

Uzbekistan remained an authoritarian country ruled by President Islam Karimov, where democratic norms and international human rights standards were routinely violated.

Throughout the year, the Uzbek authorities continued their efforts to prevent the circulation of information contradicting official policies, in particular with respect to the Andijan events in May 2005, when hundreds of civilians died as a result of the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by security and law enforcement officials who were pursuing a group of armed people.¹ Thus, the vicious crackdown on independent journalists, human rights defenders and other critics of the regime that was launched in the immediate aftermath of the events continued, further limiting the narrow space left for exercising freedom of expression, association and assembly.

While new show trials were carried out against “religious extremists” blamed for the unrest in Andijan, the authorities continued to reject calls for an independent international investigation into the events and failed to bring to justice those responsible for the killings of civilians. The international community failed to effectively take the Karimov regime to task for the Andijan massacre and the developments in its aftermath, and the November decision by the EU to weaken the mostly symbolic sanctions imposed on the country in 2005 was particularly disappointing.

The lack of independence of the judiciary, widespread corrupt practices and arbitrary action by law enforcement authorities remained major concerns. Torture and ill-treatment continued to be widely used to force defendants to “confess” to crimes of which they were accused, and the death penalty remained in use.

Right to life²

A presidential decree signed by President Karimov in 2005 provided that the

death penalty will be abolished in Uzbekistan as of 2008. However, in 2006, the death penalty continued to be actively applied, unlike in other Central Asian OSCE member states. This gave rise to particular concern since court proceedings were often conducted in serious violation of international fair trial standards.

Death row inmates were held in deplorable conditions, where scarce food rations were provided and hygiene was poor, resulting in tuberculosis widespread. They and their relatives also lived in uncertainty as to when they may be executed, causing emotional distress and anguish.

Fair trial and effective remedies

There was no true independence of the courts and the rights to equality before the law, fair trial and effective remedies were systematically violated. Statements made under torture and ill-treatment continued to be admitted as evidence on a routine basis.

Serious violations were reported in connection with cases relating to the Andijan events (see the section on freedom of religion) and the prosecution of human rights activists and others challenging the regime (see the section on freedom of expression and human rights defenders).

Freedom of the media

Independent journalists

Following the Andijan events, the authorities stepped up their efforts to silence independent media, resulting in a wave of intimidation and harassment against independent journalists. As a result, numerous independent journalists fled the country, and several international press agencies and news organizations were forced to close.³ Those few journalists who continued to report critically on government policies from within the country – often using pseudonyms – worked at great personal risk.

This chapter is largely based on reports to the IHF from the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), an IHF Cooperating Organization, and Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, as footnoted throughout the text. See also the chapter on Central Asia in part two of this report.

◆ In September, Ulugbek Khaidarov, an independent journalist reporting for foreign media, was arrested on spurious extortion charges after an envelope containing approximately EUR 300 was slipped into his pocket. In a summarily trial held on 5 October, he was sentenced to six years in prison⁴ but was released a month later.⁵ Jamshid Karimov, another independent journalist and colleague of Khaidarov's, disappeared around the time of the arrest of the latter. It was later disclosed that he was held in a psychiatric hospital in the city of Samara, without any medical reasons being cited to justify this measure.⁶

◆ Independent journalist Alisher Taksanov left Uzbekistan for neighboring Kazakhstan in the fall of 2006 because of repeated harassment.⁷

Freedom of assembly

In the aftermath of the Andijan events, the authorities stepped up their efforts to prevent the organization of protest meetings and in 2006 it remained difficult to stage such meetings. Permission for holding public gatherings was routinely denied on various pretexts to both registered and unregistered NGOs.⁸ Moreover, amendments to the Code of Administrative Liability introduced at the end of 2005 provided that the participants in gatherings that have not been authorized by the authorities are subject to fines ranging from 50 to 100 times the monthly minimum wage or administrative detention for up to 15 days.⁹

There were reportedly several occasions on which anti-government pickets organized by NGOs or political groups were forcefully dispersed, with participants receiving warnings and being subjected to beatings and arrests.¹⁰

Freedom of association¹¹

Amendments to the criminal code and Code on Administrative Liability, which en-

tered into force on 1 January 2006, introduced new legal restrictions on the work of NGOs. They provided, *inter alia*, that persons who advocate participation in the activities of non-registered groups or violate NGO regulations are liable to fines and administrative arrest for up to 15 days. They also established sanctions for employees of foreign and international NGOs who carry out political and funding activities deemed to be beyond the mission of their organizations.¹²

In practice, independent NGOs continued to experience serious difficulties in carrying out their work, including denial of registration and refusal to rent meeting facilities, and their members faced intimidation and harassment (see also the section on human rights defenders, below). The authorities also increasingly controlled and reviewed the activities of registered NGO, and the few international and foreign NGOs that remained in the country were subject to particular pressure.¹³

◆ At the beginning of 2006, Freedom House was forced to suspend its activities in Uzbekistan after losing an appeal hearing in a case initiated by the Ministry of Justice. The organization was accused of violating Uzbek NGO legislation, including by providing free access to the internet to local human rights activists.¹⁴

◆ Authorities refused to prolong the accreditation of one of the staff members of Human Rights Watch based in the country, who had to leave.¹⁵

Anti-terrorism measures and torture

The Uzbek authorities used the Andijan massacre, which was blamed on "religious extremist" groups, as an excuse to carry out new arbitrary arrests of and bring criminal charges against independent Muslims. In a number of trials held between the end of 2005 and mid 2006, hundreds of people were tried on terror-

ism and other charges relating to the Andijan events and given harsh prison sentences. All but one trial were held behind closed doors and human rights activists, journalists and representatives of foreign embassies were not allowed to observe them. According to lawyers and relatives, many of the defendants had been forced to confess through the use of torture and ill-treatment.¹⁶

In numerous cases authorities of other countries in the region, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, forcibly returned people who fled Uzbekistan in the aftermath of the Andijan events despite a real risk that they would be subjected to torture or ill-treatment upon return. In some cases, these returns were conducted outside legal procedures.¹⁷

Human rights defenders

The crackdown on human rights defenders launched in the aftermath of the Andijan events continued in 2006 and took a serious toll on the country's independent civil society.

During the year, criminal cases were initiated against numerous human rights defenders and a dozen or more were imprisoned on apparently politically motivated charges. Among those targeted by prosecution were several members of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) as well as women activists.

◆ In a secret hearing held in January, Saidjahon Zainabitdonov, head of the human rights organization "Appeal," was sentenced to seven years in prison on charges mainly related to Andijan events. He was, *inter alia*, accused of membership in a religious extremist organization and distribution of materials threatening public order. According to the Uzbek government, he had provided "terrorists" with information about the events and disseminated "slanderous" information about them. Zainabitdonov was present in

Andijan during the 2005 events and had reported to foreign media and spoken out about the government massacre that took place there.¹⁸ In late 2006, he was transferred to a prison facility in the Zangatin region, near Tashkent.¹⁹

◆ Azamzhon Farmonov, chairman of the Syrdaryn regional branch of the HRSU, and Alisher Karamatov, chairman of the Mirzaabad regional branch of the HRSU, were arrested in Gulistan in the Syrdaryn region on 29 April. The arrests followed a violent police raid of Farmonov's apartment, during which also his pregnant wife was hit by an officer.²⁰ Less than two months later, on 15 June, the two men were sentenced to nine years in prison on charges of extortion in a trial that was conducted in violation of international standards and in the absence of the legal defendant of the two men. Prior to the court hearing, the two men were reportedly held incommunicado for one month and subjected to torture, including beatings and attempted suffocation.²¹ After his verdict, Farmonov was transferred to the infamous Jaslyk prison, which was established at the site of a former Soviet military base in 1997 to accommodate religious prisoners. It was the first time that a human rights activist was sent to this prison.²²

◆ Mutabar Tadjibaeva, chairperson of the human rights organization "Fiery Hearts Club" in the Ferghana Valley, was arrested in October 2005, shortly before she was due to travel to Ireland to participate in an international conference for human rights defenders. Prior to her arrest, Tajibaeva had been actively involved in human rights monitoring and reporting and had publicly spoken out against repressive government measures taken in the wake of the Andijan events. In March 2006, she was sentenced to eight years in prison on a total of 17 charges, including slander, extortion and membership in an illegal organization.²³



Human rights defenders in Uzbekistan were subjected to serious pressure, surveillance, arbitrary arrests, politically motivated prosecution, imprisonment and forced exile. Among the victims were (from top, left): Surat Ikramov, Tamara Chikunova, Elena Urlaeva, Talib Yakubov, Akhmajon Madmarov, Komil Ashurov, Vasilja Injatova, Rakhatullo Abdullaev and Yagdan Turlibekov.

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In a development of particular concern, the Soviet-era technique of forcibly detaining dissidents in psychiatric hospitals has been used repeatedly against women human rights activists in the post-Andijan period.²⁴ Among others, 69-year-old Lydia Volkobraun was forcibly placed in psychiatric care in 2006, as was Mutabar Tadjibaeva following her imprisonment.

New efforts were made to mobilize public sentiment against human rights defenders and new so-called “shows of public outrage” were reported, such as in the Dzizhak region, which was one of the most dangerous places for human rights activists.²⁵

◆ On 18 August, Bakhtiyar Khamroev, a human rights activist in the region of Dzizhak, was attacked by a group of women who burst into his apartment and de-

nounced him as a traitor. Police watched the incident and did not intervene until Khamroev had sustained a severe injury. Upon intervening, the police did not arrest any of the attackers. This was the second time Khamroev was subject to such an attack in just over a year.²⁶

As a result of threats and pressure, a growing number of human rights defenders were forced into exile. Among them was Talib Yakubov, HRSU chairman and 2001 recipient of the IHF Recognition Award.²⁷

Virtually all human rights archivists who remained in the country were under surveillance by police and security services and were frequently prevented from moving around freely, e.g. when on their way to other cities, or required to inform local law enforcement authorities about their movements.²⁸

SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

- ◆ Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), Talib Yakubov, head of HRSU (in exile), email: hrrsu_tolib@rambler.ru
- ◆ Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan “Ezgulik,” Vasilja Inojatova, head of “Ezgulik,” email: vasilaez@dostlink.net

IHF documents:

- ◆ *The Decimation of the Human Rights Community in Uzbekistan*, February 2007, at www.ihf-hr.org
- ◆ *Central Asia, Closer To Becoming A Death Penalty-Free Region?*, 2 February 2007, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4368
- ◆ *Human Rights Defenders at Risk in Belarus, Russia and Uzbekistan: Briefing Paper to the EU Forum on Human Rights*, Helsinki, 7-8 December 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4354
- ◆ *Counter-terrorism measures and the prohibition on torture and ill-treatment. A briefing paper on developments in Europe, Central Asia and North America*, 14 November 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4343
- ◆ *Uzbekistan: Human Rights Defenders in Dzizhak Region are in Danger*, 28 June 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4273
- ◆ *Call for Central Asia to be a death penalty-free zone*, 12 June 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4260
- ◆ *Uzbekistan: Human Rights Defenders in Danger*, 9 June 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4256

- ✦ *The Assault on Human Rights Defenders in the Russian Federation, Belarus and Uzbekistan: Restrictive Legislation and Bad Practices*, 29 March 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4221
- ✦ *Uzbekistan: Women human rights defenders being forcibly detained in psychiatric hospitals*, 28 March 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4220
- ✦ *Central Asia: Human Rights Groups Facing Increasingly Restrictive Legislation*, 13 February 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4193
- ✦ *The Assault on Human Rights Organizations in Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, and other Central Asian Republics*, 13 February 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4194
- ✦ Additional IHF documents are available at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/?sec_id=58

Other organizations and media sources on Uzbekistan

- ✦ Human Rights Watch, at www.hrw.org/doc?t=europe&c=uzbeki
- ✦ Amnesty International, at <http://web.amnesty.org/library/eng-uzb/index>
- ✦ Committee to Protect Journalists, at www.cpj.org/regions_07/europe_07/europe_07.html#uzbek
- ✦ Reporters without Borders (RSF), at www.rsf.org/country-53.php3?id_mot=105&Valid=OK
- ✦ International Crisis Group, www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1256&l=1
- ✦ Institute for War and Peace Reporting, at www.iwpr.net/
- ✦ Muslim Uzbekistan, at www.muslimuzbekistan.net/en/index.php
- ✦ Ferghana RU information agency, at <http://enews.ferghana.ru/index.php>

Endnotes

- ¹ For a more detailed discussion of the Andijan events, see the chapter on Uzbekistan in IHF, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2006 (Events of 2005)*, at www.ihf-hr.org/cms/cms.php?sec_id=71.
- ² For more on this topic see IHF, *Central Asia, Closer To Becoming A Death Penalty-Free Region?*, 2 February 2007, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4368.
- ³ See the chapter on Uzbekistan in IHF, *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2006 (Events of 2005)*.
- ⁴ Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF; Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "One Uzbek reporter confined in hospital, another in prison," 26 September 2006, at www.cpj.org/news/2006/europe/uzbek26sept06na.html; Human Rights Watch, "Uzbekistan: Journalist Imprisoned in Widening Crackdown," 6 October 2006, at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/10/06/uzbeki14355.htm>.
- ⁵ Reporter without Border (RSF), "Welcome for release of Ulugbek Khaidarov but other journalists remain in prison," 8 November 2006, at www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=19657.
- ⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, "One Uzbek reporter confined in hospital, another in prison," 26 September 2006; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Uzbekistan: Concerns Grow over Missing, Jailed Journalist," 27 September 2006, at www.ferl.org/featuresarticle/

2006/09/e56fb8de-97d7-4981-b3e3-d65831d7c6f9.html.

- ⁷ Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF.
- ⁸ Information from the HRSU to the IHF.
- ⁹ Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ See also the section on human rights defenders.
- ¹² See IHF, *Central Asia: Human Rights Groups Facing Increasingly Restrictive Legislation*, 13 February 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4193.
- ¹³ Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF.
- ¹⁴ See IHF, "Open letter to the minister of justice of Uzbekistan regarding the suspension of activities of Freedom House and recent amendments to the NGO law," 19 January 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4174.
- ¹⁵ Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF.
- ¹⁶ For more information, see the chapter on counter-terrorism measures and torture in part two of the report.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.; Human Rights Watch, "Uzbek Rights Defender Saidjahon Zainabidinov in Andijan, Uzbekistan," 8 February 2006, at <http://hrw.org/campaigns/uzbekistan/andijan/hrdefenders.htm>; Amnesty International, "Uzbekistan: Release human rights activist who tried to tell the truth about Andizhan," at <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/uzb-260905-action-eng>.
- ¹⁹ Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF.
- ²⁰ See IHF, "Open Letter regarding the assault on human rights defenders in Gulistan.," 3 May 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4238.
- ²¹ See IHF, "Human Rights Defenders Tortured, Sentenced to Nine Year Prison Terms," 20 June 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4268.
- ²² Information from the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF.
- ²³ Information from the HRSU and the Uzbek Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law to the IHF. See also IHF intervention to 2006 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting on "The Precarious Situation of Women Human Rights Defenders in Uzbekistan," at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4307; and IHF, "Uzbekistan: Women human rights defenders being forcibly detained in psychiatric hospitals," 29 March 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4220.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ See also IHF, "Uzbekistan: Human rights defenders in the Dzhizak region are in danger," 27 June 2006, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=4273.
- ²⁶ IHF, "Noted Uzbek Human Rights Defender, Bakhtiyar Khamroev, Beaten as Police Watch," 22 August 2006, www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4287
- ²⁷ See IHF, "Alarming Human Rights Situation in Uzbekistan. Uzbek Human Rights Defender, Talib Yakubov Receives Recognition Award," 18 November 2001, at www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=1133.
- ²⁸ Information from the HRSU to the IHF.