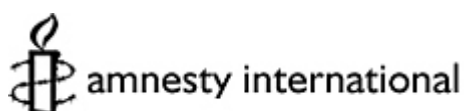


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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Uzbekistan

REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN

Head of state: Islam Karimov
Head of government: Shavkat Mirzioiev
Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes
Population: 27.5 million
Life expectancy: 67.6 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 63/53 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 96.9 per cent

The authorities persisted in their refusal to allow an independent, international investigation into the mass killing of protesters in Andizhan in 2005. Human rights defenders and journalists continued to be targeted, and some were sentenced to prison terms after unfair trials. Dozens of members of minority religious Islamic groups were given long prison terms after unfair trials. The space for freedom of religion and belief contracted further. In waves of arbitrary detentions, the security forces swept up a range of individuals and their relatives suspected of involvement with banned Islamist parties and armed groups accused of attacks throughout the country. Thousands of people convicted of involvement with Islamic movements and Islamist parties remained imprisoned in harsh and life-threatening conditions. Reports of torture or other ill-treatment continued.

International scrutiny

Four years after the killing of hundreds of mainly peaceful demonstrators by the security forces in Andizhan on 13 May 2005, the authorities still refused to initiate or allow an independent, international investigation into the events. The government failed to release all imprisoned human rights defenders or meet other human rights benchmarks set by the EU in 2005 when it imposed a visa ban on 12 officials and an arms embargo following the killings. The government considered the matter closed, as it had informed a UN Universal Periodic Review of human rights in December 2008 when its representatives once more denied the use of excessive or disproportionate force.

In October the EU unconditionally lifted the arms embargo on Uzbekistan despite the

government's failures to meet the EU's human rights benchmarks.

Counter-terror and security

New waves of arbitrary detentions followed reported attacks in the Ferghana Valley and the capital, Tashkent, in May and August and the killings of a pro-government imam and a high-ranking police officer in Tashkent in July. The authorities blamed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the unregistered Islamist Hizb-ut-Tahrir party, banned in Uzbekistan, for the attacks and killings. The IJU claimed responsibility for attacks on a police station, a border checkpoint and a government office in Khanabad on 26 May, as well as a suicide bombing at a police station in Andizhan the same day. At least three people died in a shoot-out between unidentified armed men and security forces in Tashkent on 29 August. In September at least 90 men were detained during a counter-terrorism operation in Dzhizzakh.

Among the dozens detained as suspected members or sympathizers of the IMU, the IJU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir were men and women who attended unregistered mosques, studied under independent imams, had travelled or studied abroad, or had relatives who lived abroad or were suspected of affiliation to banned Islamist groups. Many were believed to have been detained without charge or trial for lengthy periods. There were reports of torture and unfair trials.

- In September, at the start of the first trial of suspects in the 26 May attacks in Khanabad, human rights activists reported that the trial was closed, despite earlier assurances by the Prosecutor General that it would be open and fair.
- At least 30 men were arrested in October in Sirdaria on suspicion of involvement in the July killings in Tashkent and of being members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Relatives of some of the accused said the men had no connections with Hizb-ut-Tahrir or armed groups but merely practised their faith in unregistered mosques. In October relatives alleged that some of the accused had been tortured in pre-trial detention in an attempt to force them to confess to participating in the July killings. One mother said her son's face was swollen and his body covered in bruises, that needles had been inserted in the soles of his feet and electric shocks applied to his anus, and that he had difficulty eating, standing and walking.

Torture and other ill-treatment

There were continued reports of widespread torture or other ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners, and the authorities failed in most cases to conduct prompt and impartial investigations into torture allegations. Several thousand people convicted of involvement with Islamic movements and Islamist parties banned in Uzbekistan continued to serve long prison terms under conditions that amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

- In January an appeals court in Tashkent upheld the prison sentences of up to 17 years of four police officers convicted in December 2008 of torture. The officers had been convicted of killing 30-year-old Muzaffar Tuichev in the town of Angren in March 2008. Relatives said he had been detained to extort money from him, and that up to 15 police officers had beaten and tortured him for several hours.
- Poet and government critic Yusuf Dzhuma, sentenced to five years' imprisonment in April 2008 for allegedly resisting arrest and causing bodily harm, was said in November to be emaciated, ill and barely able to walk. He was reportedly held in punishment cells for periods of up to 11 days, and on one occasion handcuffed, hung by his hands from the ceiling and repeatedly beaten. He told his family that, during a visit to Yaslik prison camp by delegates of the ICRC, he had been transferred to a prison in Nukus, denied food and drink, refused access to a toilet and held naked in very cold conditions.

- In November the independent human rights organization Ezgulik reported that two sisters arrested in Tashkent in May on charges of hooliganism and robbery were repeatedly raped in custody by police officers. Their family said the charges were fabricated. They were subsequently sentenced to six and seven years in prison. One of the sisters reportedly became pregnant as a result of the rapes and tried to kill herself. In December the General Prosecutor's office said it would investigate.

Human rights defenders

Human rights defenders and independent journalists continued to be harassed, beaten and detained, although the authorities repeatedly denied this.

Although some human rights defenders were conditionally released in 2008 and 2009, others remained in prison following conviction in previous years.

- At least 10 human rights defenders were still held in cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions, serving long prison terms imposed after unfair trials. They had limited access to relatives and legal representatives, and were reportedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated.

At least three human rights defenders were sentenced to long prison terms during the year on allegedly fictitious charges brought to punish them for their work, in particular for defending farmers' rights.

- The health of 60-year-old Norboi Kholzhigitov, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan serving a 10-year prison sentence imposed in 2005 for libel and fraud, deteriorated so seriously that his family feared for his life. The charges against him were reportedly fabricated to punish him for his human rights activities on behalf of farmers. He was denied appropriate medical care for diabetes and high blood pressure, but was transferred to a prison hospital in December.
- In July Dilmurod Saidov, a journalist and human rights defender, was sentenced to 12 years and six months in prison for fraud and bribery after an unfair trial. He was believed to have been imprisoned for defending the rights of farmers in the Samarkand region and exposing corruption by local authorities. He was said to be gravely ill in prison with tuberculosis. During his trial, all the prosecution witnesses withdrew their accusations, saying that the prosecuting authorities had forced them to make false statements. An appeals court upheld the sentence in October.
- In October Farkhad Mukhtarov, a long-standing member of the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, was sentenced after a reportedly unfair trial to five years in prison for bribery and fraud relating to property deals. The charges were believed to have been politically motivated to punish him for his human rights activities. An appeal court upheld the sentence.

Human rights activists and journalists were summoned for police questioning, placed under house arrest or routinely monitored by uniformed or plain-clothes officers. Others reported being beaten by the police or by people suspected of working for the security forces. Relatives also alleged that they were threatened and harassed.

- In April Elena Urlaeva, a leading member of the Human Rights Alliance, was assaulted by two unidentified men as she was leaving her home with her five-year-old son early in the morning. She said they threatened her with a knife, beat her and asked why she was still in the country. The same week her son sustained concussion and bruising after being beaten by an unidentified young man at a playground. She was among a group of human rights defenders who were prevented by police from publicly commemorating the fourth anniversary of the

Andizhan killings and detained as they left their homes on the morning of 13 May. Seven were detained at police stations for over seven hours; others were held under house arrest.

- Bakhtior Khamroev and Mamir Azimov, members of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, were briefly detained in Dzhizzakh in November to prevent them meeting Bakhodir Choriev, a recently returned exile and leader of the unregistered political opposition movement Birdamlik. Bakhtior Khamroev was reportedly punched in the face by a plain-clothes police officer and dragged from the car in which he was sitting with Bakhodir Choriev, who was also assaulted when he got out of the car. The same day Mamir Azimov was taken to a district police station for questioning about the intended meeting. He said officers punched him in the kidneys and slapped his head, made him stand with his legs apart holding a chair above his head for over an hour, and threatened that his legs and arms would be broken if he sought medical help on release or reported the ill-treatment. Bakhodir Choriev was forced to leave the country in December.
- In December a researcher with the international NGO Human Rights Watch was assaulted in the town of Karshi by an unidentified attacker, then detained by police and deported from Uzbekistan. At least three human rights activists she had intended to meet in Karshi and Margilan were briefly detained.

Freedom of religion

Religious communities continued to be under strict control by the government, which restricted their right to freedom of religion. Those most affected were members of unregistered groups such as Christian Evangelical congregations and Muslims worshipping in unregistered mosques.

- Suspected followers of the Turkish Muslim theologian, Said Nursi, were convicted in a series of trials. The charges against them included membership or creation of an illegal religious extremist organization and publishing or distributing materials threatening the social order. According to independent religious experts, Said Nursi represented a moderate and non-violent interpretation of Islam. By October at least 68 men had been sentenced to prison terms of between six and 12 years following seven unfair trials. Appeals against the sentences were rejected.

More trials were reportedly pending at the end of the year but it was not clear how many more individuals had been detained. Reportedly, some of the verdicts were based on confessions obtained under torture in pre-trial detention; defence and expert witnesses were not called; access to the trials was in some cases obstructed; and other trials were closed. Before the start of the trials national television denounced the accused as "extremists" and "a threat to the country's stability", compromising their right to be presumed innocent before trial.

Amnesty International reports

- Uzbekistan: Submission to the Human Rights Committee, 96th session, (EUR 62/002/2009)
- Uzbekistan: Health condition of POC deteriorating, Norboi Kholzhigitov (EUR 62/003/2009)

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