

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

EU Press Release

AI Index: EUR 62/005/2007 (Public)
Embargo: 6:00 GMT SUNDAY 13 MAY 2007 (08.00 Brussels time)

EU-UZBEKISTAN: TWO YEARS AND NO PROGRESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

(Brussels, 13 May) The second anniversary of the Andizhan killings in Uzbekistan is a grim reminder of the country's grave human rights problems, says Amnesty International on the eve of an EU Foreign Affairs meeting that will be evaluating the current European policy towards Uzbekistan.

The continued refusal by the government to allow an independent and international investigation into the killings of hundreds of unarmed people in May 2005 should keep EU relations with Uzbekistan on edge.

But recent events have provided renewed cause for concern. Only this year – at the same time that the EU Presidency took steps to establish a human rights dialogue with Uzbekistan – two human rights defenders and a political activist received long prison sentences. All three were in one way or another linked to the Andizhan killings.

Amnesty International believes they, as others, have been convicted on politically motivated charges and calls on the EU Presidency to request the immediate and unconditional release of those considered as prisoners of conscience.

“The release of Umida Niazova was not unconditional and there are many disturbing aspects in the suspension of her sentence which was granted just before the EU started the new human rights dialogue,” said Dick Oosting, Director of Amnesty International's EU Office.

“The establishment of this dialogue lacks credibility if at the same time Uzbekistani authorities can continue to commit gross violations with impunity,” added Oosting.

In a letter to the EU Presidency (available at www.amnesty-eu.org) the human rights organization also pointed to:

- the deterioration of freedom of expression and assembly in Uzbekistan;
- the persistent allegations of widespread torture or other ill-treatment of detainees;
- the forced return of individuals believed to be connected to the Andizhan killings;
- the refusal of Uzbekistani authorities to impose a moratorium on executions despite a Presidential decree introducing the abolition of death penalty from 2008.

“Faced with so many serious human rights problems the EU simply cannot afford to send the wrong signal to Uzbekistan or indeed the whole Central Asian region. It must remain firm, committed to past appeals such as that of a proper Andizhan investigation, and ready to make new calls on behalf of those unjustly detained,” said Dick Oosting.

For further comment/background and interviews:

Amnesty International EU Office (Brussels)

Tel: +32-2-5482773

Fax: +32-2-5025686

Email: AmnestyIntl@aieu.be

Web-site: <http://www.amnesty-eu.org>