

Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/12/19/dispatches-tired-torture-tirades-tashkent>

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State-controlled and state-affiliated media in [Uzbekistan](#) are not sources I often turn to for scoops on what's actually happening inside the country. Censorship in authoritarian Uzbekistan is near complete, and pro-government outlets know that those who dare to report on politically sensitive topics end up harassed, imprisoned, and [tortured](#) or worse.

That's what made it all the more fascinating today that *Uzmetronom*, a Tashkent-based news outlet known for its [close ties](#) to Uzbekistan's security services, ran an [article](#) critical of the government's chief spokesman on human rights issues, Akmal Saidov.

A well-recognized figure who has long enjoyed the support of President Islam Karimov, Saidov leads nearly every Uzbek government delegation to various United Nations treaty bodies that deal with human rights. He also often represents the government in its bilateral meetings on human rights with the US, the EU, and other international partners.

Today's article ridicules Saidov for his recent handling of hearings before the UN Committee against Torture, a body made up of internationally recognized experts who review countries' obligations under the Convention against Torture. At the October meeting on Uzbekistan, Saidov adopted a familiar strategy: not only did he refuse to acknowledge Uzbekistan's serious torture epidemic and continued imprisonment of human rights defenders, Saidov [yelled, screamed and banged his fist passionately on the table while doing so](#).

The *Uzmetronom* piece lambasts Saidov for his theatrics and also states that his work as the government's spokesman on human rights is aimed at allowing Uzbekistan to imitate a commitment on the part of the government to universal human values.

Saidov's performance was certainly nothing new; diplomats and observers have witnessed his antics for years and such tactics did not prevent the committee from issuing [scathing conclusions](#). The only difference this time was that Saidov's tirades were caught on [video](#) and circulated widely in the independent Uzbek media.

But if Saidov was behaving business-as-usual, what made *Uzmetronom* criticize him this time around?

Some may point to the reports of political wrangling in the capital, Tashkent, between secret services chief Rustam Inoyatov and Gulnara Karimova, the president's daughter. Is the unusual public attack on Saidov a sign of waning support, at least within some government circles, for President Karimov's bombastic handling of Uzbekistan's atrocious human rights record?

As always with Uzbekistan, analysts are left trying to read the tea leaves, with scant hard information available. About the only thing that is clear is that Tashkent should adopt a more serious approach to its rights record, address the [longstanding problem of torture](#), and immediately release the country's many political prisoners.

If this represents the end of fist-banging denials, it would be no bad thing.

Censorship and Freedom of the Media in Uzbekistan

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