

August 30, 2010

Honorable Hillary Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary,

We are writing you about an important opportunity to raise awareness about conditions in Uzbekistani prisons and to seek amnesty for prisoners of conscience in that country. Each year on September 1st, Uzbekistan's day of independence, the government of President Islam Karimov customarily grants amnesty to a number of incarcerated persons. This event provides a fitting moment to call on the Government to address systemic problems in Uzbek prisons, including torture and ill treatment. We ask you to engage President Islam Karimov and the Uzbekistani government to take responsibility for these prisoners' basic human rights and safety and to grant amnesty to Uzbekistan's prisoners of conscience, which would constitute a major advancement in Uzbekistan's guaranteeing of fundamental human rights and freedoms.

It appears that the U.S. is poised to strengthen bilateral relations with Uzbekistan, which soured after the Andijon events of 2005. Enhanced dialogue with Uzbekistan also represents a chance to advance human rights within the context of what one might hope to be a matured relationship. For the last ten years, Freedom House has ranked Uzbekistan's government as one of the ten worst in the world for its treatment of its own citizens. Human Rights Watch points to Uzbekistan's "atrocious" human rights record and rampant "culture of impunity for torture," while Amnesty International, in its submission to the UN's Human Rights Committee, detailed several instances of torture, the summaries of which are attached. As you know, a more durable relationship with Uzbekistan will require engagement on issues of human rights in concert with other equities, and constructively addressing the state of prisons in the country is a valuable opportunity to discuss these concerns concretely.

As chronicled in our reports and those from other human rights organizations, detainees in Uzbekistan are denied the right to choose their own lawyer, and law enforcement routinely fail to inform detainees of their rights during pre-trial incarceration. Systematically, prisons are overcrowded, detainees lack proper medical care and nutrition, and the pervasiveness of diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis mean that even short stays in detention could be death sentences. As there are few mechanisms in place to guarantee that complaints will be addressed, as well as the real threat of retribution, detainees' families are often too fearful to notify authorities about the abuses they discover. Documented forms of abuse include beatings at the hands of both officials and hired prisoners; exposure to extreme temperatures; forced injections of psychotropic drugs; asphyxiation; and electric shock. While the Uzbekistani government continues to deny the existence of prisoners of conscience in the country, independent human rights groups place the number anywhere from fifteen to thirty. Among them figure such individuals as Khushodbek Usmonov – a 67-year old independent journalist who testified that while in custody, law enforcement beat him in the groin and abdomen with foreign objects, forced him to lie face-down naked, and threatened to rape him – and Yusuf Juma – a poet and political dissident who has been repeatedly burned with an electric teapot; denied food, water, and toilet facilities; and beaten by a number of prisoners at the behest of detention authorities.

It is our shared belief that the Uzbekistani government has a lot to gain from improving prison conditions in tandem with granting amnesty to prisoners of conscience, such as it did with politician Sanjar Umarov, the founder of Uzbekistan's largest opposition party, "The Sunshine Coalition." By doing so, the Uzbekistani government would reaffirm to the international community its commitment not only to the humane treatment of its own people, but also to human rights at large.

We respectfully urge you prioritize human rights in bilateral relations with the Government of Uzbekistan. Doing so will not only reaffirm our own commitment to the ideals of freedom, but also reinforce their importance to a government with which we seek to engage.

Sincerely,

Paula Schriefer, Director of Advocacy
Freedom House



T. Kumar, International Advocacy Director
Amnesty International



**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**

