

Human Rights Watch

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

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Terror Trials Get Underway in Tashkent

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The government of Uzbekistan is conducting a massive crackdown to conceal the truth about the killing of hundreds of civilian demonstrators in Andijan in May, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The 73-page report provides numerous first-hand testimonies of a brutal police campaign forcing people to "confess" that they belong to extremist religious organizations, that the protests in Andijan were violent, and that the protesters were armed.

In Tashkent today, trials are beginning of people charged with instigating the demonstrations in Andijan. The prosecution is expected to blame "terrorists" with an Islamic agenda for the hundreds of deaths in the central square of Andijan on May 13. Amnesty International is also releasing a report on Uzbekistan today on the Andijan events. Both organizations are renewing their calls for an independent international investigation into the massacre.

"We've been following political repression in Uzbekistan for many years, but we've never seen anything as extensive as the crackdown post-Andijan," said Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director of Human Rights Watch. "Instead of going after the perpetrators of the massacre, the Uzbek government is trying to deny responsibility and silence the witnesses."

The report, "Burying the Truth: Uzbekistan Rewrites the Story of the Andijan Massacre," details the unrelenting persecution of human rights defenders, independent journalists and political activists who tried to tell the truth about what happened on May 13. At least 11 activists have been imprisoned, at least 15 have been forced to flee the country into exile, and many other civil society activists have been forced to abandon their work.

Human Rights Watch urged the European Union to suspend its Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Uzbekistan. The EU General Affairs and External Relations Council will meet on October 3, when it is expected to make a decision.

"The European Union can no longer conduct business as usual with Tashkent," Cartner said. "Uzbekistan has flagrantly violated the terms of the PCA and there must be clear consequences to this defiance."

In June, Human Rights Watch released a [report](#) documenting Uzbek government forces' responsibility for most of the deaths and injuries on May 13. Based on eye-witness accounts, the report demonstrated that government forces fired indiscriminately on mostly unarmed protestors who had gathered in Andijan's main square and that they continued to shoot at those who tried to flee. Estimated hundreds were killed.

The government subsequently launched an investigation into the prison break, seizure of government buildings, and hostage takings that preceded the massive peaceful demonstration on May 13. But to date it has taken no steps to investigate or hold accountable those responsible for the massacre that ensued.

Beginning in June, police detained and questioned hundreds and perhaps thousands of people with any connection to the May 13 events: protestors, their relatives, relatives of those who fled to Kyrgyzstan, people who lived in the vicinity of the main square, and the like. The hunt to silence witnesses even went across the border. The Uzbek government tried to force more than 400 survivors of the massacre to return from Kyrgyzstan, where they had fled after the violence, back to Andijan.

In the weeks following the massacre, government officials aggressively pursued human rights defenders, independent journalists and political activists. These individuals have been arrested on spurious charges, detained, beaten, threatened, put under surveillance or under de facto house arrest, and have been set upon by mobs and humiliated through Soviet-style public denunciations.

Among the catalogue of cases documented in the Human Rights Watch report is that of Saidjahon Zainabitdinov, an Andijan rights defender arrested on May 21. In the days following the massacre, Zainabitdinov had spoken out about the events, including to foreign journalists. He has been charged with criminal offenses including terrorism and giving false accounts of the May 13 events, and has been missing in custody for more than six weeks. Human Rights Watch expressed deep concern for Zainabitdinov's well-being, and called for his immediate release.

Human Rights Watch called on the Uzbek government to ensure open and fair proceedings for the trials scheduled to start today. International monitors were expected to attend the hearings, in which the defendants are believed to face serious charges, including terrorism, that carry the death penalty.

Human Rights Watch also called on the European Union and the United States to impose an arms embargo on Uzbekistan as well as a visa ban on senior Uzbek government officials.

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