



**International  
Partnership**  
for Human Rights

Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer  
Hofburg, Vienna,  
Austria  
Via email: [heinz.fischer@hofburg.at](mailto:heinz.fischer@hofburg.at)

9 May 2015

Dear President Dr. Fischer,

We are writing to you on behalf of Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR, based in exile in Vienna) and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR, Brussels) on the occasion of your meeting with President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov of Turkmenistan in Vienna on 12 May 2015.

We would like to urge you to use this meeting to raise concerns about the human rights situation in Turkmenistan and seek concrete commitments from President Berdymukhammedov to address such issues.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that Turkmenistan remains one of the most repressive and closed countries in the world. It has been year after year featuring among the “worst of the worst” in the Freedom House ranking of [Freedom in the World](#), on par with countries such as North Korea and Saudi Arabia. Fundamental rights and freedoms are seriously restricted.

There is no real political opposition in the country, there are no independent media and the civil society environment is highly repressive. International human rights monitors, including UN human rights experts have been denied access.

Corruption is endemic and citizens continue to be subjected to arbitrary and unlawful measures taken by authorities, with little access to justice or remedy. Dozens of individuals convicted in flawed and politically motivated trials are known to have disappeared in prison, including individuals convicted for the alleged assassination attempt on the previous president in 2002.

Women, children, minorities, migrants and other vulnerable groups remain at particular risk of human rights violations. TIHR’s monitoring shows that the authorities have failed to bring about substantial improvements in education and other key areas of the rights of the child since President Berdymukhammedov took power in 2007. There are also serious concerns about continued practices of discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.

In view of the [human rights priorities](#) of Austrian foreign policy, as well as the commitment by the EU and its member states to integrate human rights into all political dialogue with third countries (as set out in the EU [Strategic Framework](#) and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy), we urge you to address these issues with President Berdymukhammedov. Given the current discussions on the plans for natural gas supply from Turkmenistan to Europe, we believe that it is imperative to stress the importance that Austria and other EU member states attach to human rights and rule of law in all its relations with Turkmenistan, including in the area of energy cooperation. We urge you to make clear to President

Berdymukhammedov that a deepening of relations requires real human rights progress by the Turkmen authorities.

In the attachment of this letter, we are sending you an overview of major current human rights concerns in Turkmenistan prepared by our organizations. It is based on monitoring conducted by TIHR, which works together with a network of activists inside the country, and provides more detailed information on the issues outlined above. If requested, we would be happy to provide additional information.

We thank you for your attention and wish you a constructive meeting with President Berdymukhammedov.

Sincerely,

Farid Tuhbatullin, TIHR Director  
Brigitte Dufour, IPHR Director