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for Human Rights



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Uzbekistan: Continuing repression in the wake of Andijan**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic events in Andijan, International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA), Reporters without Borders (RSF), the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), Uzbek-German Forum for human rights (UGF), and Cotton Campaign at International Labor Rights Forum commemorate the victims of the bloodiest repression of demonstrators in the last 25 years in Uzbekistan and express concern that the Uzbekistani authorities continue repressions against those who speak out about the tragic events in Andijan of 13 May 2005.

On 13 May, a growing number of people gathered in the central Babur Square in Andijan to voice grievances about repressive government policies and economic hardships. Their number grew to several thousands. Uzbek law enforcement and security forces encircled the crowd and repeatedly fired indiscriminately on the protesters, the vast majority of whom were unarmed. They did not give any warning or attempt to use other crowd control measures, such as water cannons or tear gas, and ignored cries from protesters to stop shooting. As a result of the shootings, hundreds of people died and many more were injured. Among the victims were many women, children and elderly. According to official figures, 187 people were killed, but unofficial estimates put the number between 500 and 1500.

In the months after the events of 13 May, hundreds of people were charged with crimes related to the violence and tried in closed and secret hearings, where they were given lengthy prison sentences. Many others were forced to flee Uzbekistan. None of the officials who were involved in the shootings have been brought to justice and held accountable.

The government of Uzbekistan refers to "the Andijan issue" as an internal matter and has dismissed international calls for carrying out an effective, independent and impartial investigation into the May 2005 events, in violation of its international human rights obligations.

"Today, eleven years have passed since the massacre in Andijan, and still, no one has been held responsible for the extra-judicial killings and executions that shook the international community. Uzbekistan must allow an impartial, international investigation into the gruesome events that left hundreds dead", said Bjørn Engesland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

"In Uzbekistan, the practice of imprisoning people on the basis of confessions obtained through torture is pervasive" - said Julia Bourbon head of the Central Asia and Asia desk of ACAT, - "Prisoners' sentences are frequently extended. Thousands of political prisoners have spent years in prison in conditions amounting to torture and ill-treatment. "

Although eleven years have passed since the Andijan tragedy, many of the circumstances remain unclear. It remains necessary to establish the number of dead, wounded and missing and to cease harassing those witnesses and civil society activists who demand an investigation into the tragedy.

Those who fled Uzbekistan and settled in Russia and throughout the CIS face continued repression and harassment. The relatives of Andijan refugees living in Uzbekistan face constant pressure from state bodies. The Uzbekistani authorities misuse international mechanisms such as Interpol to pursue civil society activists who have fled abroad.

"Corruption is widespread in all echelons of power in Uzbekistan and this destroys the rule of law and undermines the principles of the Constitution," said Nadejda Atayeva, AHRCA president. "The lack of freedom of speech and of judicial independence only serves to fuel practices of torture and contemporary forms of slavery. We must remember the Andijan tragedy and speak out about the situation in Uzbekistan."

"The climate of fear continues to enable the Uzbek government's use of forced labor, and officials increased the frequency and severity of attacks against citizens documenting the cotton harvest this past year," said Matthew Fischer-Daly, Cotton Campaign coordinator at the International Labor Rights Forum. "It is incumbent on the international community to press the Uzbekistani government to ensure citizens can raise labor and human rights concerns without fear of reprisals."

"We won't forget the tragic events of Andijan; despite the authorities' attempts to silence those who strived to report on the tragedy of 13 May 2005. Journalists have a crucial role to play to remind the world about the repression imposed by the Uzbekistani authorities on the people - from cotton workers to media workers. Our thoughts go to the Uzbekistani journalists who continue to endure violence, prison, torture or exile in retribution for exercising their right to freedom of information", said, Johann Bihl, head of RSF's Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk.

The international community must not forget about the tragic events in Andijan, and must pay close attention to the ongoing human rights violations occurring in Uzbekistan. External pressure is imperative to achieve accountability for the Andijan events and progress on the respect of fundamental human rights and the development of civil society in Uzbekistan.

"Allowing the Andijan massacre to be forgotten means the Uzbekistani authorities will avoid assuming responsibility for the most serious of crimes," - Rachel Bugler, IPHR consultant – "the international community must continue to demand accountability for this tragedy and the UN Human Rights Council should establish a special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. "

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