

We will continue to monitor the progress in the Turkmen parliament of proposals for reforming the penitentiary and juvenile justice system, the mechanisms of judicial protection, improving legislation on religious organisations, and on media regulation.

Uzbekistan



While some positive steps have been observed in 2009, serious concerns remain about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. Little progress has been made towards implementing

the recommendations accepted by Uzbekistan at its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in December 2008.

In October, EU Member States took the unanimous decision not to renew the remaining sanctions on Uzbekistan, which had been imposed following the events in Andizhan in May 2005. This decision was made with a view to encouraging the Uzbek authorities to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and the human rights situation on the ground.

The EU remains ready to strengthen relations with Uzbekistan and help the Uzbek authorities improve the human rights situation. In this respect, we hope that agreement can be reached with the Uzbek authorities for the EU to open a full delegation office in Tashkent, to better drive forward increased engagement.

Freedom of Expression

Serious restrictions on freedom of expression remained in place in 2009. Although formal censorship was abolished in 2002, self-censorship and new laws continue to prevent criticism of the government. Internet service providers must use the state-controlled telecom operator, enabling the blocking of selected websites, including the BBC. Journalists have reported being beaten and detained, or otherwise harassed, by police or security services.

In July, Dilmurod Saidov, a journalist who had reported on alleged government agricultural abuses, was sentenced to 12½ years in prison on charges of extortion and forgery. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists' 2009 Prison Census Report, this took the number of imprisoned journalists in Uzbekistan to seven, the 6th highest in the survey.

Few international NGOs are able to operate in Uzbekistan because the authorities withhold accreditation to foreign NGO staff. Human Rights Watch (HRW) continues to operate without a full time representative in the country as the government has refused to grant accreditation to the organisation's previous three candidates, and banned the latest applicant from entering the country. In meetings with Uzbek officials the British Embassy has urged the Uzbek government to promote greater pluralism of views in the country, including through accreditation of an HRW representative.

Freedom of Religion

Legislation in Uzbekistan guarantees religious freedom, but the reality is different. The Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations (1998) grants rights only to registered groups and bans proselytising. Registration is a complex and lengthy process, and officially registered "religious organisations" are subject to tight legal controls. All religious activity by unregistered groups is criminalised, leaving peaceful groups vulnerable to raids on their homes and meetings by the police and security services. They can also face interrogation, fines and even imprisonment. Many groups report having been denied registration on spurious grounds. Followers of Islam outside the state-sponsored version are also vulnerable to arrest for perceived extremism. We have a number of ongoing concerns:

- > Dimitri Shestakov, a Pentecostal pastor from Andizhan, is still in the Navoi labour camp, serving a four-year sentence on charges of organising an illegal religious group, inciting religious hatred and distributing extremist religious literature.
- > In November, Jens Gregersen, a Danish citizen, was reportedly deported from Uzbekistan for missionary work on behalf of the Jehovah's Witnesses.
- > Forum 18 News Service reported that an unprecedented number of followers of the Muslim theologian Said Nursi, at least 47 as of July, have been imprisoned in 2009.
- > The Baha'i community in Uzbekistan has also reportedly experienced harassment, with meetings being raided by law-enforcement agencies and pressure allegedly put on members to renounce their faith.

- > In November, a British citizen resident in Uzbekistan since 1991 was detained by police and deported, apparently because of his leadership role within the Baha'i faith. Despite repeated requests for information, no proper explanation was given for the authorities' actions.

The British Embassy regularly raises its concerns about religious freedoms with Uzbek officials and urged the easing of registration procedures for religious groups at Uzbekistan's UPR.

Political Prisoners

We remain concerned by the number of human rights defenders and dissidents in prison. EU Member States have urged the Uzbek government to release all imprisoned human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience, with little success. Human rights defenders continue to report harassment and pressure that has forced some to leave Uzbekistan, or to cease their activities.

On 12 November, it was reported that Bakhtiyor Khamraev and Mamir Azimov, human rights defenders from Djizak region, were beaten by police following a meeting with the leader of the opposition Birdamlik Movement. This occurred just hours after Khamraev was quoted in a BBC report on child labour in Uzbekistan.

Bakhodir Choriev, leader of the Birdamlik (Solidarity) Uzbek opposition movement, who returned to Uzbekistan from the US in 2009, was reportedly deported back to the US on 12 December. Sanjar Umarov, founder of the opposition group Sunshine Coalition, and who was jailed in 2006 for economic crimes, was granted early release from prison on 7 November and allowed to travel to the US unimpeded. Human rights groups believe that his imprisonment was politically motivated. The British Ambassador welcomed the release in meetings with Uzbek officials.

Child Labour

There have been some encouraging steps on child labour, including ratification of International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions 138 and 182 on combating child labour, and the launch in 2008 of a Nation Action Plan to ensure implementation of



A UK-funded project to train neonatologists

these conventions. However, despite these positive developments, there have been reports of the continued and systematic mobilisation of children, some as young as 11, during the 2009 cotton harvest.

Rule of Law

In April, legislation was amended to allow the Human Rights Ombudsman of Uzbekistan unfettered access to prisons to monitor conditions. Prison conditions have reportedly improved. But reports of widespread hepatitis and tuberculosis and allegations of mistreatment of some prisoners by officials, particularly those sentenced on religious grounds, remain a source of concern. The Uzbek government's agreement in July to resume prison monitoring by the International Committee for the Red Cross for a further six-month period is a welcome step.

In November, the London Metropolitan Police hosted an Uzbek delegation, headed by Mr Alexandr Yakubov, Chief of the Uzbek Police Academy, to share UK experience of police training. The visit, funded by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was aimed at improving staff training and professional development of personnel. The programme of the visit included various meetings at the Metropolitan Police Training School, the Crime Academy, New Scotland Yard, and included tours and briefings at Central Communication Command and Belgravia Police Station. The delegation also met representatives of the FCO.

In January 2007, the UN Committee against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment called upon the Uzbek authorities to do more to address impunity. While several law-enforcement officials have been disciplined following complaints about human rights abuses, the continued high number of allegations of torture, especially in pre-trial detention, remains a serious concern. Uzbekistan has also yet to allow the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to carry out a requested follow-up mission to his 2002 visit, which we continue to urge them to do.

Electoral Reform

A number of changes to the electoral process were introduced ahead of the 27 December parliamentary elections. Some were broadly positive – an enhanced role for political parties, TV debates, and measures to ensure transparency in vote-counting at polling stations. The election represented a very limited step forward but it may in time help foster a more democratic culture. Other changes appear to be retrogressive. The provision for citizens' initiative groups to put forward candidates by petition was revoked. Also, 15 seats were automatically apportioned to the newly created Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan, and therefore not contested in direct elections. There seems to have been a lack of genuine competition, with none of the parties presenting a truly alternative manifesto, and opposition leaders routinely praising the Presidential party's record.

A Needs Assessment Mission carried out by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in October did not identify any significant improvements in the electoral framework. The Uzbek Central Election Committee limited the potential scope of an OSCE election monitoring mission to 25 short-term observers. Taking all this into account, the OSCE ODIHR took the decision to deploy a more limited Election Assessment Mission. Their post-election report is expected to be published in late February 2010.

Healthcare

The Uzbek government has taken significant measures to improve healthcare provision, especially within the field of maternal and child health. This has included large projects in cooperation with the EU, UNICEF and the Asian Development Bank, alongside which the British Embassy funded a complementary project to train 16 Uzbek neonatologists in the treatment of

respiratory disorders in newborn care, who would then disseminate the training regionally. This training was coordinated by British NGO HealthProm, in partnership with the Uzbek Ministry of Health and the Asian Development Bank.

Vietnam



Until recently, the trajectory of change on human rights in Vietnam was positive. But there have been worrying developments during 2009 and there remain significant areas of concern, most notably freedom of expression, media freedoms and the death penalty.

Vietnam's major achievement in recent years is its socio-economic development. As it reaches middle-income country status Vietnam will face a new set of challenges to ensure socio-economic standards continue to improve. For these positive developments to be sustained rampant corruption must be tackled, overly bureaucratic systems reformed, and people allowed to share ideas and information freely.

The UK maintains a constructive dialogue on human rights issues with the Vietnamese government both bilaterally and through the EU, including at the biannual EU–Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue. Human rights are also a key pillar of our Development Partnership Agreement with Vietnam, led by DFID, which ensures the government is held to account for the support that the UK government provides.

In July, Vietnam sent a delegation to the UK to meet NGOs and officials from the FCO, Ministry of Justice and Department of Work and Pensions to learn from the UK's experience of implementing human rights treaties. We will be monitoring progress closely through both our bilateral and EU consultations with the Vietnamese government.

The UK is also funding a range of human rights-related project activity in Vietnam through the FCO's Strategic Programme Fund and the British Embassy's Bilateral Fund. This includes:

- > supporting the Danish Institute for Human Rights to work with the General Department of Police and, more recently, the People's Police Academy, to promote the application of international human rights standards in law enforcement and policing;