

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 62/022/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 248
20 September 2005

Embargo Date: 20 September 2005 00:01 GMT

Uzbekistan: Truth under siege

Only an independent international investigation can reveal the truth about the events in the city of Andizhan, in eastern Uzbekistan, which reportedly resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians in May, Amnesty International said in a report released today.

"The truth is under siege. The government wants to prevent the truth about what really happened in Andizhan from coming out," said Maisy Weicherding, Amnesty International's researcher on Uzbekistan.

Also today Human Rights Watch is releasing a report on the Uzbekistani government's crackdown to conceal the truth about the killings. Both international organizations are renewing their calls for an independent international investigation into the Andizhan events as the first trial of those charged by the Uzbekistani authorities in connection with the Andizhan events is scheduled to get underway.

In its latest report, *Uzbekistan: Lifting the siege on the truth about Andizhan*, Amnesty International exposes the human rights abuses perpetrated in Andizhan on 12-13 May 2005. According to eyewitness testimony, security forces fired indiscriminately into crowds of thousands of demonstrators gathered in the centre of Andizhan and as they fled. The government's version of events differs significantly to those testimonies. It maintains that the security forces did not kill any civilians and that all those civilians who lost their lives were killed by armed "terrorists".

The government has stated that 187 people were killed and that many of them were "terrorists", although it has yet to publish the names of those who died. Some people have been unable to find out what happened to their missing relatives. According to unconfirmed reports, the bodies of people killed were removed from the city and secretly buried in unknown locations.

A man who was still looking for his son two months afterwards told Amnesty International: "*He is not in the refugee camp and he is not in the detention centre either. Where can I go ask? We hope he is still alive.*"

"President Islam Karimov claims that his government does not shoot at women and children. Why doesn't he allow an independent international investigation? Why don't the authorities publish the names of all of those killed? Why haven't they allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross access to hospitals and detention centres?" Maisy Weicherding said. "The ongoing parliamentary investigation is not

a substitute for an international investigation -- it is toothless."

Amnesty International's report reveals the lengths to which the government of Uzbekistan has gone to prevent information that contradicts the official version of events from reaching the outside world. Thousands of people have been arbitrarily detained. Witnesses have been intimidated to prevent them from speaking about their experiences. Relevant records and documents have reportedly been destroyed. International organizations, journalists and human rights defenders have been prevented from accessing the city. Access to websites that provide differing accounts of the events has been blocked within Uzbekistan, as well as access to websites affiliated to the Uzbekistani opposition in exile and those presumed to carry information critical of the authorities. Local independent journalists, human rights defenders and members of the political opposition have been harassed and detained. Some have been charged, including with serious criminal offences, for exercising their right to freedom of expression, and are considered to be prisoners of conscience.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned for the safety of Saidzhakhon Zainabidinov, the chairperson of the Andizhan independent human rights group Apelliatsia (Appeal). Saidzhakhon Zainabidinov was present in Andizhan on 13 May and gave the international media an account of the events, providing a stark contrast to the official version of events. According to reports he was arbitrarily detained by law enforcement officers on 21 May and was held in police custody in Andizhan. He was transferred to Tashkent sometime in July, where he has been held in incommunicado detention and is at serious risk of torture and ill-treatment. He is said to have been charged with "spreading information with the aim of causing panic" and "terrorism", the latter being a capital offence.

"The authorities of Uzbekistan are using the May events to deal a further blow to the fledgling civil society in the country," Maisy Weicherding said. "Once again the authorities are harassing human rights defenders and stifling freedom of expression in the name of national security."

The organization considers those people who have been charged with criminal offences to be at risk of being tried in a manner that violates international fair trial standards.

"People in detention are at serious risk of being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment. Some have been charged with capital offences. They are at great risk of being sentenced to death -- and even executed -- following an unfair trial."

Amnesty International makes a series of recommendations to the authorities to address systemic flaws in the administration of justice, and to protect the rights to freedom from torture or other ill-treatment, freedom from arbitrary detention, and the right to freedom of expression.

Amnesty International also makes a series of specific recommendations to the member states of the UN, to the UN Commission on Human Rights or its successor body, to the European Union and its member states, and to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe institutions and its participating states, including to continue to call for the establishment of a thorough, independent and impartial international investigation into the events in Andizhan on 12-13 May; and to express concern to the government of Uzbekistan about the human rights situation in the country.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>