

February 12, 2014

Dear President Zeman,

Thank you for your quick response to our letter voicing our deep concern over your invitation of Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov for an official visit this month.

You make three points, which we address here:

First, Václav Klaus visited Tashkent in 2004, thus before the Andijan Massacre of May 2005, after which the international community's relationship – and in particular, the European Union's relationship – with the Uzbek government regime changed dramatically. As you know, the Czech Republic, along with the other member states of the EU, placed sanctions on the Uzbek government for its persistent refusal to allow an international independent investigation into the killings of hundreds of mainly peaceful protesters in Andijan as well as for the ensuing crackdown in which authorities imprisoned numerous human rights defenders and journalists for attempting to document and raise questions about the massacre. Moreover, as we state in our initial letter, while diplomatic courtesy is important, we believe the proper course of action would be to postpone the invitation until there is measurable evidence that President Karimov has made concrete improvements on the EU's core human rights criteria, which are outlined in numerous official statements.

Second, when President Karimov visited Brussels in January 2011, the invitation was made by NATO, not the EU. In addition, most top officials – including European Council President Herman Van Rompuy and European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, as well as the Belgian king and foreign minister – refrained from meeting with him. European Commission President José Manuel Barroso did meet him, but the protest was loud and strong from most of the organizations that have signed today's letter. Significantly, in a public statement issued following the meeting, Mr. Barroso made clear that “a strengthening of relations with Uzbekistan, for which the European Union was ready in principle, is strictly dependent on Uzbek reforms and progress, notably regarding human rights, democratization and the rule of law.”

See, for example, this public letter at the time:

<http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2011/january/congratulations-mr-karimov/69949.aspx>

Or RSF's protest here:

http://en.rsf.org/uzbekistan-rights-and-freedoms-left-off-20-01-2011_39369.html

Or CPJ's protest here:

<http://cpj.org/2011/01/cpj-asks-eu-to-press-uzbekistan-on-its-press-freed.php>

and here:

<http://cpj.org/blog/2011/01/eu-has-contradictory-message-on-karimov-lukashenko.php>

Or HRW's protest:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/01/19/letter-european-commission-president-barroso-uzbek-president-islam-karimov-s-visit-b>

Or FIDH's protest: <http://www.fidh.org/en/eastern-europe-central-asia/uzbekistan/Flash-protest-around-the-official,8967>

Or AHRCA's protest: <http://nadejda-atayeva-en.blogspot.fr/2011/01/free-europe-embraces-uzbek-dictator.html>

and here:

<http://nadejda-atayeva-en.blogspot.fr/2011/01/karimov-will-visit-brussels-january-24.html>

There are many more. In addition, many Uzbeks, including human rights activists who earlier were imprisoned and subjected to torture in Uzbekistan, came to Brussels to protest in person at the Commission. Some photos of that protest are here:

<http://www.fidh.org/en/eastern-europe-central-asia/uzbekistan/Flash-protest-around-the-official,8967>

and here: <http://nadejda-atayeva-en.blogspot.fr/2011/01/demonstration-in-brussels-in-support-of.html>

Third, while United States officials have recognized the role Uzbekistan has played in the war in Afghanistan, the US government has also long criticized Tashkent over its abysmal record on fundamental labor rights and freedom of religion, which includes Tashkent's more than decade-long campaign to arbitrarily detain and imprison thousands of peaceful religious believers who practice their religion outside strict state controls under the banner of fighting "terrorism." (See: "USCIRF's 2013 Annual Report on the State of International Religious Freedom Identifies World's Worst Violators," April 30, 2013, <http://www.uscifr.gov/news-room/press-releases/3986.html>). Nonetheless, many of the organizations that signed the letter to you have been critical of Washington's stance on Uzbekistan. Many have repeatedly called on the US government to adopt a more robust human rights policy, including by making regular public statements on continuing rights abuses and attaching meaningful policy consequences for Tashkent's failure to make improvements.

For example, just a few weeks ago, Human Rights Watch said, "The US government continued to avoid attaching any serious policy consequences for Uzbekistan's failure to improve its rights record."

See: <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/uzbekistan?page=3>

Or this article by Human Rights Watch in *Foreign Policy* from 2011:

<http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/16/kisses-karimov>

Or, to give an example of something older, 2003:

<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/03/25/name-counter-terrorism-human-rights-abuses-worldwide>

Or this from Freedom House in 2011, saying, “the US stoops too low” with Uzbekistan:
http://www.freedomhouse.org/blog/courting-uzbekistan-united-states-stoops-too-low-0#.Uvj3B_lVg0
http://www.freedomhouse.org/blog/courting-uzbekistan-united-states-stoops-too-low-0%23.Uvj3B_lVg0

Or this from CPJ:

<http://cpj.org/blog/2012/01/what-us-cant-accept-in-belarus-it-supports-in-uzbe.php>

Or these numerous points from the Cotton Campaign on the need to condition economic trade on fulfilling human rights commitments:

- http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/03/opinion/plea-for-fair-cotton-harvest.html?_r=0
- <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2013/05/15/ilrf-calls-on-u-s-customs-service-to-halt-imports-of-forced-labor-cotton-from-uzbekistan/>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/10/cotton-slavery-uzbekistan?INTCMP=SRCH>
- <http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2013/02/21/cfp-pkg-clancy-uzbek-cotton.cnn>
- <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2012/10/29/end-cotton-crimes-remove-trade-preferences-for-uzbek-cotton/>

And also from the Cotton Campaign on the need for the US and the EU to prioritize human rights in their diplomacy:

- <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2013/12/04/open-letter-to-the-eu-special-representative-for-central-asia/>
- <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2013/03/15/uzbekistan-must-end-state-sponsored-slavery/>
- http://www.cottoncampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Letter_EUSpecRepCA_PatriciaFlor_25July2012.pdf
- <http://www.cottoncampaign.org/2012/05/30/cotton-campaign-seeks-eu-support-for-ilo-monitoring-in-uzbekistan/>

Or this from FIDH: <http://www.fidh.org/en/americas/usa/As-Hunger-Strike-Enters-Third-Month-25-Prominent-Human-Rights-13142>

We would welcome the opportunity to elaborate further on these three points and on our work on Uzbekistan should you wish to be informed by our many years of collective research and analysis of the human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

Signed (alphabetically),

Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (ACAT), www.acatfrance.fr,
www.acatfrance.fr

Anti-Slavery International (ASI), www.antislavery.org

Association of Human Rights in Central Asia, www.nadejda-atayeva-en.blogspot.com

Association International Human Rights “Fiery Hears Club,” www.jarayon.com

The Australian Council of Trade Unions, www.actu.org.au

Calvert Investments, www.calvert.com

The Child Labor Coalition, www.stopchildlabor.org

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), www.cpj.org

The Cotton Campaign, www.cottoncampaign.org

European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR), <http://www.ecchr.de>

Expert Working Group

Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), www.fidh.org

Freedom House, www.freedomhour.org

Freedom Now, www.freedom-now.org

Human Rights Watch (HRW), www.hrw.org

INKOTA-netzwerk, www.inkota.de/baumwolle

International Labor Rights Forum, www.laborrights.org

International Partnership for Human Rights, www.IPHRonline.org

Liga lidských práv, www.llp.cz

NaZemi, www.nazemi.cz

Norwegian Helsinki Committee, www.nhc.no

People in Need, www.clovekvtisni.cz

Reporters Without Borders (RSF), www.rsf.org

Sunshine Coalition, @sunshineuz

Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia, www.tcfua.org.au

Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, www.victas.uca.org.au

Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (UGF), www.uzbekgermanforum.org