

# Turkmenistan: Clampdown on dissent

## A background briefing

*“I feel completely helpless. Nobody outside Turkmenistan is interested to hear about the terrible situation in my country. My relatives are persecuted and I can’t do anything. I am thinking of returning there; even if that means imprisonment and torture it might draw the attention of the world to Turkmenistan, at least for a moment.” Exiled opposition supporter who wishes to remain anonymous)*

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan has been appalling for years. It has deteriorated even further following an alleged assassination attempt on President Saparmurat Niyazov on 25 November 2002, which triggered a new wave of repression in the country.

Since Turkmenistan became independent after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, it has been dominated by President Niyazov who has been declared President-for-Life and is both head of state and head of government.

The government is known to be extremely intolerant of dissent, and it has severely limited civil and political liberties. Opponents of the regime have been forced into exile or faced imprisonment and persecution, and no independent political parties can openly operate in Turkmenistan. Civil society activists have also faced persecution and imprisonment, and no independent human rights groups are able to function in the country. Religious freedom has been severely curtailed, and the authorities in this virtually closed country have retained tight control of the media. In a press release issued in April 2002 the Representative on Freedom of the Media of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) condemned Turkmenistan for what he called “*absolute lack of any freedom of expression.*” The authorities have banned the circus, opera, and philharmonic orchestra, and closed the Academy of Sciences. Freedom of movement has been severely restricted and ethnic minorities have been targets of harassment and discrimination.

Amnesty International has for years documented cases of prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression or conscience, as well as of political prisoners imprisoned following unfair trials. Many of them were reportedly tortured or ill-treated in detention. The authorities have taken no steps to effectively counter routine impunity of the perpetrators.

### ***President Niyazov’s personality cult***

Key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuse of human rights is the domination by President Niyazov of all aspects of life in the country, and the personality cult he has surrounded himself with. Portraits and statues of the self-proclaimed *Turkmenbashi* (Father of all Turkmen) are ubiquitous in Turkmenistan. In August 2002 President Niyazov renamed the days of the week and the months of the year. January, for example, is now called “*Turkmenbashi*”, April is called “*Gurbansoltan edzhe*” after the President’s mother and September is called “*Rukhnama*”(Book of the Soul). The President’s book *Rukhnama*,

published in 2001, is a core element of his personality cult. According to the President, the book was “*born in my heart [...] through the will of the Almighty and Most Gracious Allah*” and deals with the “*spiritual realization of the goals and mission of the nation.*” The book is praised in songs, and excerpts from it are daily publicized in the country’s media. Everybody who is employed by the state, such as teachers and doctors, have to know passages by heart. Pupils are not admitted to university unless they successfully pass a test on *Rukhnama*. When prisoners refuse to swear an oath on *Rukhnama*, they face beatings and, in many cases, have been denied release upon completion of their sentence.



The monument celebrating the President’s “holy” book *Rukhnama* sited in Ashgabat’s Independence park, © Private

### ***Failure to meet international commitments***

Turkmenistan has failed to live up to its international commitments under fundamental United Nations (UN) human rights treaties and as a participating state of the OSCE.

In the face of the escalating human rights situation following the November 2002 events, 10 OSCE member states appointed the French international law professor Prof. Emmanuel Decaux to examine concerns in the context of the investigation into the alleged

assassination attempt. The authorities of Turkmenistan refused to cooperate with the OSCE and denied the Rapporteur access to the country. In his report published in March 2003, the Rapporteur strongly condemned Turkmenistan's poor human rights record and called on the international community to urgently address the serious human rights situation.<sup>1</sup> According to him, "[a]ny new delay in taking action would not only be a moral abdication but also a collective complicity."

On 16 April 2003 the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution on Turkmenistan, expressing "grave concern" about the human rights situation in the country. The Commission urged the authorities of Turkmenistan, for example, to "grant urgently access by independent bodies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, to the persons detained following the events of 25 November 2002", "to ensure that those responsible for human rights violations are brought to justice", to "remove restrictions on the activities of non-governmental organizations, particularly human rights non-governmental organizations, and other civil society actors", and to "immediately and unconditionally [...] release all prisoners of conscience".<sup>2</sup>

To date the government of Turkmenistan has not shown any political will to implement the recommendations made by the international community.

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. Emmanuel Decaux recommended the Turkmen authorities, among others, to "[create] an independent Constitutional Court, which would be the guardian of the primacy of international law over domestic law, of separation of powers and of the review of the constitutionality of laws"; to "review, either by appeal or through new trials" the "political trials" following the 25 November; to "respect ... the rights of individuals belonging to civil society"; to "guarantee freedom of movement inside the country and freedom to leave the country for all Turkmen nationals, as well as for foreigners"; to "abandon discriminatory discourses or practices, based on a conception of 'racial purity'"; and to meet the country's obligations as a member of the UN and a party to many fundamental human rights treaties, and as a member of the OSCE.

<sup>2</sup> The Commission also expressed grave concern about the "persistence of a governmental policy based on the repression of all political opposition activities", "the suppression of independent media and freedom of expression", "restrictions on the exercise of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion", "the heavy prison sentences given to objectors to compulsory military service on religious grounds [...] and the lack of alternative service compatible with the reasons for conscientious objection". With regard to the investigation into the 25 November 2002 events, the Commission, for example, deplored "[t]he treatment of accused individuals in violation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights", "the harassment of family members of the accused and the arbitrary confiscation of their homes and property", the "conduct of the Turkmen authorities with regard to the lack of fair trials of the accused, the reliance on confessional evidence which may have been extracted by torture or the threat of torture, the closed court proceedings [...] and the refusal to allow diplomatic missions or international observers [...] access to the trials as observers." The Commission requested several UN Special Rapporteurs, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, and on human rights defenders to seek invitations from the authorities of Turkmenistan to visit the country. The Commission's resolution can be found on: [http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.CN.4.RES.2003.11.En?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/E.CN.4.RES.2003.11.En?Opendocument)

Amnesty International urges the international community to build on their initiatives and commit themselves to long-term engagement with regard to human rights in Turkmenistan.

## **Silencing political dissent**

The authorities of Turkmenistan have conducted several waves of repression against political opponents since the country became independent in 1991. Many have been forced into exile; many have faced house arrests, detention, and imprisonment following unfair trials, often accompanied by torture and ill-treatment. Several of those that were later released had to publicly repent on television, promising not to engage in political activities and in many cases had to swear an oath of loyalty to the President. Several waves of politically motivated purges lead to the demotion, dismissal or imprisonment of numerous senior officials in recent years. The November 2002 events triggered another large-scale clampdown on political dissent. Though the new wave of repression is extraordinary, it nevertheless reflects the harsh practices that human rights groups have documented throughout recent years.

### ***Serving his ninth year in prison following unfair trial***

**Mukhametkuli Aymuradov** was convicted of anti-state crimes including “attempted terrorism” and sentenced to 12 years’ imprisonment after a reportedly unfair trial in 1995. In December 1998 Mukhametkuli Aymuradov was sentenced to an additional 18 years’ imprisonment in connection with an alleged prison escape attempt. He remains in the maximum security prison of the Caspian port Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk) that is known for its particularly harsh conditions. His supporters claim that the case against him was fabricated solely to punish him for his association with exiled opponents of the government. Amnesty International is calling for the release of long-standing political prisoner Mukhametkuli Aymuradov on the grounds that repeated calls for a fair retrial of his case have gone unheeded and there does not appear to be a prospect of his being given a fair trial. In addition, the organization is concerned about reports that his state of health continues to be very poor and that he has been denied appropriate medical treatment for a heart attack, a gastric ulcer and recurring inflammation of the kidneys, bladder and gall bladder.



Mukhametkuli Aymuradov,  
© Private

### ***Clampdown following the 25 November 2002 events***

According to the authorities, on 25 November 2002 opposition supporters carried out an armed attack on the President’s motorcade in the capital Ashgabat in an attempt to assassinate him and to overthrow the constitutional order. The President remained unharmed. The

investigation into the alleged attack and the subsequent trials have been marred by serious human rights violations, including credible reports of torture and ill-treatment. As a result, the full truth about the 25 November events has not yet come to light.

Amnesty International received reports that many of those accused of involvement in the alleged assassination attempt as well as their relatives were subjected to torture, ill-treatment and psychological pressure. Such pressure was reportedly aimed at forcing the detainees to 'confess' to their involvement in the attack, to incriminate others or to disclose the whereabouts of people wanted by the police. Several detainees were pressurized to 'confess' publicly or to publicly denounce their parents. Reportedly, many detainees have been denied appropriate medical treatment. To Amnesty International's knowledge, no investigations have been carried out into any of these allegations.

**Amanmukhammet Yklymov**, for example, is said to have been tortured in the Ashgabat city police building following his arrest on 25 November 2002. His family claim that as a result of the torture, he lost sight in his left eye and the hearing in his left ear. His left arm was reportedly broken and he was hardly able to move. Sources allege that a plastic bag was put over his head to restrict his breathing, and that he was suspended by his arms, and forced to wear a gas mask, to which the air supply was cut off. The court reportedly ignored Amanmukhammet Yklymov's allegations that he was tortured in custody. His brother Saparmurat Yklymov told Amnesty International from exile in Sweden in January 2003: "*Amanmukhammet was already ill before they arrested him. I'm afraid he may not survive.*" Unconfirmed reports received by Amnesty International in August 2003 alleged that Amanmukhammet Yklymov died in custody in March as a result of torture.

There were reports that **Batyr Berdyev**, former Ambassador of Turkmenistan to the OSCE and former Foreign Minister, was ill-treated in detention following his arrest on 8 December 2002. Three officers of the Ministry of National Security reportedly beat him after they had attached him to a door with handcuffs.

The two men named above and at least 57 others were sentenced to prison terms ranging from five years' to life imprisonment by the Supreme Court and Ashgabat City Court in December 2002 and January 2003,<sup>3</sup> accused of involvement in the alleged assassination attempt. The OSCE-appointed Rapporteur Prof. Emmanuel Decaux described the conditions in which the trials took place as "*appalling*" and "*in breach of all the most elementary principles of the rule of law*".

The authorities refused to disclose vital information about those detained, including their whereabouts and the charges brought against them, and only on 31 January 2003 an official list of names and charges and sentences of most of the defendants was published in the official *Adalat* newspaper. In most cases the charges brought included "conspiracy to

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<sup>3</sup> According to the *Adalat* newspaper, Amanmukhammet and Orazmamed Yklymov were sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment on 19 January and Batyr Berdyev was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment on 21 January.

violently overthrow the government and/or change the constitutional order”, “attempting to assassinate the President”, and “setting up or participating in a criminal organization”.

The first trial took place at the end of December 2002. Opposition figures who had been senior officials in the Niyazov government in the past – **Boris Shikhmuradov, Nurmukhammet Khanamov, Khudayberdy Orazov, and Saparmurat Yklymov** – were reportedly sentenced to 25 years’ imprisonment in a closed trial of the country’s Supreme Court. The latter three were sentenced in their absence. The sentences were reportedly increased to life imprisonment the following day by the People’s Council, which consists of representatives of the legislative, the executive and the judicial branches of power. Reportedly, none of the defendants was represented by an independent lawyer and it is not known whether those tried *in absentia* were represented by a defence lawyer at all. Boris Shikhmuradov’s wife, Tatyana Shikhmuradova, told Amnesty International: “*It is impossible to find out whether the lawyers were allowed to speak, whether any witnesses were questioned [and] who chaired the hearing.*” Nurmukhammet Khanamov, Khudayberdy Orazov and Saparmurat Yklymov told Amnesty International that they had not been notified of the trial in advance and only learnt about it through the media. In Boris Shikhmuradov’s televised ‘confession’ that was broadcast at the end of December and that was believed to have been dictated to him, he stated: “*I and my allies [...] are not opposition members but ordinary criminals and drug addicts [...] there is not a single decent person among us; we are all thugs [...] I am not a man able to rule a state [...] I am a criminal able only to destroy the state.*”

According to official sources, Boris Shikhmuradov -- who had been in exile since he defected in November 2001 -- entered Turkmenistan shortly before the attack on the President and Turkmen secret police detained him on 25 December 2002. According to a declaration entitled “Boris Shikhmuradov’s statement”, dated 24 December and posted on the website of Boris Shikhmuradov’s opposition group on 26 December, he had returned to Turkmenistan in September to organize demonstrations and denied involvement in the November attack.

Another 55 people, among them Amanmukhammet Yklymov and Batyr Berdyev, were convicted in a series of closed trials, accused of involvement in the November 2002 attack that began in the middle of January 2002. The defendants were not represented by independent lawyers. In many cases the defendants’ lawyers and families were given little or no notice before the court hearings began. Some lawyers representing the defendants in court reportedly began their plea with the words “*I am ashamed to defend a person like you...*”. The defendants were reportedly forced to sign a document saying they were familiar with the documentation of their criminal case and the indictment, without being given the chance to study these documents. Representatives of embassies and the OSCE who requested to observe the trials were not given access to any of the court hearings.

By the time of writing, the five prisoners serving life imprisonment reportedly remain in the detention facilities of the Ministry of National Security in Ashgabat. Many relatives of those convicted in connection with the November 2002 events do not know where their relatives are kept. There were reports that there had been transfers of prisoners to a new prison north of Ashgabat. Relatives of the prisoners and representatives of independent bodies have to date been denied permission to visit the prisoners. The lack of transparency heightens

Amnesty International's concern that the prisoners continue to be at risk of torture and ill-treatment. Many relatives of those convicted and imprisoned reported that they have been refused permission to pass on food parcels and medicine to their relatives.

## **Clampdown on religious dissent**

The authorities of Turkmenistan are also extremely intolerant of religious dissent. Under the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, religious congregations are required to register with the government, and since re-registration of religious organizations was made compulsory in early 1997 only two groups -- the Russian Orthodox Church and Sunni Muslims -- obtained registration.

Those belonging to religious groups that are not officially sanctioned, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, Baha'i, Buddhists, Hare Krishna devotees, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Jews, have been denied any public religious activities and have faced imprisonment, deportation, internal exile, house eviction and harassment for years. Many have been harassed by the authorities also for religious activities carried out in private, for example, when holding services in private homes. Amnesty International has documented many cases in which members of religious minorities were tortured or ill-treated by law enforcement officers. Many foreign missionaries have been deported from Turkmenistan in recent years and several ethnic Turkmen followers who advocated a religious belief other than those officially sanctioned have been forced into exile or have been forcibly resettled inside the country.

The Russian Orthodox Church and the Sunni Muslim community are also under strict state control and members of registered religious groups have apparently also been targeted and punished when daring to express any kind of dissent.

There is no civilian alternative in Turkmenistan for young men who object to compulsory military service on grounds of conscience. Those who refuse conscription face imprisonment under criminal law. Amnesty International continues to receive reports of young men imprisoned in Turkmenistan solely for their refusal to serve in the army on religious grounds.

### ***Repeat imprisonment of conscientious objector Nikolay Shelekhov***

Twenty-one-year-old **Nikolay Shelekhov**, a Jehovah's Witness, is kept in the prison colony of Turkmenabad (formerly Chardzhev) near the border with Uzbekistan, to punish him for his repeat objection to serve in the army on religious grounds. He was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment by President Niyazov district court in Ashgabat on 2 July 2002. Appeals lodged against his sentence with Ashgabat city court and the Supreme Court were turned down in August and October respectively. He had previously been imprisoned for the same offence -- "evasion of military call-up"-- and was still suffering from illnesses, including kidney problems, contracted while serving the previous prison term, between August 2000 and December 2001. Amnesty International regards Nikolay Shelekhov as a prisoner of conscience and calls for his prompt and unconditional release.

### **Reportedly fabricated charges against Jehovah's Witness Kurban Zakirov**

Twenty-year-old **Kurban Zakirov** is serving a prison sentence of eight years in particularly harsh conditions in a labour colony in the Caspian port of Turkmenbashi. He was sentenced to one year's imprisonment in May 1999 for refusing to serve in the army on religious grounds. Since then, he has allegedly twice been denied release because of his refusal on conscientious grounds to swear an oath of allegiance to President Niyazov, first when he was pardoned in December 1999 and again upon completion of his sentence around April 2000. Following his second refusal, a new criminal case was brought against him and he was sentenced to an additional eight years' imprisonment. There is reason to believe that this case was fabricated to punish him for his religious beliefs. According to Jehovah's Witnesses inside Turkmenistan, a prison official ripped a shoulder strap from his own uniform in the presence of other officials, and accused Kurban Zakirov of having attacked him. The exact charge or charges for which he was convicted are not known to Amnesty International. Amnesty International regards Kurban Zakirov as a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.



Kurban Zakirov, © Private

### **Civil society**

The authorities of Turkmenistan have severely controlled the activities of civil society activists and have dramatically narrowed the space in which civil society groups can operate. The civil society community is relatively small, not least because its activists have had to take great personal risks in order to carry out their activities. Civil society activists have been frequent targets of imprisonment, detention, persecution and harassment, including routine summoning to the Security Service.

In April 2003 the civil society activist **Farid Tukhbatullin**, adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience, was released from prison following massive international pressure. He had been detained in December 2002 and sentenced to three years' imprisonment on fabricated charges in an unfair trial in March 2003, solely to punish him for exercising his right to freedom of expression. Upon his release he was forced to sign a 'confession' stating, for example "*I fully support your [Saparmurat Niyazov's] domestic and foreign policy, whose aim is the welfare and prosperity of the Turkmen people and stability of Turkmenistan's forward movement in a golden age.*" Farid Tukhbatullin's 'confession' was reportedly videotaped and he had to swear an oath on the Koran and *Rukhnama* promising to refrain from any "criminal activities" in the future. Throughout his pre-trial detention and in court Farid Tukhbatullin had maintained his innocence.

The authorities have in many instances prevented civil society activists, journalists, opposition supporters and others from meeting representatives of foreign governments and international organizations, including the UN and the OSCE on their visits to Turkmenistan. The security service has frequently warned them not to attend such meetings or not to address any issues that may shed a negative light on the authorities, and threatened that non-compliance would have serious repercussions. In many cases the telephones of activists were apparently disconnected throughout the time of the visit of a foreign delegation.

## **Punishing the relatives**

The authorities of Turkmenistan have frequently targeted persons because of the known or perceived political or religious activities of their relatives. Relatives have faced detention, harassment, eviction from their homes, demolition of their houses, and dismissal from their jobs. Many of those living in exile refrain from openly criticizing the authorities of Turkmenistan so as not to put their relatives who remain in the country at risk.

Immediately after the alleged attack in November 2002, scores of relatives of known or perceived government critics implicated by the authorities in the attack were detained. Many of them were reportedly subjected to torture, ill-treatment and psychological pressure by law enforcement officers to force them to incriminate their relatives or others or to disclose their relative's whereabouts.

**Svetlana Prokofyeva and her mother** were reportedly tortured using electric shocks, and beaten with rubber truncheons and plastic bottles filled with water, in an attempt to force them to disclose the whereabouts of Yklym Yklymov, the boyfriend of Svetlana's sister Olga Prokofyeva. Yklym Yklymov had gone into hiding following the 25 November attack. Svetlana Prokofyeva and her mother were reportedly released when law enforcement officers succeeded in detaining Yklym Yklymov.

**Ayna Shikhmuradova**, the sister-in-law of Boris Shikhmuradov, and her **15-year-old son Aman** were detained and kept at Ashgabat city police on 21 February 2003 for approximately 10 hours. Aman Shikhmuradov was reportedly present throughout the interrogation of his mother and witnessed how she was verbally abused and threatened that she would be beaten if she did not disclose the whereabouts of her nephew Begench Beknazarov, who went into hiding following the November 2002 attack. The officers reportedly also wanted her to confess to complicity in a murder; Ayna Shikhmuradova claimed she was innocent and that she did not even know the person who was allegedly murdered. At one point Aman Shikhmuradov was reportedly taken to another office and threatened that his mother would be put into prison and he would never see neither her nor his father anymore. When they were released shortly after midnight Aman Shikhmuradov was reportedly in a state of shock and began to speak with a stammer.

In addition, many family members were evicted from their homes and their property was confiscated. Most court verdicts handed down in December 2002 and January 2003 in relation to those implicated in the November 2002 attack included the confiscation of property. However, in many cases the confiscation of property was believed to have been

carried out weeks before the verdicts were pronounced and reportedly severely affected family members.

**Edzhebay Yklymova**, Saparmurat Yklymov's 75-year old mother, for example, who is confined to a wheelchair, and several children that belong to the Yklymov family were evicted from their house on Rustaveli street in Ashgabat on 27 November 2002. Reportedly, they had to leave most of their possessions, which were also confiscated, in the house. Saparmurat Yklymov's mother and the children went to live in the homes of other relatives and lived in constant fear of another eviction or that they could be sent into internal exile. On 27 March 2003 law enforcement officers reportedly came to the house where Edzhebay Yklymova was staying and forcibly took her out of the house. Reportedly, she found refuge with other relatives.

Apart from that, many relatives of those convicted in connection with the 25 November 2002 attack were dismissed from their jobs and children reportedly faced harassment and intimidation at school. Many family members of known or perceived government critics who were released after questioning in connection with the November 2002 attack reportedly had their passports confiscated and had to sign an undertaking not to leave the city where they had been detained.

## Recommendations

Amnesty International urges the authorities of Turkmenistan to promptly introduce fundamental reforms of domestic law, policies and institutions in line with the country's obligations under international human rights law, as steps in a process to significantly improve its human rights record.

The organization urges the international community to build on their efforts to address human rights violations in Turkmenistan and to commit themselves to long-term engagement with a view to improving the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.

### ***Amnesty International's recommendations to the government of Turkmenistan***

- Implement promptly all recommendations listed in the resolution adopted in April 2003 at the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, as well as the recommendations made by the OSCE-appointed rapporteur Prof. Emmanuel Decaux in his March 2003 report.
- Grant access to political prisoners by their relatives and the International Committee of the Red Cross.
- Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience including **Nikolay Shelekhov** and **Kurban Zakirov**, and political prisoner **Mukhametkuli Aymuradov**, convicted in 1995 in an unfair trial.
- Stop persecuting dissidents and their relatives, ensuring the full scope of their rights.
- Confirm whether or not **Amanmukhammet Yklymov** died in custody.
- Carry out impartial and thorough investigations into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment, including of **Amanmukhammet Yklymov**, **Batyr Berdyev**, **Svetlana Prokofyeva and her mother**, and others detained following the 25 November 2002 events; publish the findings of these investigations; bring to justice those found responsible and provide full reparation to the victims.
- Ensure that all those convicted in connection with the 25 November 2002 events as well as all other political prisoners who were sentenced following unfair trials are granted a retrial in procedures which meet international standards of fairness; and ensure that independent trial observers are granted access to the trials.
- Ensure that everyone in Turkmenistan is able to exercise peacefully their right to freedom of religion without threat of imprisonment, detention or harassment. Repeal the Presidential ruling that restricts registration of religious groups.
- Ensure that non-governmental organizations and civil society activists are able to carry out their peaceful activities free from harassment and persecution and be allowed to register and operate freely.

Cooperate with United Nations human rights bodies:

- Submit all due reports to all United Nations treaty bodies without delay; ensure full and prompt implementation of their recommendations; and respond to all outstanding communications of the United Nations special mechanisms.
- Grant access to the country to the United Nations special procedures.
- Cooperate with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights by accepting the technical assistance offered by the Office.

***Amnesty International's recommendations to the international community***

- Urge the authorities of Turkmenistan to implement all recommendations listed in the resolution adopted in April 2003 at the 59<sup>th</sup> session of United Nations Commission on Human Rights as well as the recommendations made by the OSCE-appointed Rapporteur Prof. Emmanuel Decaux in his March 2003 report, and the recommendations to the authorities of Turkmenistan listed above.
- Ensure the protection of all persons that are at risk of being forcibly returned to Turkmenistan in connection with the 25 November 2002 attack and all others whose forcible return to Turkmenistan would violate international human rights standards; remove any restrictive measures on immigration and asylum that obstruct Turkmen from accessing protection against persecution and human rights abuses in other countries; and act upon requests for family reunification of Turkmen in their countries in a speedily and firm manner.
- Ensure continued focus on Turkmenistan by the 60<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in 2004; support another resolution that builds on the recommendations of the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the CHR in 2003; support the establishment of a mandate for a Special Rapporteur on Turkmenistan.
- Call on the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to undertake a visit to Turkmenistan to investigate reports of human rights violations as a matter of priority.
- Establish an informal Contact Group of governments with a view to improving the human rights situation in Turkmenistan.