

Amnesty International EU Office Press Release

Fifth Anniversary of Andizhan killings: The EU must put pressure on Uzbekistan

(Brussels, 12 May) On the fifth anniversary of the Andizhan killings in Uzbekistan, Amnesty International urges the European Union to strongly condemn the continued attacks on human rights defenders and journalists who raise the issue in the country. In a letter to Catherine Ashton, Amnesty International also seeks a public assurance that an urgent, independent and international investigation into the killings is still a foreign policy priority for the EU.

Hundreds of people, including women and children, were killed on 13 May 2005 when government security forces fired on mainly peaceful demonstrators in the centre of Andizhan. In the aftermath, the Uzbekistani government clamped down on expression of dissent and tried to silence independent reporting on the event. The response of the EU was an arms embargo that came into force in October 2005 and other targeted sanctions. The embargo, however, was lifted in October 2009 without a single reference to the need for an independent investigation into the killings – a key demand the decision to establish sanctions was centred on.

“The European Union’s inconsistencies on Andizhan are harming the credibility of a foreign policy that should put human rights at the centre of any decision. There needs to be a clear and consistent approach which put international pressure on Uzbekistan to allow an international independent investigation of the killings”, says Nicolas Beger, the director of Amnesty International’s EU office.

Uzbekistan has recently cited the lifting of the EU arms embargo as evidence that the matter of the investigation now is closed. Amnesty International believes that the human rights situation has continued to deteriorate since the events in May 2005 with human rights defenders and independent journalists increasingly being harassed, beaten and detained, although the authorities repeatedly deny this. Reports of torture or other ill-treatment in custody continue unabated.

The case of Dilorom Abdukadirova, 44, a refugee in Australia, is particularly disturbing. She fled to Kyrgyzstan after attending the Andizhan demonstration, leaving her husband and children behind. She returned in January this year after assurances by the authorities that nothing would happen to her but was immediately detained for four days upon arrival at the airport. In March she was detained once again and kept in a police cell for two weeks without access to a lawyer or her family. She was eventually brought to trial in April on anti-constitutional charges as well as of illegal exit from and entry to Uzbekistan for her participation in the Andizhan events. She was sentenced to 10 years and two months imprisonment on 30 April in a trial that failed to meet international standards.

“The human rights situation in Uzbekistan is still as bad as it was five years ago and the EU must recognize this immediately. Courageous individuals such as journalists and human rights defenders that still dare to raise the issue of the killings are suffering and the EU cannot simply ignore this and carry on in its relationship with Uzbekistan as if it is business as usual,” concludes Nicolas Beger.

***For further comment/background and interviews:***

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