

Frank-Walter Steinmeier
President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union

Brussels, 8 June 2007
Our ref: B 677

Dear Dr Steinmeier,

Subject: EU Strategy for Central Asia

On the occasion of the next General Affairs and External Relations Council on 18 and 19 June, where the EU Strategy for Central Asia is due to be adopted, Amnesty International would like to remind you of our major recommendations for this strategy.

1) Human rights dialogue

Amnesty International appreciates the German initiative to establish human rights dialogues with each Central Asian country. However, it is obvious that not each Central Asian country is willing to make a firm commitment to address shortcomings and improve the human rights situation. Amnesty International therefore urges the EU to ensure that human rights will always be an issue of priority in every political meeting at all levels as stated in the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Dialogues. The dialogues need to take place on a regular basis and should be result-oriented. The existing guidelines should be the framework in which they take place.

2) Separate benchmarks for each Central Asian country

Amnesty International points out the need to develop detailed country-related strategies and programmes which take the specificity of the human rights situation in each country into account. We urge the EU to implement the overall EU strategy for Central Asia and to adopt country specific strategies and programmes without delay. Amnesty International expects the European Commission, the EU Special Representative for Central Asia and those EU member states with a representation in the Central Asian countries to provide support to those member states and EU Presidencies which have no such representation in the region.

It is essential to develop separate benchmarks for each of the five countries as the human rights situation in each country is different. Such benchmarks should be created on the basis of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights.

In Amnesty International's opinion the most relevant are the:

- EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders;
- EU Guidelines on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; and
- EU Guidelines on the Death Penalty.

Above all the EU should call for the implementation of those international human rights conventions which have already been ratified by the Central Asian states. Core international human rights conventions and optional protocols should be ratified and then implemented. These are for instance, the 1951 Refugee Convention, which has not been signed and ratified by Uzbekistan, or the First Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OP CAT), which none of the Central Asian states is party to.

3) Areas of concern

Based on Amnesty International's assessment of the specific human rights situation in each country it is strongly recommended that the benchmarks which need to be developed before the start of the human rights dialogues should include the following areas of concern where relevant:

- immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience;
- protection of human rights defenders, civil society activists and independent journalists;
- guaranteeing freedom of expression;
- effectively combating torture and other ill-treatment, including addressing impunity for law enforcement personnel;
- guaranteeing fair trial standards;
- providing the International Committee of the Red Cross with access to prisons and the public monitoring of all detention facilities; and
- abolition of the death penalty and immediate introduction of a moratorium on executions pending abolition.

4) EU Special Representative's role

Amnesty International expects the EU Special Representative for Central Asia to play an important role in implementing the strategy. His office should be provided with sufficient resources to monitor the human rights situation in the Central Asian states. We also hope that his reports will be made available to other interested parties, such as NGOs working to improve the human rights situation in Central Asia and that his office will be open to consultation and co-operation with such groups.

We look forward to hearing from you as regards the outcome of the meeting.

Yours sincerely,



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Barbara Lochbihler
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