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Given the restrictions placed on the media, civil society and human rights work in Uzbekistan, it is hard to get a clear picture of the situation of minorities within the country. HRW reported in 2011 that in recent years, arrests and persecution of political and human rights activists have increased, and credible reports of arbitrary detention and torture of detainees, including several suspicious deaths in custody, have continued. HRW itself was forced to close its office in Uzbekistan in June. However, the country's continued strategic importance as an entry point to Afghanistan appears to have meant that NATO countries feel obliged to tone down their criticism of the country's human rights situation.

Tight state control continues to curb any potential retaliatory action against Uzbekistan's ethnic Kyrgyz minority following the ethnic violence of 2010 and ongoing discrimination faced by ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. A small demonstration held by a local human rights group in Tashkent to mark the anniversary of the ethnic conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan and protest the continuing discrimination faced by Uzbeks resulted in 15 activists being briefly detained in June. Nevertheless, there have been reports of ethnic Kyrgyz leaving Uzbekistan for Kyrgyzstan in 2011, particularly the Fergana Valley provinces of Jalalabad and Osh, in fear of retaliation.

Uzbekistan's already strained relationship with Tajikistan has deteriorated in recent years, partly due to the belief that a new hydroelectric dam being built upstream in

Tajikistan would reduce Uzbekistan's water supplies. This has reportedly led to the Uzbek minority facing increasing pressure inside the country.

This year has seen ethnic Tajik nationals of Tajikistan working in Uzbekistan coming under suspicion. A former metallurgist was sentenced by a military court in August to 12 years in prison for espionage. His lawyer denied the accusations. In September, another ethnic Tajik was reportedly deported for inciting ethnic hatred; the man denied having been involved in Tajik-Uzbek issues.

The situation of religious minorities remains difficult in Uzbekistan due to tight state control of religion. According to Forum 18, followers of all faiths are subject to National Security Service surveillance, which can often be highly intrusive, as well as the use of informers inside religious communities. Muslims who wear atypical clothing or longer beards, and Protestants, appear particularly vulnerable. In 2011, Protestants had religious literature seized and destroyed, were fined, and prevented from leaving the country after importing religious literature. Meanwhile, a scheduled visit by the Russian Orthodox patriarch in November was postponed, reportedly because the government disagreed with the appointment of a bishop for the country. As of spring 2012, there was no indication when the visit might take place. Many religious groups remain unable or unwilling to officially register, while those that do operate legally continue to be pressurized to prevent children attending worship and not to proselytize.

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