

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 62/011/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 112
11 May 2006

Embargo Date: 11 May 2006 10:00 GMT

Uzbekistan: Andizhan one year on - the victims must not be forgotten

"The street was running with blood and rain. We were soaked in blood and rain."

An eyewitness of the events in Andizhan on 12-13 May 2005.

Last year's killings in Andizhan continue to be used as an excuse by the authorities in Uzbekistan to clamp down on freedom of expression in the name of national security and the "war on terror", said Amnesty International.

On the eve of the first anniversary of the killings of hundreds of people, many of whom were unarmed civilians, Amnesty International members around the world are calling on the international community not to turn a blind eye to the killings and the continued torture in Uzbekistan.

"The authorities in Uzbekistan have blatantly ignored the calls of the international community for an impartial, independent and thorough international investigation. They have refused to take any effective measures to investigate the violence by the security forces and to bring to justice those responsible," Maisy Weicherding, Amnesty International's researcher on Uzbekistan said.

"One year on, the need for such an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the tragic events in Andizhan remains as pertinent and pressing as ever in order to determine the truth of these disputed events and to ensure reparation, including redress, for all the victims of the human rights abuses perpetrated on those days."

On 13 May 2005, Uzbekistani security forces fired indiscriminately on demonstrators who had gathered in the city of Andizhan in eastern Uzbekistan to voice their grievances about repressive government policies and widespread poverty. Hundreds suspected of involvement in the events were detained, and many were allegedly ill-treated or tortured. Hundreds fled to neighbouring Kyrgyzstan in search of refuge. Dozens were tried and sentenced in proceedings that failed to meet international standards of fairness.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other non-governmental organizations have continued to expose the ongoing repression of civil society and particularly of anybody, who dares to challenge the official version of the Andizhan events, including foreign media. In its update document following the killings in Andizhan, *Andizhan: Impunity must not prevail*, Amnesty International condemns the failure of the Uzbekistani authorities to ensure that all allegations of serious human rights violations are promptly, independently and thoroughly investigated.

"By imprisoning human rights activists and by gagging the independent media, the Uzbekistani authorities are trying to bury the truth about what happened in Andizhan one year ago. They are trying to conceal the fact that repressive practices, such as arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment, unfair trials, lack of freedom of expression and association that led to the protests in Andizhan, continue unabated," Maisy Weicherding said.

Amnesty International considers the people arrested for trying to tell the truth about Andizhan as prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release. The organization calls upon the authorities of Uzbekistan to allow immediately an independent international investigation into the Andizhan events and to ensure that all those charged receive a fair and public trial with statements obtained through torture or other ill-treatment excluded as evidence.

Cases

Independent journalist, Aleksei Volosevich, was in Andizhan on 13 May and reported the events on the main independent Russian language website www.ferghana.ru. He was attacked near his home in Tashkent after the main national governmental newspaper *Pravda Vostoka* accused him of treason against the state.

Prominent human rights activist, Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov, was sentenced to seven years in prison in Tashkent on 5 January 2006 in effectively a secret trial. His current whereabouts are unknown. One of the real reasons for his imprisonment appeared to be his reporting of the 13 May events, which received international media coverage and provided a stark contrast to the official version of events.

On 12 January 2006, Dilmurod Muhiddinov, a human rights activist from Andizhan, was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of "attempting to overthrow the constitutional order". He had been detained the previous year for being in possession of a statement on the Andizhan events, published by the secular opposition party Birlik.

On 6 March 2006, Mutabar Tadzhibaeva, Chairwoman of the human rights organization Fiery Hearts Club and a 2005 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, was sentenced to eight years in prison on economic and political charges. Before her arrest last year, Mutabar Tadzhibaeva was monitoring human rights violations in Ferghana Valley.

Background

In response to Uzbekistan's continued refusal to allow an independent international investigation into the May killings in Andizhan, in November 2005 the European Union announced an embargo on its arms sales and military transfers to Uzbekistan, and a one-year visa ban on 12 senior government ministers and officials. In December 2005, the UN General Assembly expressed deep regret over Uzbekistan's refusal to allow an international investigation and urged the authorities to stop their "harassment and detention of eyewitnesses".

See: *Andizhan: Impunity must not prevail* (AI Index: EUR 62/010/2006)

<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur620102006>

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