



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the One-Year Anniversary of the Andijon Tragedy

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna,
May 18, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This certainly is not an occasion we are particularly happy to recall, and we wish relations were smoother and better between the OSCE and Uzbekistan.

A year ago, the tragic events in Andijon played out with terrifying speed. A trial of businessmen allegedly involved in an extremist Islamist group led to protests. A prison-break took place on May 12th, 2005, as well as attacks on government buildings. On May 13th, numerous eyewitness reports indicate that Uzbek security forces opened fire on a crowd that had gathered in Andijon's main square, killing hundreds of people. One year later, these events have still not been addressed adequately.

Important questions have not been answered by Uzbek authorities. The victims and survivors deserve better. They deserve a full accounting from the Government of Uzbekistan. They deserve the full support of the international community in demanding answers.

The full accounting of the events of May 12th-13th that we have called for consistently should include the prison break and attacks on government buildings, as well. While governments are obliged to respond to such actions, they do not excuse the wholesale shootings of men, women, and children gathered in a public square.

Instead of seeking accountability, the government of Uzbekistan has adopted a defensive posture, lashing out at its critics and declining to seek out the truth. The Government implemented a vicious crackdown on human rights activists, journalists, Andijon residents, and many who spoke about the Andijon tragedy.

The Government further restricted the activities of civil society by closing as many as 200 organizations over the last year, increasing criminal and administrative penalties on activities of non-governmental organizations, and restricting the activities of foreign and independent media. Trials for alleged Andijon perpetrators failed to meet international standards of justice and were often closed to the public. The Government has also pursued the extradition from several countries of hundreds of individuals who it accuses of involvement with the events in Andijon, without producing credible evidence to support its claims. Credible reports indicate that Uzbeks who fled Andijon and were forcibly returned have been tortured. The Government has refused to grant international access to individuals who were returned, detained, and imprisoned -- despite repeated requests.

The United States calls on the Government of Uzbekistan to allow for a full, credible, and transparent international investigation into the events at Andijon. We also urge Uzbek authorities to cease immediately the crackdown on civil society and to take steps to uphold Uzbekistan's OSCE and international human rights commitments.

Mr. Chairman, the way forward in Uzbekistan is through greater reliance on the principles and commitments for which this Organization stands. Only by dealing with the problems in Uzbekistan in a comprehensive manner and across all three OSCE dimensions can Uzbek authorities pave the road away from Andijon.

The paving stones for that road are embodied in the values of this Organization:

Transparency is the first step. A credible, international investigation into the events is needed. It still has not taken place.

Another key element is reliance on rule of law and a fair judicial procedure. The OSCE effort to monitor the trial of those accused of being behind the unrest produced concrete recommendations for changes and improvements in application of justice. The Government of Uzbekistan should consider them seriously.

Respect for human dignity and individual rights is a third critical element. The freedom to engage in a vibrant civil society provides a way for government leaders to understand their peoples' needs and concerns, as well as an outlet for the non-violent expression of dissatisfaction.

One year after the Andijon massacre we urge Uzbekistan to participate fully in the OSCE by allowing the Tashkent Center to help establish a new era of growth, stability, security, and respect for human rights. The OSCE is not part of the problem in Uzbekistan -- it is part of the solution.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.