

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

We write to ask your assistance in addressing the Government of Uzbekistan's continued and widespread human rights violations. Specifically, we urge you to raise with the Uzbek government the cases of 13 imprisoned human rights defenders. Germany must maintain a principled position towards the protection of fundamental human rights in Uzbekistan.

Unfortunately, the Uzbek government has a long record of violating the basic rights of its citizens. After government forces killed hundreds of largely peaceful protesters on May 15, 2005 in the town of Andijan, the European Union imposed sanctions against President Islam Karimov's regime. However, the sanctions were lifted in 2009 despite the Uzbek government's failure to improve the country's human rights conditions. The Uzbek government continues unabated its violations of the human rights of its citizens. Government authorities arbitrarily arrest and detain individuals who exercise fundamental freedoms or express views critical of the government. The judiciary lacks real independence and the use of torture continues to be rampant. The Uzbek government interferes with the ability of national and international civil society groups to operate freely in Uzbekistan. In March 2011, the government forced Human Rights Watch to shutter its office in Tashkent. The Uzbek government also limits access to the country for international institutions, including eight UN special procedures that have requested invitations to visit Uzbekistan.

Of particular concern is the continued detention of 13 human rights defenders and independent journalists in Uzbekistan, imprisoned as punishment for their human rights advocacy. They are Akzam Turgunov, Solijon Abdurakhmanov, Azam Formonov, Nosim Isakov, Gaibullo Jalilov, Alisher Karamatov, Jamshid Karimov, Norboi Kholjigitov, Abdurasul Khudainasarov, Ganihon Mamatkhanov, Habibulla Okpulatov, Yuldash Rasulov, and Dilmurod Saidov.

The detention of Akzam Turgunov is illustrative of how the Uzbek government treats human rights defenders. At the time of his arrest, Mr. Turgunov, the director of a Tashkent-based human rights organization and the local leader of a political opposition party, was working as a lay public defender and investigating public corruption in Manget, Karakalpakstan. Authorities in Manget arrested Mr. Turgunov and charged him with extortion in July 2008—charges that international observers have dismissed as fabricated means to punish Mr. Turgunov for his public and political advocacy. Authorities held Mr. Turgunov *incommunicado* for 18 days, during which time a police interrogator poured boiling water on his neck and back. After a trial that failed to meet international due process standards, the court sentenced Mr. Turgunov to 10 years in prison with hard labor. At the age of 59, he is now detained at a prison camp in Karshi where he is forced to work 12 hours every day making bricks. As a result of the conditions of his confinement, he now weighs less than 50 kilos.

We ask you to raise the case of Akzam Turgunov and those of other imprisoned human rights defenders with the Government of Uzbekistan. The German government's engagement with the

Uzbek government must include a consistent and frank dialogue regarding its ongoing human rights violations.

Sincerely,

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cc:

Guido Westerwelle, Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs
Markus Löning, Federal Commissioner for Human Rights