



United States Mission to the OSCE

Status of Uzbek Asylum Seekers in Kyrgyzstan

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 15, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Like the European Union, the United States continues to be concerned about the status of Uzbek asylum seekers who fled Andijon last summer and who have requested asylum in Kyrgyzstan. Following interviews with these individuals, as well as through a review of all available information, UNHCR has determined that all four individuals are "mandate" refugees, and is willing and able to quickly resettle them in third countries.

Despite UNHCR's findings, the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan has already denied refugee status to three of the individuals, and issued another ruling against the fourth on June 13. Before it considers forcibly repatriating these four individuals to Uzbekistan, we call on the government of Kyrgyzstan to be mindful of its OSCE commitments reaffirming the importance of international standards and instruments on the protection of refugees, as well as its international legal obligations under the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Forcibly returning these asylum seekers would also seriously tarnish the reputation and credibility Kyrgyzstan established with the international community through its positive actions last summer, when it transferred 450 Uzbek asylum seekers to UNHCR for permanent third-country resettlement. We know that this was not an easy decision at the time, and that the Kyrgyz government came under intense pressure to return this group. We urge the Government of Kyrgyzstan to once again demonstrate its willingness to assist individuals who seek protection from persecution by allowing UNHCR to resettle these four asylum seekers in third countries. To that effect, we understand that UNHCR has already received commitments from specific countries to resettle all four individuals, and that this information has been communicated to the Government of Kyrgyzstan.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.