
EU Central Asia Strategy and Human Rights Promotion: Civil Society Views and Recommendations

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This month it is five years since the adoption of the EU Strategy for a new Partnership with Central Asia¹, which provides a framework for enhanced relations between the EU and the countries of this region. The implementation of the Strategy has resulted in a growing number of high-level meetings between EU and Central Asian officials, new initiatives for cooperation in terms of trade, energy, security and other areas, and efforts aimed at deepening bilateral relations. A new, strengthened EU-Kazakhstan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) is currently being negotiated. A process of adopting a PCA with Turkmenistan has also been re-initiated after being stalled for years during the rule of *Turkmenbashi*. The EU-Uzbekistan PCA was suspended by the EU as part of sanctions adopted by the EU over the 2005 Andijan events, when Uzbek government forces used indiscriminate force and killed hundreds of participants in a mass protest. However, since these sanctions were gradually eased and finally abolished in 2009, EU-Uzbek relations have “normalised”, as characterised among others by the opening of an EU delegation in this country in early 2012.

The EU Central Asia Strategy identifies human rights as a key element in EU-Central Asia relations and sets out that the EU will step up support for the protection of human rights in the region. However, while the EU has established annual human rights dialogues with the Central Asian governments and addressed human rights in other ways in its interactions with these governments in the past five years, there is broad consensus that the implementation of the human rights dimension of the Strategy has not been as effective as desired, given the lack of overall human rights progress in the region (see more in the next section). This document is meant as a contribution to the discussion on how to reinforce human rights action under the EU Central Asia Strategy and better realise the Strategy’s potential as a tool for strengthening respect for human rights. First, the paper makes a number of general suggestions for how we, the civil society organisations issuing it², believe the EU could improve the effectiveness and impact of its human rights action the region. While many of these points have been raised before and some of them may already have been partially addressed by the EU, we consider that they deserve renewed attention and focus. Second, the paper provides an overview of major human rights challenges that currently exist in three countries of the region (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and makes recommendations for measures we believe the EU should pursue as objectives and priorities in its human rights policies toward these countries.

Background to the EU Central Asia Strategy

The EU Strategy for a new Partnership with Central Asia, which was adopted by the EU governments in June 2007, lays the foundation for increased cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in political, economic and other areas. By adopting the Strategy, the EU also undertook to step up support for the protection of human rights in the region, *inter alia* by conducting “regular and results-oriented” human rights dialogues with the Central Asian governments and by cooperating closely with the UN, the OSCE and other international actors in this area. According to the Strategy, strengthening the commitment of the Central Asian states to democracy, human rights and the rule of law “will promote security and stability in Central Asia, thus making the countries of the region reliable partners for the EU with shared common interests and goals.”³

The implementation of the Central Asia Strategy has been reviewed in progress reports by the EU Council and the European Commission in 2008 and 2010. A new progress report is expected to be adopted in late June 2012. The 2010 progress report⁴ acknowledged that there had been no “consistent and sustainable improvement” in the human rights situation in Central Asia since the adoption of the Strategy and concluded that “reinforced efforts” were needed in this area. The report pointed out, in particular, that more efforts are needed to ensure that the annual human rights dialogues conducted with the governments of the region become “ever more results-oriented and inclusive,” as well as to promote “human rights across the board as part of the broader reform process” in the region.

A December 2011 resolution adopted by the European Parliament⁵ likewise highlighted the “scant” human rights progress in the region and called for a more “differentiated and conditional” approach in the implementation of the Central Asia Strategy, whereby the level and nature of the EU’s engagement should depend on “measurable progress” by the Central Asian states in human rights and related fields. The resolution emphasised, among other things, that human rights-related questions should be included in all relevant areas of cooperation, and not limited to the human rights dialogues conducted with the governments of the region.

Improving EU human rights policies toward Central Asia

While the EU has acknowledged the need to reinforce human rights action under its Central Asia Strategy, there are differing opinions as to how this could best be done. Based on our experience and perspective as civil society organisations, we would like to make a number of recommendations⁶ for how we believe that the EU should go about its human rights policies in the region so as to ensure that they are as effective as possible in bringing about positive human rights change.

- The EU should **pursue a coherent approach to strengthening respect for human rights** in Central Asia. In accordance with its Lisbon Treaty commitment⁷ to promoting human rights in all areas of EU external action, as well as the *Agenda for Change*⁸, which emphasises the importance of good governance and human rights in EU development policy, it should integrate human rights issues into all fields of cooperation with the Central Asian governments. It should coordinate action on such issues taken within different initiatives

and programs, as well as by different actors. As underlined by the European Parliament⁹, the conduct of annual human rights dialogues with the governments of the region should not be used as an excuse not to address or act on human rights in other ways.

- The EU should be **consistent in addressing human rights** in its relations with the Central Asian governments and **stay true to its values** at all times, not allowing other interests in the fields of energy and security to serve as an excuse for downplaying or ignoring human rights on any occasion. By expressing human rights concerns in some cases, while downplaying them in others, the EU risks delivering the message to the Central Asian governments that it is ready to trade its values when the circumstances so require. This will undermine the credibility and impact of its human rights policies. Official representatives of EU member states should also refrain from expressing views that contradict and undermine common EU human rights positions.
- The EU should **raise human rights issues visibly and prominently** in its relations with the Central Asian governments and more frequently **take a public stand** on human rights issues in the region. While quiet diplomacy may work best in some situations, a higher degree of overall visibility will help in enhancing the profile and integrity of the EU as a human rights actor (including in the eyes of the Central Asian public) and help show that it is serious about human rights. The recent use of local delegation statements is a positive practice, which should be further encouraged, though should not become a substitute for statements issued at the highest level from Brussels. It is also important that high-ranking EU officials convey strong human rights messages in connection with official visits to the region.
- The EU should be **more transparent** about its human rights policies in Central Asia. Above all, it should **regularly consult with civil society actors and other stakeholders, and provide relevant and timely information** to them about its priorities and actions in this area, including with respect to the implementation of the revised EU Human Rights Strategy (which is expected to be endorsed in late June 2012) in relation to Central Asia, as well as the country-specific EU human rights strategies that have been developed for the Central Asian states. Such consultations and interactions are essential to enabling these actors to contribute in meaningful ways to EU human rights policies toward the countries of the region.
- As part of its implementation of country strategies for human rights in Central Asia, the EU should adopt and elaborate specific **objectives for human rights change** for each of the states in this region, drawing on recommendations made by civil society, the European Parliament, international human rights review bodies and other relevant actors when doing so. It should promote implementation of the objectives in a sustained and public manner and **use conditionality** to this end, thereby ensuring that the level and nature of its continued engagement with the Central Asian governments depends on measurable human rights progress, as emphasized by the European Parliament¹⁰.
- The EU should **insist on concrete and measurable human rights change** in the Central Asian countries and not be satisfied with window-dressing, i.e. measures that are taken by the governments of the region to create an impression of human rights progress but that do not

result in any meaningful positive change in practice (e.g. the adoption of legislation, action plans or programs that are not adequately or effectively implemented). Regular and thorough evaluation of human rights improvements in the countries of the region is of key importance in this regard.

- The EU should **reinforce and improve the impact of the human rights dialogues** it conducts with the governments of the region, among others, by adopting and publicising clearly defined objectives and priorities for the dialogues; involving civil society more closely in the dialogues (see more below); informing all relevant stakeholders about the discussions and outcomes of the dialogues; and ensuring that there is a systematic follow-up on the dialogues. The EU should also regularly assess the achievements of the dialogues in relation to their objectives, in line with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues,¹¹ which call for the EU to measure progress against objectives set before the start of the dialogues with a view to ensuring the added value of the dialogues. The EU should consider on this basis whether to reorient a dialogue if there is evidence it is not achieving added value, or even becoming an end in itself.
- The EU should, as a matter of practice, hold comprehensive preparatory meetings with both international NGOs and independent local groups (including exile groups where relevant) prior to its human rights dialogues with the Central Asian governments; **integrate civil society concerns and recommendations more prominently** into the dialogues; and invite civil society to participate in assessing the outcomes of the dialogues. The EU Civil Society seminars held in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan offer a platform for engagement with civil society groups on dialogue agenda items, but the seminars would benefit from a more careful preparation in consultation with participants (including with respect to the selection of topics) and a closer linkage to the official dialogues. The EU should ensure that issues discussed and recommendations agreed by seminar participants are adequately addressed during the official dialogues and that the implementation of civil society recommendations is effectively monitored and followed up on. Given the extremely repressive climate in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and the difficulties experienced in organizing Civil Society seminars there, the EU should consider organizing such events in nearby countries instead and inviting both activists who work in the region and exiled activists.
- The EU should also do more to proactively **engage with independent human rights activists** from Central Asia outside the human rights dialogues, systematically pursuing such consultations and input both through the EU delegations and EU member state embassies based in the region, and through Brussels-based EU institutions. Interaction with local human rights defenders is an important means for the EU to obtain first-hand information about developments in the Central Asian countries that can inform and guide its human rights policies toward the governments of the region, granted that this information is used and acted upon in a coordinated and effective way. Such interaction is also in line with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders¹², which call for a proactive policy toward human rights defenders, providing visible recognition to them and communicating support with activists, who are often subject to pressure and hostility by national authorities in the Central Asian countries.

- The EU should **continue to provide financial assistance** to human rights projects implemented by independent civil society groups in Central Asia. It should consider simplifying the process and requirements for applying for grants, on the basis of the example of other international donors that are perceived as having less demanding albeit rigorous requirements in this respect; funding more small-scale projects; and facilitating the organization of hands-on trainings on how to apply for grants with a view to enabling more local civil society groups to obtain assistance. Local groups are in a unique position to carry out projects that directly benefit local communities given their knowledge and understanding of situation, their on-the-ground experience and their local networks.
- The EU should **coordinate and streamline its engagement on human rights in Central Asia with efforts to promote democratic reform, rule of law, socio-economic development, anti-corruption measures** etc. as these are all closely related and mutually reinforcing objectives. Such an approach would ensure that action to promote human rights priorities is clearly linked with and an integral part of EU-funded cooperation and assistance programs that are implemented in related areas (e.g. in the framework of the new Rule of Law initiative). An essential component of this approach is ensuring that all EU-supported initiatives that affect human rights protection are implemented in a transparent manner and that civil society organizations are given an opportunity to have a say on the activities carried out. It is also crucial that projects implemented by local civil society groups are directly supported in the framework of EU assistance and development programs.
- The EU and its member states should ensure that **all EU-based companies that operate in the Central Asian countries, as well as foreign-based companies that are involved in trade between the EU and Central Asian countries are committed to upholding human rights values and anti-corruption practices** in their business dealings in the region, e.g. by aligning their operations with the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises¹³ and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights¹⁴. Moreover, in order to promote transparency and accountability, the EU should also require that oil, gas and mining companies with which it and its member states cooperate in Central Asia disclose the payments made to governments in the region on a country-by-country and project-by-project basis in their annual financial accounts, as called for by the Publish What You Pay civil society coalition¹⁵.

Responding to current human rights challenges: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Fundamental rights and freedoms remain under serious threat in Central Asia. In the sections below we describe major human rights problems currently existing in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to which we believe the EU should pay particular attention in its continued human rights action in the region. We also provide recommendations for reform steps we believe the EU should require the governments of these countries to take as part of a coherent, consistent and effective strategy of engagement aimed at holding the governments accountable to their international human rights obligations. Neither the descriptions of problems nor the recommendations are exhaustive in any way.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan continues to be ruled in an authoritarian way by President Nursultan Nazarbaev. The pro-presidential Nur Otan party remains essentially unchallenged even if parliamentary elections held in January 2012 formally ended its monopoly in the lower chamber of the law-making body. In spite of the hopes for human rights reform that were associated with Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE chairmanship, the human rights situation in the country has recently deteriorated rather than improved.

The Kazakhstani authorities have to date failed to ensure an impartial and thorough investigation of the December 2011 events in Zhanaozen in western Kazakhstan, when more than a dozen people died and some 100 were wounded as police used arms to put down riots. Widespread allegations of due process violations and torture and ill-treatment undermined the credibility of the trial against individuals accused of involvement in the riots and have given rise to serious concern about the verdicts announced in early June 2012. Among those convicted and sentenced to the longest prison terms (up to seven years) in this trial are several well-known members of the oil worker movement that launched a strike in western Kazakhstan in mid-2011. This reinforces the impression that they were punished for their role in these peaceful labour protests. A number of police officers have been convicted for "abuse of power" in connection with the law enforcement response to the riots. However, other officers alleged to have participated in the use of excessive force (as indicated by video material available) or to have given orders about it have not been held accountable.

Moreover, in the aftermath of the Zhanaozen events, the authorities have launched a renewed crackdown on the political opposition, which it has sought to blame for masterminding and fomenting the riots. A number of representatives of political opposition movements and opposition media have been summoned for interrogation, detained and criminally charged in the past few months. Opposition *Alga* party leader Vladimir Kozlov, *Alga* party activist Aizhangul' Amirova and opposition People's Front movement activist Serik Sapargali have been held in detention since January 2012 on spurious charges of "inciting social hatred" related to the Zhanaozen events. Two other opposition activists, Bolat Atabaev and Zhanbolat Mamai, facing the same charges were arrested on 15 June 2012. Preparations for the trial against these activists is currently under way, with the hearing expected to start at the earliest in July 2012. A suspension of the opposition Communist Party, which was ordered by court on questionable grounds during the run-up to the parliamentary elections, was prolonged in April 2012. The *Alga* party has repeatedly been denied registration.

Independent media and journalists also continue to be subjected to other forms of pressure, including civil defamation suits involving excessive claims for damages and physical attacks. Uralsk-based journalist Lukpan Akhmedyarov, who is known for articles critically examining the activities of officials and other public actors, as well as for organising and participating in anti-government protests, was the target of a brutal attack in April 2012. While the police have identified four suspects in connection with the attack, there are concerns that the investigation has not given due attention to allegations that the attack may have been politically motivated.

Internet sites containing information critical of authorities are regularly blocked in Kazakhstan and vague allegations of "extremism" have increasingly been used to justify restrictions on online

content. In the last few months, new repressive measures have been taken in response to peaceful opposition protests, including a series of so-called Disagreement Day rallies held in a number of cities across the country to protest political repression and demand reforms. Permission to hold these assemblies has been denied on arbitrary grounds and organizers and participants have been intimidated, detained, brought to court and fined or sentenced to administrative arrest.

A new harsh Religion Law, which was adopted in October 2011, introduced further restrictions on religious activities and retained the ban on unregistered religious communities, while making the process of registration more difficult and open to selective implementation. Among others, registration requires that religious communities have at least 50 members and go through an “expert review” aimed at determining whether their statutes and programs are consistent with the requirements of the law. Religious groups that already were registered when the law was adopted are required to re-register within one year or else they risk being liquidated. The adoption of the law has reinforced a pre-existing pattern of harassment of so-called non-traditional religious communities, who are subject among others to raids on their meetings, confiscation of religious literature, and warnings and fines for leading or participating in the activities of unregistered religious communities.

A series of prison riots in Kazakhstan in 2011 highlighted concerns about poor prison conditions and torture and ill-treatment of prisoners. The authorities, however, sought to respond to these developments primarily by stepping up security in prisons and transferred oversight of the prison system back from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Interior. This measure was criticised by human rights defenders.

In order to demonstrate human rights progress, the Kazakhstani authorities should be asked to take the following steps:

- Conducting a thorough and independent investigation into all aspects of the December 2011 events in western Kazakhstan and bringing to justice all officials responsible for injuries and loss of lives that could have been avoided.
- Promptly and impartially investigating all allegations of torture and ill-treatment against those charged with involvement in the Zhanaozen riots and ensuring that the convictions handed out to these individuals are reviewed in fair process. Dropping the charges against political opposition activists accused of “promoting social hatred” in connection with the Zhanaozen events and releasing those held in custody on such charges.
- Implementing recommendations on elections made by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and ensuring that political opposition parties are able to obtain registration, campaign, enjoy access to national TV and radio and participate in the political process on an equal footing with other parties.
- Abolishing existing restrictions on freedom of assembly (in legislation and practice) that are in violation of international standards and ensuring that peaceful anti-government protests can take place without undue interference by authorities or harassment of organizers and participants.
- Taking adequate measures to put an end to harassment of opposition media and journalists, including by dropping any politically motivated legal cases, establishing upper limits for the

amounts of moral damage that can be awarded in any defamation lawsuits, and ensuring impartial and thorough investigations into physical attacks against journalists.

- Revising the 2011 Religion Law in accordance with recommendations made by international and national experts, and promoting tolerance toward non-traditional minority religious communities.
- Taking effective steps toward safeguarding independence of the judiciary, fair trials and an end to torture, including by implementing recommendations made by UN human rights bodies, and reversing the decision to transfer oversight of prisons back to the Ministry of Interior.

Turkmenistan

Upon taking power following the death of long-time ruler *Turkmenbashi* in 2006, current Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov announced a reform agenda. However, most reform initiatives have only amounted to window-dressing and no meaningful overall democracy or human rights progress has taken place in the country during his years in office. At the same time, members of his government have publicly denied the existence of human rights problems in the country, as happened during the review of Turkmenistan by the UN Human Rights Committee in March 2012.

The Turkmen president, who was re-elected in sham elections held in February 2012, continues to dominate all branches of power and there is no openly functioning political opposition inside of the country. At the beginning of the year, a first-ever Law on Political Parties was adopted and efforts are currently under way to establish two new political parties aside the existing presidential one. However, this process is carried out under the auspices of the presidential administration, raising serious doubts as to whether the new parties will be advocating any independent positions, rather than just serving as instruments for creating an illusion of political pluralism. A purported outreach to exile opponents ahead of the presidential elections was not followed up by any concrete action to facilitate their return or ensure their safety upon return.

The Turkmen state-run media is tightly controlled and the internet remains heavily regulated and censored. Foreign websites that publish independent and critical information about developments in Turkmenistan are blocked and foreign social media sites are also unavailable. At the beginning of June 2012, the Turkmen web forum Ertir.com suddenly became inaccessible after being subjected to repeated hacker attacks. This forum, which has some 8000 registered users, is popular among the country's youth and features discussion on topics such as sports, movies and love but also to some extent on politically related issues. Access to the site was restored only in mid-June.

The few local journalists who contribute to independent foreign media such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, as well as members of civil society who speak up about problems existing in the country face intimidation and harassment. They are, inter alia, held under surveillance by security services, summoned for interrogation, "blacklisted" for travel abroad, and arrested and prosecuted on politically motivated grounds. While some individuals who have been apprehended on such grounds in the recent period have subsequently been released following international pressure, others remain behind bars. Among these are journalists and human rights defenders Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadziyev, who have been in prison since 2006.

The Turkmen authorities continue to promote government-controlled organizations in place of independent civil society groups, while international human rights NGOs are not allowed to work in the country. The Austria-based Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), which is well-known for its independent coverage of developments in Turkmenistan, has repeatedly been the target of cyber attacks, most recently on the eve of the February 2012 presidential elections. The acute risk of reprisal effectively discourages public protests against government policies in the country, with the last known attempt at a protest in 2011 having been quashed by police.

Ethnic minorities continue to face impediments in exercising their own language and culture, as well as in participating in public life, even if *Turkmenization* policies have been scaled back to some extent under the current president. When reviewing the situation in Turkmenistan earlier this year, the UN Committee against Racial Discrimination (CERD) called on the Turkmen authorities, among others, to ensure equal opportunities of all residents of the country in terms of all aspects of employment, increase access of children belonging to ethnic minorities to education in their own language, and to take specific measures for the preservation and development of the cultures of minority groups.¹⁶

Restrictive legislation on the practice of religion remains in force and members of religious minority communities continue to be singled out for persecution, such as raids on meetings held in private homes, confiscation of religious literature, and pressure to stop participating in the activities of their communities. Several religious believers are known to have been subjected to travel bans. No civilian alternative to compulsory military service exists and Jehovah's Witnesses continue to be imprisoned for their refusal to serve in the army on conscientious grounds. As of the end of May 2012, five conscientious objectors were known to be serving prison sentences.

Torture and ill-treatment are widespread, and prison conditions are deplorable. The whereabouts remain unknown of numerous individuals who were sentenced to lengthy prison terms after the November 2002 purported assassination attempt against late President Saparmurat Niyazov. The Turkmen authorities have failed to comply with the call made by international human rights bodies to grant independent observers unhindered access to all the country's prison and detention facilities. While the International Committee of the Red Cross has been allowed to visit two selected prison facilities during the past year, its representatives were reportedly not able to speak privately with inmates during either of these visits.

In order to demonstrate human rights progress, the Turkmen authorities should be asked to take the following steps:

- Promoting genuine democratic reform, ensuring that political parties independent of state structures may obtain registration under the new Law on Political Parties, and enabling exile opponents to return and take part in the political life of the country.
- Promoting the growth of privately owned media, ensuring that such media can operate independently, and refraining from censoring, blocking or restricting the use of the internet in ways that are contrary to international freedom of expression standards.
- Putting an end to the persecution of independent journalists, civil society activists and others who openly address problems in the country, including by abolishing arbitrary

restrictions on travel abroad (the use of so-called “black lists”) and releasing all individuals who have been imprisoned on politically motivated grounds.

- Allowing independent NGOs to obtain registration and operate freely, and ensuring that peaceful public protests can take place.
- Bringing legislation on religion into line with international standards, protecting religious minority communities from harassment, and stopping the practice of imprisoning conscientious objectors.
- Taking adequate steps to protect and promote the language, culture and public participation of ethnic minorities, including by implementing recommendations made by the UN CERD.
- Adopting effective measures aimed at eradicating torture and ill-treatment, including by investigating alleged disappearances in custody and granting the International Committee of the Red Cross unhindered access to all prison and detention facilities.

Uzbekistan

The human rights situation in Uzbekistan remains fundamentally repressive. President Islam Karimov, who was last re-elected in 2007 elections where he faced only token competition and a constitutional limitation on the allowed number of presidential terms was ignored, controls all branches of power, suppresses dissent and limits basic rights of citizens.

Only pro-presidential parties are able to operate openly in the country, and political opposition movements remain marginalised and divided, with their leaders living in exile abroad. The authorities tightly control the country’s media and try to prevent the circulation of information deemed unfavourable. The wave of protests in the Arab world has prompted new attempts to rein in the internet, whose users have increased rapidly in the last few years.

Members of the country’s small community of independent journalists and human rights defenders face ongoing harassment, ranging from surveillance and house arrest to physical assaults carried out by individuals believed to have been specifically recruited for this purpose and politically motivated charges and convictions.

Recent months have seen several new legal cases against independent journalists and human rights activists. Journalists Viktor Krymzalov and Elena Bondar were both given hefty fines after being convicted on spurious charges of “slandering” and “inciting national hatred”, respectively. Member of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders of Uzbekistan (IGIHRDU) Gul'naza Juldashaeva, who lives in the city of Chinaz, has been charged with extortion (article 165 of the Criminal Code) in what appears to be retaliation for her efforts to bring attention to suspected human trafficking cases involving local officials. If she is found guilty on these charges, she could face three or more years in prison.

Numerous journalists and human rights activists also continue to languish in prison in Uzbekistan despite a few recent releases apparently made as concessions to the international community. There are serious concerns about the health and well-being of these prisoners. Human rights activist Alisher Karamatov, who was released in April 2012 after serving close to six years of a nine-year sentence given to him on fabricated extortion charges, suffered a significant deterioration of

his health while in prison due to torture and mistreatment. The same is the case with other wrongfully imprisoned human rights defenders.

Having failed to obtain registration, most of the few human rights NGOs that operate in Uzbekistan carry out their work without legal status, which increases their vulnerability to harassment. One of the few international NGOs to have worked in Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch was forced out of the country in 2011. Small-scale peaceful pickets staged by known critics of the regime continue to be broken up by police, with participants being detained and fined. No mass protest has taken place in the country since the 2005 Andijan events. The Uzbek authorities have rejected calls for an independent and impartial investigation into this tragedy, when government troops killed hundreds of protestors.

Minority religious communities remain under pressure and the authorities continue their indiscriminate campaign against independent Muslims who practise their faith outside strict state control. In the past year, IGIHRDU has documented dozens of new cases involving arbitrary arrests, torture and ill-treatment, fabricated criminal cases and unfair trials against individuals branded and imprisoned as religious “extremists.” Relatives of alleged religious “extremists” also face harassment. In early June 2012, more than a dozen teachers with family members who have been convicted or charged on such grounds were dismissed apparently under pressure from local authorities in the city of Parkent. After the office of the Human Rights Ombudsman paid attention to the issue, the teachers were reinstated.

Torture and ill-treatment remain systematic in Uzbekistan and those charged on political and religious grounds are particularly vulnerable to abusive treatment. There are also regular reports of suspicious deaths in prison. In March 2012, IGIHRDU was informed about the sudden death of 41-year-old Sagdiev Abdurahman, who was serving a religious “extremism” sentence in a prison colony in the city of Navoi. Prison authorities claimed that he had died in fight with fellow inmates, but his relatives believe that the many wounds and bruises on his body were the result of torture.

While there has recently been growing international attention to the problem of the use of forced child labour in the annual cotton harvest in Uzbekistan, this practice continues and children are forced to work hard for little if any pay in the cotton fields, amid threats of reprisals for themselves and family if they refuse to participate, and with negative implications for their education, health and well-being.

In order to demonstrate human rights progress, the Uzbek authorities should be asked to take the following steps:

- Taking adequate measures to facilitate the conduct of free and fair elections, true division of power and an active political opposition.
- Ending harassment of independent journalists and human rights defenders, allowing peaceful protests, and enabling independent NGOs (including international NGOs) to obtain registration and work without hindrance.
- Immediately and unconditionally releasing all individuals who have been arrested or imprisoned on politically motivated charges.

- Ensuring that a thorough, independent and impartial international investigation is carried out into the 2005 Andijan events with a view to identifying, prosecuting and punishing those responsible for the killings of civilians.
- Putting an end to the persecution of members of minority religious communities, including Muslim believers who practice their faith in peaceful ways outside strict state controls, and ensuring that no one is punished for exercising his or her internationally protected right to freedom of religion.
- Adopting effective measures to implement recommendations made by the UN Committee against Torture and other international human rights bodies for how to prevent and punish torture, including by investigating all allegations of torture, as well as deaths in custody in a prompt, impartial and thorough manner and ensuring that the perpetrators of abuse are brought to justice.
- Ending the practice of using state-sponsored and forced child labour in the cotton harvest.

¹ The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/central_asia/docs/2010_strategy_eu_centralasia_en.pdf

² These recommendations have also been endorsed by a wider group of NGOs, see separate appeal, *Five Year Anniversary of EU Central Asia Strategy: Placing Human Rights at the Heart of EU Action*, at www.iphronline.org.

³ See Section II of the EU Central Asia Strategy.

⁴ Joint Progress Report by the Council and the European Commission to the European Council on the implementation of the EU Central Asia Strategy. Available at:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/10/st11/st11402.en10.pdf#page=2>

⁵ European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2011 on the state of implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2011-0588&language=EN>

⁶ See endnote 2.

⁷ Article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union, at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2008:115:0013:0045:EN:PDF>

⁸ "Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: An Agenda for Change", COM (2011) 637 final, October 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/development-policies/documents/agenda_for_change_en.pdf

⁹ Par. 12 of European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2011 on the state of implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia.

¹⁰ Par. 3 of resolution cited in previous endnote.

¹¹ The EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues state that the assessment of human rights dialogues "will involve assessing the [human rights] situation [in a given country] in relation to the objectives which the Union set itself before the start of the dialogue, and will examine how much added value has been provided by the dialogue". The Guidelines are available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/16526.en08.pdf>

¹² The EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders are available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/GuidelinesDefenders.pdf>

¹³ The last updated version of the Guidelines was endorsed by 42 OECD and non-OECD countries in May 2011, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/29/48004323.pdf>

¹⁴ These Guiding Principles were adopted by the UN Human Rights Council on 16 June 2011. Section II of them concerns "The corporate responsibility to protect human rights". See <http://www.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/ruggie/ruggie-guiding-principles-21-mar-2011.pdf>

¹⁵ This is a global coalition, with over 650 member organizations, campaigning for transparency in the payment, receipt and management of revenues from the oil, gas and mining industries. For more information, see <http://www.publishwhatyoupay.org/about>

¹⁶ The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Eightieth session, 13 February-9 March 2012, *Concluding Observations: Turkmenistan*, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/CERD.C.TKM.CO.6-7.pdf>