provinces and rural areas are being coercively employed in harvesting cotton without their parents' permission and in violation of national and international law**. Each year they are torn away from learning process for more than two months, due to which the quality of their education is declining. Their work on cotton fields is often underpaid. Rural population, despite their contribution to the cotton export revenue, suffer from chronic poverty; rural schools drag out a miserable existence. Cotton fibre and textiles produced as a result of coerced child labour are being sold in world markets, including in Europe. The people of Uzbekistan are deprived of the right to know what is the net cotton export revenue and how it is being used.

Against the background of these mass violations of human rights the Government of Uzbekistan tries to persuade the international community that there is a progress in this sphere. Under the pressure from human rights activists and international community the Parliament of Uzbekistan has recently adopted a law on abolishing the death penalty and delegating the power of issuing arrest warrants from the Prosecutor Office to judges, act per se deserving of encouragement. However, without the guarantees and mechanism of public control over its implementation this law could easily become another propagandist show, little more than an improvement on paper, like the law prohibiting press censorship adopted a few years ago but not making an affect upon the reality in Uzbekistan mass media. Only 2008 will show whether this legislative step will be implemented in

reality, or will be another regime's smoke screen hiding the genuine state of affairs in respect to human rights.

*Respected representatives of the European Union,*

The political system of Uzbekistan is in crisis. The country is governed by a man whose overtly protracted presidency (since 1990) expired already in January 2007. His power is resting mainly upon the use of coercive force and violence. It is not the rule of law that reigns in the country, but the right of might. The courts are guided not by Constitution, but by direct instructions from Prosecutor offices, and the security and law enforcement agencies. The majority of state institutions, especially their chief staff, are bogged in corruption.

Against the background of deteriorating human rights conditions and continuing systematic abuses **we urge you to keep the sanctions against Uzbekistan in place** as a matter of principle. Dropping these sanctions this autumn would only serve to advance the regime of Karimov, who would perceive this step as a cart-blanc for further repressions. In doing so the EU would involuntarily vote for the prolongation of Karimov's presidency. **The European Union should first find out whether the forthcoming presidential elections will be free and fair** and not another puppet show with appointed pseudo-contestants.

In urging you to extend the term of sanctions, we do not call for a total international isolation of Uzbekistan. **The dialogue on human rights, cooperation in the sphere of education and humanitarian programs, discussion of necessary preconditions for economic and business cooperation should be continued.**

**This dialogue and cooperation must however be oriented towards practical results, not empty declarations**, and take into account rights of the population in general as well as its aforementioned specific categories and groups, such as children, farmers and rural populace, small and medium business, civil society activists. The government of Uzbekistan needs - not only through empty words but in practice - to demonstrate its good will for the improvement of the situation with human rights. First of all, the government of Uzbekistan should meet the following demands:

1. *Reconsider the sentences and release from prison all prisoners of conscience;*
2. *Allow the International Red Cross to visit all prisons in the country and perform its humanitarian mission;*
3. *Start the reform of the penitentiary system; stop the practice of torture;*
4. *Release the judicial system from the dictate of the executive branch of power and law enforcement agencies;*
5. *Stop the practice of coercive child labour;*
6. *Abolish restrictions on the freedom of religion;*
7. *End restrictions on NGOs, independent mass media. Register opposition parties and allow them to take part in elections.*
8. *Open doors for cooperation with international community.*

Besides these measures, **the Andijan tragedy should not be forgotten**. There is a pressing need for objective assessment, fairness and justice with respect to the events of Andijan. If national law

cannot be implemented in an unbiased way, then the mechanism of international law and international collective actions must be used.

The refusal of the Uzbek government to face the law for indiscriminately shooting mass demonstrators indicates that **the government is ready further to use violence against the population** in a similar way as in Andijan. The likelihood of mass protests, in the meantime, is increasing due to the deterioration of the living conditions of the majority of the population. Failure to demonstrate now its adherence to principles will leave the EU liable to take a part of the responsibility for future massacres committed by the Karimov regime, beyond the lifetime of that regime.

We understand that we are proposing for the EU to continue on a difficult path. Yet we consider that this action is necessary and consistent with the course the EU set upon following the events at Andijan. **We hope the EU can remain steadfast and unified in its approach to one of the worst human rights offenders in the world. The EU should maintain these sanctions whilst clearly stipulating the actions required to be taken by the government of Uzbekistan in order to have the sanctions lifted and bring the government back out of its isolation.**

*In hope for Your understanding,*

Nadejda Ataeva, President, Association for Human Rights in Central Asia, Paris, France

Kudrat Babadjanov, Group for Freedom of Press in Uzbekistan, Timro, Sweden

Yelena Urlaeva, human rights defender, Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Ahtam Shaimardanov, human rights defender, Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan,, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Abdillo Tojibai ugli, human rights defender, Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan,, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Jahongir Shosalimov, human rights defender, Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Bakhodiy Isamuhamedov, Chair, 'Mahalla' Project for supporting neighbourhood communities, Stockholm, Sweden

Surat Ikramov, Chairman, Independent Group of Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan

Abdualil Boymatov, Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Dublin, Ireland

Safar Bekchan, Uzbek literati, Member of the International PEN Club, Lausanne, Switzerland

Dustnazar Hudonazarov, Head of the Society for the protection of the rights of refugees and forced migrants from Uzbekistan, Sundsvall, Sweden

Tulkin Karaev, journalist, Society of Human Rights of Uzbekistan, Timro, Sweden \_

Alisher Ilkhamov, social scientist, London, UK

Kamoliddin Rabbimov, political scientist, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Khatam Khadzimatov, author of the project "Vatandosh", <http://jakob.clan.su/> , Ulsteinvik, Norway

Maksud Bekjan, Uzbek literati, member of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Oslo, Norway

Alisher Taksanov, Uzbekistani journalist, Switzerland

Yodgor Obid, Uzbek literati, Graz, Austria

Saodat Pulkanova, Uzbek poet, Timro, Sweden

Vitaly Krasilovsky, Uzbekistani legal expert, Alaska, USA

Nuriddin Nizimiddinov, activist of Youth movement 'Zevenar', The Netherlands

Nigina Malikova, representative of the Association 'Human Rights in Central Asia' in the USA

Ulugbek Zainabiddinov, Uzbekistani civic activist, Ukraine

A number of human rights and civil society activists from Uzbekistan have also supported this petition, but their names are not enlisted here for the sake of their safety

**Friends of Uzbekistan joining these voices:**

Theo van Boven, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture

Olivier Dupuis, former European Parliament delegate, human rights activist, Brussels, Belgium

Aaron Rhodes, International Helsinki Federation for Human rights, executive director

Oleg Orlov, Board Chair, Human Rights Centre 'Memorial', Russia

Sergei Kovalev, Chair of the 'Memorial' Society; President of the Institute of Human Rights, Russia

Svetlana Gannushkina, Chairwoman, Civic Assistance Committee, Moscow, Russia

Natalya Gorbanevskaya, is a Russian poet and civil rights activist, Paris, France

Vladimir Bukovsky, former Soviet dissident, neurophysiologist, writer and a co-founder of Committee 2008, Democratic Coalition of Russia, publisher, United Kingdom

Andrey Babitsky, Russian journalist and war correspondent for Radio Free Europe-Liberty, Czech Republic

Valentin Gefter, Director of the Human Rights Institute, Moscow, Russia

Yevgeniy Jovtis, chairman of Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Aude Merlin, specialist on Northern Caucasus, human rights activist, Brussels, Belgium

Georg Warning, human rights defender, Bodanstraße 15 D-78462 Konstanz, Germany

Elena Ryabinina, Project Director of the Program "Assistance to Political Exiles from Central Asia", Civic Assistance Committee Moscow, Russia

Bernhard Clasen, journalist, co-chairman of a group for the release of prisoners and missing persons in the zone of Karabakh conflict Mönchengladbach, Germany

Ekkehard Maas, publicist, translator, Germany

Elin Jonson, freelance journalist, Sweden

Viktoria Tuleneva, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Alexei Tolkachev, Chairman of the International Democratic Initiative 'Pomaranch', Kiev, Ukraine

Oleksandr Shapovalov, human rights activist and a journalist, Kherson regional centre for defence of patients' and consumers' rights, Kherson, Ukraine, tel. +380-0552 45-41-22, mob. +38-093-975-03-75

Alla Tyutyunnyk, Kherson regional foundation for charity and health, Kherson, Ukraine

Yevgeniy Zakharov, Kharkiv Human Rights group, Kharkiv, Ukraine

Serhiy Fedorynchuk, Informational centre "Zelenyj svit" Kyiv, Ukraine

Dmitriy Groysman, chairman of the Vinnitsa Human Rights Group Vinnitsa, Ukraine

Roman Mykolayovych Podolyan, literati, Kyiv, Ukraine

Tukhan Ediev, Chernihiv Public Committee of Human Rights Protection, Ukraine

Hanna Hrytsenko, project "NoBorders", Kyiv, Ukraine

Maksym Butkevych, project "NoBorders", Kyiv, Ukraine

Quinn Martin, The Uzbekistan Initiative-USA, New York City, USA

Grigoriy Pasko, journalist , Moscow, Россия

Mirsuljan Namazaliev, member of the Popular Youth Movement 'Birge', Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

Paul Mitchell, human rights defender, documentation officer, founder of «WILTONFILMS », London, UK

Tania Rakhmanova, human rights defender, documentation officer, founder of «WILTONFILMS» Paris, France

Alisher Saipov, head of the limited liability company "Valley Media Group", Osh, Kyrgyzstan

Olga Vesnyanka, journalist, Kyiv, Ukraine