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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Conviction of Gulnaza Yuldasheva in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Counselor for Public Affairs Christopher Midura
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 19, 2012

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The United States expresses its concern today over the case of Gulnaza Yuldasheva in Uzbekistan, after a court in the Tashkent region sentenced her on July 10 to two years in prison on questionable charges. According to reports received by our embassy in Tashkent, Ms. Yuldasheva turned to police to investigate claims of official involvement in trafficking in human beings and subsequently became the target of what appears to be an effort to silence her for her efforts to expose corruption involving public officials.

Ms. Yuldasheva has alleged the involvement of high-level police and local government officials from the city of Chinoz in a trafficking ring that sold people into human slavery in neighboring countries. By Yuldosheva's account, in early 2011, two of her brothers, along with two other men, were sent to Kazakhstan with promises of good work and high salaries. Upon reaching their destination, however, it is alleged that their passports were taken away, and the men were forced to work 15-hour days with only a single loaf of bread for sustenance. After several months, the men managed to return to Uzbekistan and revealed the ordeal to their sister, a human rights activist. Ms. Yuldasheva first raised the issue with government officials in May 2011 and began to conduct her own investigation to gather evidence against those involved. When she persisted in that case, she apparently became the target of police, ultimately leading to her arrest in April 2012 on an allegation that she tried to extort money from a bus conductor. Her explanation was that she accepted compensation from him after he intentionally broke her mobile telephone, a matter apparently unrelated to her brothers' difficulties.

From accounts we have received, the court proceedings were conducted behind closed doors and human rights activists were not allowed into the courtroom to observe or testify on Ms. Yuldasheva's behalf. According to her lawyer, Shoirra Muhammedova, the charges were fabricated and unsubstantiated.

We call on the Government of Uzbekistan to fully investigate the questionable circumstances surrounding these charges against Gulnaza Yuldasheva, as well as the fairness of the proceedings and conformity to Uzbekistan's international obligations and OSCE commitments. We also call on the government of Uzbekistan to identify and investigate potential cases of human trafficking as well as the possible involvement of public officials.

A basic tenet of democracy is that victims of crime must feel secure in seeking assistance from law enforcement at all levels and under all circumstances, and should not be prosecuted or further victimized simply for seeking justice, whether on one's own behalf or on behalf of others.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.