



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement Regarding Treatment of Human Rights Defenders in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 3, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States wishes to express grave concern about the environment for human rights defenders in Uzbekistan. At least 15 human rights defenders are currently in prison, with at least two arrests that appear to be politically motivated occurring since January.

On April 24, according to press reports, the Andijon Province Criminal Court convicted Andijon-based human rights activist Gulbahor Turayeva on charges of anti-constitutional activity, slander, and distributing materials threatening public order. The circumstances of Ms. Turayeva's trial and the charges in the case bear all the hallmarks of a politically-motivated prosecution. Ms. Turayeva thus joins a growing list of women human rights activists imprisoned for their criticism of the government. This list includes Human Rights Watch local staffer Umida Niyazova, who, like Ms. Turayeva, was arrested in January at a border crossing point under similar circumstances. Ms. Niyazova's trial began on April 30 and ended the next day with a sentence of seven years. The judge excluded journalists and diplomats from observing the proceedings. The list of women political detainees also includes Ferghana-based activist Mutabar Tajibayeva, who was convicted in March 2006 and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment.

Human rights activists and NGOs play a vital role in the development of modern democratic states. In 1991, the Government of Uzbekistan voluntarily pledged to uphold an OSCE commitment to foster civil society. Non-governmental organizations and individuals defending human rights are an integral part of such a healthy civil society.

When I visited Tashkent last month, I heard positive and encouraging words from a variety of government officials regarding the state of human rights and civil society in Uzbekistan. Words are a beginning, but certainly not enough. There has to be follow-through on commitments made.

The United States calls on the Government of Uzbekistan to meet its international commitments on human rights defenders, independent journalists, and members of the political opposition. We urge that authorities release all civil society activists detained on politically motivated charges.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.