

Carl Bildt
Foreign Minister of Sweden
Presidency of the European Union

Brussels, 13 October 2009
Our Ref: B905

Dear Mr. Bildt,

Subject: Review of the EU arms embargo on Uzbekistan

On the occasion of the review of the current arms embargo on Uzbekistan, expected at the forthcoming General Affairs and External Relations Council on 26/27 October 2009, Amnesty International urges the EU to ensure a clear and assertive approach to human rights abuses in Uzbekistan and to remain consistent with regards to ongoing impunity.

As outlined in previous correspondence, including most recently on 3 September 2009, we remain deeply concerned that the human rights dimension of the Central Asia Strategy is not treated sufficiently seriously by non-human rights experts within the EU institutions and Member States. This is clearly evident with regards to the human rights dimension of the EU's engagement with Uzbekistan – a key element of which has been the arms embargo, established in October 2005.

The arms embargo, along with other targeted sanctions, was established as a direct response to the killing of hundreds of people in Andizhan in May 2005, when security forces fired on mainly peaceful demonstrators. The EU's decision to establish sanctions was centred on the core demand that Uzbekistan allow an independent, international investigation into the events in Andizhan. This demand was undermined when the EU lifted all sanctions apart from the arms embargo in October 2008, without a single reference to the continuing need for an investigation. Indeed, Uzbekistan forcefully reiterated its rejection of all calls for an investigation during its UN Universal Periodic Review session, just two months later in December 2008. Should the EU now lift the arms embargo as well, whilst Uzbekistan still refuses to allow an investigation, there will be no further international pressure on this issue and it will be seen as effectively closed. Moreover, the EU will have seriously damaged the credibility and consistency of its own foreign policy. It is therefore essential that this issue continues to be regularly pursued, monitored and reported at EU foreign ministerial level.

In October 2007, the EU also set up additional benchmarks to evaluate human rights progress made by Uzbekistan in a variety of other areas and to assess the need for continuing the sanctions regime. Amnesty International has still not observed any positive changes in relation to these benchmarks that suggest that the human rights situation has improved. For example, although a small number of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) have been released, these releases have had strict conditions attached, ten HRDs continue to serve long prison terms and four others have been convicted during the past year. In addition, Uzbekistan has still not granted full access to international monitors, including the ICRC, UN mechanisms, special procedures and international NGOs. Further details can be found in the attached briefing.

Amnesty International therefore urges the EU once again not to damage the consistency and coherence of its own human rights policy, and to seriously consider the effect that the forthcoming arms embargo review will have on the EU's own credibility vis-a-vis Central Asian partners. We remain at your disposal to discuss this issue in greater depth.

Yours sincerely,



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