

Human Rights Watch

Torture, Former Combatants, Political Prisoners, Terror Suspects, & Terrorists

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2004/09/09/uzbekistan-torture-unfair-trials-wake-attacks>

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Government Broadly Targets Dissident Muslims in Response to March-April Violence

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The Uzbek government has resorted to torture, incommunicado detention and unfair trials in its response to violent attacks in the country in March and April, Human Rights Watch said in letters to the Uzbek president. In particular, the authorities have targeted Muslims who practice their faith outside state-controlled religious institutions.

Human Rights Watch documented the recent wave of repression in two letters to Uzbek President Islam Karimov that were made public today. The Uzbek government has yet to reply to the concerns raised in the letters, which were sent on August 18, 2004.

The fight against terrorism doesn't give the government free reign to violate human rights, said Rachel Denber, acting executive director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia Division. The state can't simply dispense with core human rights even if it has legitimate security concerns.

The first letter documents new cases of arbitrary detention, harassment and ill-treatment of Muslim dissidents. A wave of arrests followed explosions directed against police officers in Tashkent and Bukhara in late March and early April. While the government blamed the attacks on extremists, its response has broadly targeted independent Muslims, who practice their faith outside government-controlled mosques and other religious institutions. The letter also sets out concrete recommendations for tackling government abuses.

The second letter details violations of fair trial standards in a recent Supreme Court trial of 15 defendants on terrorism, murder and other charges relating to the March-April violence. On August 24, all 15 were found guilty and sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 18 years. The letter calls on the government to respect due process and fair trial standards in future trials. Uzbekistan lacks an independent judiciary.

Uzbekistan has a terrible track record when it comes to trying terrorism cases, Denber said. Unfair trials rob the judicial process of legitimacy, which only undermines the Uzbek government's struggle against terrorism.

The start of two new terrorism trials in Tashkent and Bukhara on Tuesday, September 7, has given the need for fair trials a particular urgency. In Tashkent, seven men and eight women are being tried in the Akmal-Ikramov district court on multiple charges, including terrorism, murder, inciting religious hatred, fundamentalism, violating freedom of conscience and undermining the constitutional order. Allegations that some of the defendants were illegally detained and denied access to counsel raised questions about the fairness of the proceedings even before the trial began.

In Bukhara, the 16 male defendants on trial in the city's Province Court face multiple charges including terrorism and murder. All 16 reportedly confessed on the first day of the trial. Rukhiddin Komilov, a lawyer representing the defendant Fazliddin Tukhtaev, has been excluded from the proceedings because authorities claimed that he is not the attorney of record, even though he has a copy of the order appointing him to represent Tukhtaev. The authorities have also prevented Komilov from taking part in the investigation and reviewing the case materials.

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