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**STATEMENT BY THE  
DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN AT THE  
MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

8 June 2004

Mr. Chairman,

At the Permanent Council meeting on 27 May this year our delegation, replying to a statement by the representative of Ireland, expressed its willingness to inform the Uzbek authorities of the concern felt by European Union countries regarding the death in custody, in Uzbekistan, of the condemned recidivist A. Shelkovenko, held on suspicion of murder and convicted on three previous occasions. I should like, briefly, to inform the members of the Permanent Council about the circumstances of the case.

As is well known, the initiators of this diffusion by the media of unchecked and unconfirmed information concerning torture allegedly inflicted on the suspect A. Shelkovenko were representatives of the embassies of certain participating States and also the NGO "Human Rights Watch".

On 25 May 2004 the Uzbek Government approved the conduct of a further forensic medical examination of the prisoner in the presence of a special commission composed of representatives of the Republic's law-enforcement bodies, representatives of the NGO Freedom House and international specialists invited by the latter, including:

- Mjuse Sever, Freedom House Director in Uzbekistan;
- Victor Jackovich, Freedom House consultant and former United States Ambassador in Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- M. Sven Pollelan, Member of the Pathological-Anatomical Department of the Chief Prosecutor's Office, Ontario, Canada.

We consider it important to make the point that the independent examination carried out on 27 May confirmed the conclusions reached during the initial forensic medical examination carried out by Uzbek specialists on 19 May 2004, namely that Shelkovenko's death had resulted from suicide. The Commission found no other bodily injuries that might have been connected with the prisoner's death.

On 31 May 2004, Freedom House held a press conference in Tashkent on the results of the "independent investigation of the death of A. Yu Shelkovenko, a citizen of Uzbekistan, who died in custody at Bostanlyksk prison on 19 May 2004". The press conference was

attended by representatives of the embassies of the United States of America, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands in Tashkent, as well as representatives of Human Rights Watch and of local and foreign media.

In the course of the press conference the representatives of Freedom House mentioned the complete openness and support of the Uzbek authorities during the second examination and also the high level of professionalism shown by the Uzbek specialists. At the same time, international experts voiced their views regarding the incompetence of the Human Rights Watch staff and of the representatives of certain embassies who had resorted to premature and unfounded ideas regarding the death of Shelkovenko. In the words of a Freedom House expert, the “noise” and fuss raised in connection with this issue was utterly groundless and the motives underlying it incomprehensible, because the death of an ordinary prisoner should not be a cause of inflated scandals and quarrels, particularly at the international level. It was also noted that the Freedom House experts would be prepared to take part in similar independent enquiries in the future as well if their services should be required.

It should also be mentioned that the representatives of Human Rights Watch and a number of foreign embassies present at the press conference — people who had actually initiated this investigation to trump up a potentially giant scandal — did not say a word about the results of the independent examination, probably, as we are inclined to think, because they were expecting different results and were discouraged by this turn of events.

In the context of what I have said already, I should like to make the following statement. We do not deny that, despite the precautions taken by the Uzbek Government, individual instances of violation of human rights do occur, in prisons as elsewhere. I condemn these violations in the strongest possible terms, but at the same time I want to stress that they do not occur systematically. The State, using all the resources and possibilities at its disposal, is conducting and will continue to conduct a resolute and uncompromising campaign against any and all violations of human rights and in particular against torture. The Republic has an active programme in hand within the framework of the National Plan of Action prepared on the basis of recommendations submitted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Theo van Boven. Furthermore, the representatives of the diplomatic corps and of international NGOs accredited in Tashkent have the possibility of visiting the Republic’s correctional labour institutions periodically if they wish.

In conclusion, I should like to use this occasion to address, through the representatives of participating States here in Vienna, a particular plea to their colleagues accredited in Tashkent, who sometimes, unfortunately, still make use of unfounded and unchecked “facts” as their only source of information: please be more careful and attentive in dealing with matters of this kind.

Thank you for your attention.