

Dr. Frank Walter Steinmeier  
President of the Council of Ministers of the European Union

Brussels, 16 March 2007  
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Dear Dr. Steinmeier,

**Subject: Amnesty International's human rights concerns in Central Asia**

In light of the EU-Central Asia Troika meeting on 27-28 March, Amnesty International welcomes the EU's efforts to strengthen its relations with the region. We encourage you make human rights and the rule of law key components in the political dialogue with your Central Asian partners. Whereas countries like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan should be encouraged to proceed with their initial reforms in these fields, the EU should send a strong signal to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan that their record on human rights needs to be addressed without delay.

Please allow us to draw your attention to some of Amnesty International's gravest human rights concerns related to the region:

**Freedom of Expression**

In several Central Asian countries, individuals and organisations promoting human rights are subjected to harassment and intimidation. This is particularly the case in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where prisoners of conscience face long-term imprisonment after unfair trials and are detained in very harsh conditions. In the other countries human rights defenders, journalists and opposition figures face restrictions to their work.

*In your deliberations with your counterparts, Amnesty International asks you to inquire about the status of cases of prisoners of conscience and to reiterate the EU's concern about the lack of protection provided to human rights defenders.*

**Rule of Law**

In all Central Asian countries, institutions upholding the rule of law are fragile and in need of strengthening. Torture and ill-treatment are applied routinely by law-enforcement agencies in all five countries. In Uzbekistan torture is not only widespread, but systematic. In most of the Central Asian countries Amnesty International learned about deaths in custody allegedly due to torture and ill-treatment. The organization is concerned that these allegations are not thoroughly, promptly and independently investigated.

Fair trial standards are violated on a regular basis in all Central Asian countries. Evidence based on confessions extracted under torture is routinely admitted in court not only but particularly in Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan violate the right to *non-refoulement* according to 1951 Refugee Convention by forcibly returning refugees and asylum-seekers to Uzbekistan and Uighurs to China where they are at risk of being tortured.

*Amnesty International asks that you remind your counterparts of their international obligations with respect to the Convention against Torture and encourage them to take steps towards strengthening the institutions that uphold the rule of law.*

## Death penalty

Amnesty International welcomes the recent positive changes towards abolishing the use of the death penalty in most of the Central Asian countries. However, with regard to Kyrgyzstan, Amnesty International has received information that some courts continue to pass the death penalty, in spite of the constitutional changes made in November 2006, as changes to the criminal code have yet to be made.

With regard to Uzbekistan, Amnesty International welcomes the presidential decree of 1 August 2005 to fully abolish the death penalty by 1 January 2008, but is concerned that the Uzbek government has failed to introduce a moratorium on execution until the abolition date. Meanwhile, at least 25 persons are on death row in Tashkent, 20 of whom suffer from tuberculosis. Tuberculosis occurs on death row in all Central Asian countries apart from Turkmenistan where the death penalty does not exist.

*Amnesty International calls on you to encourage the Government of Kyrgyzstan to enforce its constitutional changes rigorously and to take immediate steps to amend the criminal and procedural code to that effect. We would also ask you to encourage the Uzbek government to immediately introduce a moratorium on executions.*

Please find attached for your information a briefing note, which we hope will prove useful in the preparation of your meeting.

We look forward to hearing from you as regards the outcome of the meeting and any possible reactions from your Central Asian colleagues.

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting  
Director  
Amnesty International EU Office



Barbara Lochbihler  
Secretary General  
Amnesty International Germany

Annex: Central Asia human rights overview 2007.

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Ms. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations.

Mr. Pierre Morrel, EU Special Envoy to Central Asia

Ms. Riina Kionka, Personal Representative of the SG/HR on Human Rights

Ms. Helene Flautre, Chair of Subcommittee on Human Rights, European Parliament