

AI members only

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SURAN Coordinators

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Justice not revenge

The "forgotten countries" of Central Asia -
now in the spotlight as neighbours of Afghanistan

Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan



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1) Background and summary of the action

This action is part of AI's response to the current crisis following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA and subsequent military air strikes by the US-led coalition on targets in Afghanistan launched on 7 October. It focuses on the countries neighbouring Afghanistan -- the five Central Asian -- which gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have offered the coalition use of their airspace and military bases. Tajikistan, the only country in Central Asia with Russian border guards stationed at its border, received a green light from Russia for the country's cooperation with the USA. Reportedly, the first deployment of US ground troops arrived in Uzbekistan on 6 October. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have also offered their airspace. Turkmenistan has stated that it was willing to cooperate, but was not planning to give permission to the coalition to use its bases for non-humanitarian military action.

The current crisis may have an immense impact on the region of Central Asia. Possible scenarios include that the USA and other coalition participants may turn a blind eye to human rights violations committed by Central Asian governments following the states' offer to support the military response to the 11 September events in the USA. It is feared that particularly Uzbekistan may use the "international fight against terrorism" as an excuse to continue to clamp down on the internal Islamic opposition. Possible scenarios also include a major refugee crisis with more Afghans heading towards Central Asia.

This action focuses on AI's two main concerns at the current time: The BACKLASH the current crisis may cause in Central Asia, and issues surrounding REFUGEES fleeing Afghanistan.

Backlash

It is feared that the proclaimed "international fight against terrorism" may be used by Central Asian governments to further undermine respect for human rights. It may lead to further restriction of the rights of particularly vulnerable groups and individuals, such as members and alleged supporters of banned Islamic opposition parties and movements, independent human rights organizations, Afghan refugees, ethnic minorities, in particular Uighurs, and those who object to military service on conscientious grounds.

It is feared that Uzbekistan may use the "international fight against terrorism" as an opportunity to further clamp down on members of the country's internal opposition, with greater impunity than ever before. Most likely targets are members as well as alleged supporters of Islamic groups which are banned in Uzbekistan, including those who peacefully exercise their right of freedom of expression. The country has a track record of clamping down on dissent. Thousands of alleged supporters or sympathizers of banned Islamic opposition parties or movements, including members of their families, have been detained or sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in Uzbekistan. In virtually all the cases that have come to AI's attention over the last five years, those detained have been denied prompt access to a lawyer of their choice, to their families and to medical assistance. Those with the responsibility to do so -- procurators, courts at all levels and the parliamentary ombudsman -- have persistently failed to conduct timely, full and independent investigations into the widespread allegations of torture and ill-treatment. According to independent and credible sources, self-incriminating evidence reportedly extracted as a result of torture has routinely been admitted as evidence in trial proceedings and has provided the primary basis for a guilty verdict in many of the cases reviewed by AI. Death sentences were imposed on some of the people tried in connection with bomb explosions in February 1999 in unfair trials - all were reportedly executed. Also, in November 2000 the Supreme Court sentenced Takhir Yuldash and Juma Namangani, the alleged leaders of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), to death in their absence. They were convicted

of terrorism and treason and of causing the death of 73 people in armed incursions and in the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent.

The authorities attributed the bombings to banned Islamic opposition groups, in particular the IMU. The clampdown on perceived Islamic opposition parties and movements has also extended to members and suspected supporters of the banned secular political opposition parties *Erk* and *Birlik*, as well as independent human rights monitors.

Another group of people that AI believes to be particularly at risk of human rights violations is the Uighur population of Central Asia. AI believes that persecution of Uighurs in Central Asia will intensify following the events of 11 September in the USA. Uighurs have been increasingly accused of sympathizing with and even supporting the banned Islamic opposition movements in Central Asia over the past few years. Uighurs have frequently been arbitrarily arrested, tortured and ill-treated by the authorities in Central Asia, and some forcibly deported to China, where they are also at risk of human rights violations, including the death penalty.

Refugees

It is feared that the number of people fleeing towards the borders with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will dramatically increase following the October 7 start of air strikes on Afghanistan. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is preparing for the flight of approximately 50,000 Afghan refugees to Tajikistan, and another 50,000 to Turkmenistan. Tajikistan closed its borders to Afghan refugees fleeing fighting within Afghanistan in September 2000. Around 10,000 refugees have been stranded in particularly harsh conditions on promontories on the Tajik-Afghan border since November 2000. Fears that IMU fighters may enter the country along with those Afghans fleeing the conflict have prompted Uzbekistan to seal and reinforce its borders. Turkmenistan has also sealed its borders with Afghanistan.

AI calls upon countries neighbouring Afghanistan to comply with their obligations under the principle of *non-refoulement* and keep their borders open to refugees fleeing Afghanistan. Amnesty International acknowledges that the economic situation in most Central Asian republics may pose difficulties for them to accept large numbers of refugees. For example, according to a statement by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on 19 September 2001, half of Tajikistan's population is facing starvation because of a prolonged drought. The Tajik authorities have expressed fears that allowing refugee camps to be built on its territory may create resentment among the local population, who would not have access to similar humanitarian aid and shelter.

The Central Asian states should not, simply because of their geographic location, have to bear a disproportionate share of the responsibility for providing protection and assistance to the refugees. Other states, too, have a responsibility to provide emergency, financial and technical assistance to assist neighbouring countries in fulfilling their obligation to provide protection to the refugees, at the same time as fulfilling their responsibilities to their own populations.

* For more detailed information on AI's past and current concerns on Central Asia, please consult the external document that accompanies this action (AI Index: EUR 4/002/2001), as well as entries on the Central Asian states from AI's *Concerns in Europe*, that are attached with this action (AI Index: EUR 01/003/2001).

* We have posted a photo on the crisis website that you can use for your campaigning on this action. It features Afghan children at a refugee camp near the village of Khaga Bawden in Northern Afghanistan, some 15 kilometres from the Afghan-Tajik border.

Website address: <http://web.amnesty.org/11september.htm>

2) Distribution

This action is for SURAN coordinators and the SURAN network. It is also being sent to AI Section Campaign/Crisis Response coordinators to be adapted for use in Section lobbying and campaigning.

Campaign coordinators are asked to copy this action to home government lobbyists, outreach coordinators, refugee coordinators and others involved in the crisis work.

Coordinators should contact their section offices before approaching home governments and national media.

Action should be taken as soon as possible after receipt of this action.

3) AI's key messages

Backlash

- **Uzbekistan** must not use the "international fight against terrorism" as an opportunity to continue its clampdown on Islamic and secular political opposition groups.
- The **Central Asian** countries must not use security concerns as a pretext for failing to respect and protect fundamental human rights. They have to ensure fundamental human rights and freedoms of groups particularly at risk of human rights violations, such as members or alleged supporters of banned Islamic groups, independent human rights organizations, Afghan refugees, ethnic minorities, in particular Uighurs, and conscientious objectors.
- **Your home governments** must remind the Central Asian states of their states' international obligation to respect fundamental human rights.

Refugees

- The **Central Asian countries** must open their borders to civilians fleeing Afghanistan.
- **The international community** must provide the necessary support to the Central Asian countries to enable them to receive and provide protection and assistance to refugees from Afghanistan.

4) Recommended actions

Recommended actions given in this Action circular include **home government lobbying, approaches to Central Asian governments, media and outreach.**

For home government lobbying, approach your Head of Government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Letters to Central Asian governments should be sent to the addresses that you find at the end of this action. Please write your appeals in English, Russian, or your own language.

Please send a copy of your letters to the office of the UNHCR in your country.

In consultation with your Section you may also want to approach the embassies of Central Asian states to your country.

Depending on the situation in your country you may not find all recommendations suitable. Please feel free to select recommendations and develop ideas based on AI's key messages.

In approaches to Central Asian governments as well as your home government

- state that AI has condemned in the strongest terms the attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001 and expresses its sympathy for the families of victims of the attack. AI has urged the international community to find all the necessary means of achieving justice in full accordance with international human rights standards and not to resort to the use of the death penalty;

Additional recommendations for approaches of your home government

- state that you are concerned at the impact the current crisis may have on the human rights situation in Central Asia; and that you would like to draw their particular attention to the following issues:
- state that in the past measures taken in response to threats to regional and national security by some of the Central Asian authorities, in particular Uzbekistan, were disproportionate and discriminatory and in contravention of international human rights standards;
- state that AI is concerned that the Central Asian states may use the "international fight against terrorism" as an excuse to clamp down on their internal opposition and/or restrict human rights of particularly vulnerable groups, such as members or alleged members of banned Islamic opposition groups, human rights organizations, Afghan refugees, Uighurs, and conscientious objectors;
- **ask your government to urge the Central Asian governments not to restrict human rights that they are obliged to observe under international human rights law;** in particular, urge them to ensure that fundamental human rights and freedoms of the groups identified above be respected;
- **urge the authorities of your country to fulfil their international obligation to share responsibility for providing protection and assistance to Afghan refugees,** particularly during this time of crisis. This includes providing support to UN agencies and NGOs working to protect refugees in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan, and also Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, so that these states have adequate resources to live up to their responsibility to open their borders to civilians fleeing Afghanistan; ask them to encourage other donor governments to also provide support;
- ask your government to inform you what steps they have taken or will take to ensure that the current crisis has no negative impact on the human rights situation in Central Asia.

Additional recommendations for approaches of Central Asian governments

- state that AI recognizes that governments have the obligation to ensure the safety of their citizens. However, any measures taken by the government must be in accordance with international human rights standards;
- urge the authorities to ensure that fundamental human rights and freedoms be respected, particularly with regard to members of independent human rights organizations, members and alleged supporters of banned Islamic groups (only in letters to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), Afghan refugees, ethnic minorities, in particular Uighurs, and conscientious objectors;

- state that AI calls on the authorities not to encourage public statements that incite identity-based and other violations of human rights;
- urge the authorities to open their borders to civilians fleeing Afghanistan. Turning back civilians from Afghanistan would be a violation of their obligations under the principle of *non-refoulement*, which includes non-rejection at the border;
- inform the authorities that AI is calling upon the international community to fulfil their obligation to share responsibility for providing protection and assistance to Afghan refugees seeking protection in the Central Asian states; however, stress also that the Central Asian countries have an obligation to allow the refugees entry and provide protection, which cannot be held to be contingent on an international responsibility-sharing program;
- state that AI believes that justice and security will best be served by respect for human rights.

5) Media / publicity

Please inform the media about the human rights situation and AI's key messages in the 'forgotten countries' of Central Asia. Please circulate external documents on Central Asia that are attached with this action as widely as possible.

Letters to local and national newspapers, highlighting AI's message are important at this time, as well as opinion pieces where appropriate.

Please coordinate any media work very closely with those responsible for media work in your sections.

Please note that all external materials prepared as part of this Crisis Response will be posted on the following website: <http://web.amnesty.org/11september.htm>

6) Outreach

Please distribute as widely as possible our external material on Central Asia that is attached with this action to anybody who may be interested / works on any of the following issues or groups of people (as these groups were identified by AI to be currently most at risk of human rights violations):

- Afghan refugees or refugees in general;
- Human rights defenders;
- Conscientious objectors;
- Uighurs (maybe there is a diaspora community in your country);
- Members or alleged supporters of the Islamic opposition, e.g. the party *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* (for more information on this party, please consult the external document EUR 4/002/2001 attached with this action);
- The region of Central Asia in general.

Country coordinators (possibly in conjunction with **SURAN coordinators**) are encouraged to advise groups and Sections as to useful contacts and opportunities for outreach in your country.

Sections and groups are encouraged to contact AI Central Asia country coordinator/s in their Section (if there are any) as he/she may be able to advise what organizations and individuals it may be useful to reach out to.

Groups and country coordinators are encouraged to design outreach strategies in conjunction with refugee coordinators in their Section regarding approaches to refugee organizations.

It would be good if **groups and coordinators** contacted local branches of political parties, as well as your local representative in Parliament (if there is one) and let them know of AI's concerns in Central Asia.

If you want to cooperate and share platforms with other organizations on issues featured in this action, we recommend that you refer to current AI guidelines on joining coalitions and platforms: *Policy and Guidelines on Cooperative Activities between Amnesty International and the Human Rights Movement* (AI Index: ORG 20/01/96), which will give you some ideas on the parameters for joint activities with others.

7) Materials

- *Concerns in Europe January-June 2001*; AI Index: EUR 01/003/2001 (Entries on Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakstan), public
- *Uzbekistan: The rhetoric of human rights protection: Briefing for the United Nations Human Rights Committee* (AI Index EUR: 62/006/2001), public
- *Background on Tajikistan: Refugees from Afghanistan* (AI Index EUR 60/006/2001 - News Service Nr. 168), public
- *We must stand up for human rights* (AI Index ACT 30/023/2001 - News Service Nr. 171), public
- List of Useful Addresses for approaches of Central Asian governments (you find the list at the end of this action). for AI members only
- Map of Central Asia. for AI members only

* If you would like to get more background information on Central Asia: Please ask the SURAN coordinator or a country coordinator working on Central Asia in your Section to send you a compilation of entries taken from AI's *Concerns in Europe* bulletin on Central Asian countries covering the past three years. If you don't have coordinators working on this region in your Section, contact jsurroca@amnesty.org.

8) Last but not least

Please send any replies you receive from Central Asian governments to the South Caucasus and Central Asia Research & Campaign team at the IS as soon as possible.

Also pass on any positive and negative statements by political leaders in your countries around this action, which you think could be used in our campaigning.

For your information: Upcoming AI action on Afghanistan

The Afghanistan team is working on an Action circular focussing on the protection of civilians in Afghanistan and Afghan refugees. It'll probably be issued later this week. The external paper to go with the action has already been published: *Afghanistan: Protect Afghan Civilians and Refugees*; ASA 11/012/2001

List of useful addresses for letter-writing to Central Asian governments

When writing to the following officials it may helpful to include both the Russian and the English version of the addresses. You can re-format the addresses to use them as labels.

Tajikistan

President of the Republic of Tajikistan
Imamali Sharipovich RAKHMONOV

Имамали Шарипович РАХМОНОВ

Respublika Tajikistan
g. Dushanbe
pr. Rudaki 80
Apparat Prezidenta Respubliki
Tajikistan
Prezidentu RAKHMONOVU I.Sh.

Республика Таджикистан
г. Душанбе
пр. Рудаки 80
Аппарат Президента Республики
Таджикистан
Президенту РАХМОНОВУ И.Ш.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan
Talbak Nazarovich NAZAROV

Талбак Назарович НАЗАРОВ

Respublika Tajikistan
734051 g. Dushanbe 7
pr. Rudaki, 42
Ministerstvo inostrannykh del
Respubliki Tajikistan
Ministru NAZAROVU T.

Республика Таджикистан
34051 г. Душанбе
пр. Рудаки, 42
Министерство иностранных дел
Республики Таджикистан
Министру НАЗАРОВУ Т.

Turkmenistan

President of Turkmenistan
Saparmurad Atayevich NIYAZOV

Сапармурад Атаевич НИЯЗОВ

Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
Apparat Prezidenta
Prezidentu Turkmenistana NIYAZOVU S.A.

Туркменистан
744000 г. Ашгабат
Аппарат президента
Президенту Туркменистана НИЯЗОВУ С.А.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan

Rashit Ovezgeldiyevich MEREDOV

Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
pr. Magtymguly, 83
Ministerstvo inostrannykh
del Turkmenistana
Ministru MEREDOVU R.

Рашит Овезгелдиевич МЕРЕДОВ

Туркменистан
744000 г. Ашгабат
пр. Магтымгулы, 83
Министерство иностранных
дел Туркменистана
Министру МЕРЕДОВУ Р.

UzbekistanPresident of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Islam Abduganiyevich KARIMOV

Respublika Uzbekistan
700163 g. Tashkent
ul. Uzbekistanskaya, 43
Rezidentsia prezidenta
Prezidentu Respubliki Uzbekistan
KARIMOVU I.A.

Ислам Абдуганиевич КАРИМОВ

Республика Узбекистан
700163 г. Ташкент
ул. Узбекистанская
Резиденция президента
Президенту Республики Узбекистан
КАРИМОВУ И.А.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Abdulaziz Khafizovich KOMILOV

Respublika Uzbekistan
700029 g. Tashkent
pl. Mustakillik, 5
Ministerstvo inostrannykh del
Respubliki Uzbekistan
Ministru KOMILOVU A.Kh.

Абдулазиз Хафизович КОМИЛОВ

Республика Узбекистан
700029 г. Ташкент
пл. Мустакиллик, 5
Министерство иностранных дел
Республики Узбекистан
Министру КОМИЛОВУ А.Х.

KazakstanPresident of the Republic of Kazakstan

Nursultan Abishevich NAZARBAYEV

Respublika Kazakhstan
473000 g. Astana
ul. Mira 11
Apparat Prezidenta
Prezidentu Respubliki Kazakhstan
NAZARBAYEVU N.A.

Нурсултан Абишевич НАЗАРБАЕВ

Республика Казахстан
473000 г. Астана
ул. Мира 11
Аппарат Президента
Президенту Республики Казахстан
НАЗАРБАЕВУ Н.А.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Yerlan IDRISOV

Ерлан ИДРИСОВ

Respublika Kazakhstan
473000 g. Astana
ul. Mira, 10
Ministerstvo inostrannykh
del Respubliki Kazakhstan
Ministru IDRISOVU E.

Республика Казахстан
473000 г. Астана
ул. Мира, 10
Министерство иностранных
дел Республики Казахстан
Министру ИДРИСОВУ Е.

Kyrgyzstan

President of the Kyrgyz Republic

Askar Akayevich AKAYEV

Аскар Акаевич АКАЕВ

Kyrgyzskaya Respublika
720003 g. Bishkek
Prospekt Chuy, 205
Dom pravitelstva
Prezidentu AKAYEVU A.A.

Кыргызская Республика
720003 г. Бишкек
Проспект Чуй, 205
Дом правительства
Президенту АКАЕВУ А.А.

Head of the Foreign Affairs Department in President's office

Askar AITMATOV

Аскар АИТМАТОВ

Kyrgyzskaya Respublika
720003 g. Bishkek
Prospekt Chuy, 205
Dom pravitelstva
Otdel inostrannyikh delom pri
Prezidente Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki
Otvetsvennomu sekretaryu AITMATOVU A.

Кыргызская Республика
720003 г. Бишкек
Проспект Чуй, 205
Дом правительства
Отдел инострачных делом при
Президенте Кыргызской Республики
Ответственному секретарю АИТМАТОВУ А.

