

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

Brussels, 7 May 2007
Ref: b 665

Dear Dr Steinmeier,

Subject: Human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

In light of the upcoming General Affairs and External Relations meeting on 14 May 2007, Amnesty International would like to share its concerns about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

Amnesty International welcomes the two rounds of expert talks that took place in December and April in Uzbekistan. However, we hold the view that such an initiative cannot substitute an independent international investigation into the Andijan events. The expert talks did not meet the international standards for an effective, independent and impartial investigation, including the UN Principles on the effective prevention and investigation of extra-legal arbitrary and summary executions.

The EU would send out the wrong signal not only to Uzbekistan, but also to the Central Asian region and other partners if it withdrew its call for such an investigation while human rights in Uzbekistan continued to be violated with impunity.

Amnesty International welcomes the holding of a result-oriented human rights dialogue with Uzbekistan. We hope that this dialogue will enable the EU to raise concerns about the human rights situation in the country and to seek clarification on developments in individual cases and press for improvements. In particular, the situation of human rights defenders continues to deteriorate. Human rights defenders, independent journalists and civil society and political opposition activists continue to be harassed and imprisoned after unfair trials. Moreover, according to the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, torture or other ill-treatment by law enforcement officers continue to be systematic and routine and perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. No substantial progress has been made to strengthen the judiciary: habeas corpus has not been introduced, court proceedings rarely meet international standards for fair trial and "evidence" based on confessions reportedly extracted under torture and ill treatment continues to be admitted by courts of law.

In your dialogue with your counterpart, Amnesty International asks you to:

- call for the immediate and unconditional release of those considered as prisoners of conscience and to reiterate the EU's concern about the lack of protection provided to human rights defenders;
- urge Uzbekistan to introduce measures to effectively stop and prevent the use of torture or other ill-treatment by law enforcement officers;
- rigorously and promptly investigate all such allegations and bring the perpetrators identified to justice in accordance with international human rights standards.

The Council should maintain a clear and assertive EU human rights policy towards Uzbekistan until such time as the government undertakes concrete steps to implement and enforce legislative measures that will provide effective and durable guarantees for the protection of human rights.

Amnesty International remains at your disposal to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting
Director
Amnesty International EU Office



Barbara Lochbihler
Secretary General
Amnesty International Germany