

PUBLIC

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UA 130/05 Fear for safety/ fear of torture or ill-treatment/ excessive use of force

UZBEKISTAN **81 detainees in the city of Andizhan (men and women)  
Human rights defenders and opposition political activists**

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Some 81 people, including at least three human rights defenders, have been detained by law enforcement officers following recent events in the city of Andizhan, eastern Uzbekistan on 13 May, and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Scores of men, women and children were reportedly killed when government troops opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators in the evening of 13 May. Human rights defenders and political groups trying to gather and disseminate information on the killings have been harassed and risk being detained, tortured and ill-treated.

Uzbekistan's Prosecutor General stated on 17 May that 81 people were detained and a criminal case had been opened against them on charges of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order, organizing mass disturbances and committing murder. It is not clear whether those detained have had access to a lawyer, medical assistance or their relatives or whether they are being held incommunicado. In recent years, hundreds of detainees have reportedly been tortured while held incommunicado in pre-trial detention in order to force them to "confess" to membership of illegal Islamic organizations. The Uzbekistani authorities have accused members and supporters of a local Islamic movement, *Akramia*, of attempting to organize the violent uprising in Andizhan with a view to establishing an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. They have also linked this movement to the banned *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* opposition Islamic party, categorized by Uzbekistan as a terrorist organization.

Amnesty International is concerned that at least three human rights defenders may have been detained for carrying out their legitimate and peaceful work, and more arrests of human rights defenders and opposition political activists may follow. Human rights defenders monitored the apparent indiscriminate and excessive use of force by government troops against mainly unarmed civilian demonstrators. Opposition political activists have carried out house-to-house enquiries to establish the true number of people killed, which government officials have put at 170. Unofficial sources have estimated the death toll to be at least 500. Political activists have reportedly been detained for a few hours at a time, but it is feared that they and other human rights defenders may be arrested, tortured or ill-treated in order to prevent them publicizing factual information on the identity and the numbers of those killed.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

During the night of 12-13 May, a group of unidentified armed men broke into the jail of the city of Andizhan, reportedly freeing everyone inside - an estimated 1,200 men. The group then went on to occupy other buildings, including the regional administration building. Gunfire was allegedly exchanged between armed men and soldiers. Early in the evening soldiers in armoured personnel carriers, who had surrounded a crowd of several thousand protestors on the city's main square, allegedly opened fire indiscriminately into the crowd killing and wounding many people.

The Uzbekistani authorities have denied that government troops used excessive force and that they killed civilians, including women and children. However, eyewitnesses allege that troops fired indiscriminately and without warning at the crowd of demonstrators. Survivors, who fled from Andizhan to neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, have told journalists that soldiers continued to shoot at people indiscriminately even as they were running for safety.

Reports as to what triggered the events in Andizhan are confusing but may have been linked to the trial of 23

local businessmen accused of "Islamic extremism". In the week leading up to 13 May up to 1,000 relatives and supporters of the 23 men, who deny any connection to banned Islamic groups, held peaceful sit-down vigils outside the court building to protest the men's innocence and denounce the torture they allegedly suffered.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Russian, Uzbek or your own language:**

- expressing concern for the safety of the 81 people detained following the events in Andizhan, and calling for guarantees that they will not be tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- urging the Uzbekistani authorities to ensure that all detainees are given access to a lawyer of their choice and to their relatives and that they receive the necessary medical attention;
- reminding the authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties;
- strongly condemning the reported use of excessive force against civilians in Andizhan;
- calling on the authorities of Uzbekistan to allow a prompt, thorough, transparent and independent investigation, with the participation of international experts, into the events with the results made public and those responsible brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO: (Please note that it can be difficult getting through to fax numbers in Uzbekistan. If a voice answers, repeat "fax" until you hear the signal; otherwise leave your fax machine on auto-redial if possible. Fax machines may be switched off outside office hours – 5 hours ahead of GMT):**

President

Islam A. KARIMOV,

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**Salutation: Dear President Karimov**

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**Salutation: Dear Minister Almatov**

General Procurator of the Republic of Uzbekistan

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**COPIES TO:**

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**Salutation: Dear Minister Ganiev**

and to diplomatic representatives of Uzbekistan accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 June 2005.