



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement on Government of Kyrgyzstan's Handling of Four Uzbek Refugees

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
January 19, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is deeply committed to supporting human rights and to the proper treatment of asylum seekers. We sincerely commend the Kyrgyz Government for its courageous decision last year to cooperate with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on resettling 439 Uzbek asylum seekers in Romania, despite pressure to repatriate them.

The United States, however, is concerned about the possible return of four remaining UNHCR-recognized Uzbek refugees to Uzbekistan. The forcible repatriation of recognized refugees would not only be counter to OSCE commitments reaffirming the importance of international standards and instruments related to the protection of refugees, but also would be a violation of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. In addition, Article 3 of the 1984 Convention Against Torture, to which Kyrgyzstan is also a party, states that no party can extradite a person to a country "where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture." It should be noted that the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture affirmed after a December 2002 visit to Uzbekistan that "torture or similar ill-treatment is systematic;" therefore the extradition of these refugees would also run contrary to Kyrgyzstan's treaty commitments.

These concerns are heightened by reports from international human rights organizations alleging that four Uzbek asylum seekers repatriated in June have been tortured, and press reports that one died in custody. Only one of the four has been seen by diplomatic personnel or human rights organizations since they reentered Uzbekistan.

The United States calls on the Kyrgyz Government to continue to honor its international obligations. We urge Kyrgyzstan to approve the transfer of the four asylum seekers to the UNHCR for resettlement in third countries. We encourage the Kyrgyz Government to work closely with the UNHCR, in accordance with international commitments, to respond to any future asylum seekers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.