



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Preliminary Report on Events in Andijon

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 23, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the circulation of ODIHR's preliminary report concerning the tragic events that transpired on May 13 in Andijon. We commend ODIHR for quickly organizing a mission to collect and analyze information in advance of a full and formal investigation. We look forward to further study of the report's conclusions and a close review of its recommendations. Very importantly, we also look forward to Uzbekistan's full and cooperative engagement in this process. The goal, in the first instance, is not condemnation, but fact gathering. The worst would be to try to ignore what has happened - we cannot. Far better that we work with Uzbekistan to deal with what has happened in a productive, forward-looking way.

While we condemn the violent attack by armed individuals on government facilities that precipitated this crisis, we note that ODIHR's finding corroborates reports from human rights organizations and other international monitoring agencies that Uzbek authorities used indiscriminate and excessive force in quelling the protests.

The report concludes that a large number of people, including many unarmed civilians, lost their lives, and that extrajudicial killings may have been carried out by security forces. Such reports are deeply disturbing and, in our view, underscore the urgent need for a full and credible international investigation.

The fact that ODIHR's experts have thus far been denied entry to Uzbekistan is regrettable. We believe that direct access to those involved in these events would facilitate a much clearer understanding of what actually took place in Andijon.

On a related note, the United States has studied the report on media coverage during the Andijon crisis issued by the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszi. We fully support the report's conclusions and believe its recommendations can serve as the basis for a reevaluation by the Uzbek authorities of the positive role an independent media can play in Uzbek society.

We encourage the Uzbek authorities to establish contact with ODIHR and with the Representative on Freedom of the Media, in the firm belief that such engagement is in the long-term interest of the Government of Uzbekistan and the Uzbek people.

The United States continues to closely monitor the status of Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan and remains concerned for their welfare as well as for the safety of the four asylum seekers who were summarily repatriated to Uzbekistan on June 9.

We urge all parties to strictly adhere to international law and standards concerning the treatment of refugees, and reiterate our call on the Uzbek authorities to grant the International Red Cross or UNHCR access to the repatriated individuals.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.