

# Human Rights Watch

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

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/18/letter-gsp-application-and-human-rights-situation-uzbekistan>

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To Permanent Representatives of  
EU Member States to the EU  
Brussels

Brussels, 17 December 2020,

**RE: GSP+ application and human rights situation in Uzbekistan**

Dear Ambassador,

We are writing following the European Commissions 30 November [delegated regulation](#) adding Uzbekistan to the list of GSP+ beneficiary countries. We believe that many of the salient shortcomings identified by the Commission perpetuate or continue to cause grave human rights violations and therefore [could in fact constitute serious failures of Uzbekistans obligations](#) to abide by core human rights treaties.

We urge your delegation and other members of the Council to press the European Commission to at the very least set up an enhanced follow-up and monitoring mechanism of Uzbekistans human rights obligations under the GSP+ requirements and identify specific recommendations and time-bound benchmarks.

Despite some steps taken since Uzbekistans President Shavkat Mirziyoyev assumed the presidency in 2016, Uzbekistans political system remains largely authoritarian. Thousands of people, mainly peaceful religious believers, remain in prison on unjustified charges, and most of those released from arbitrary detention in recent years have not been legally rehabilitated. The security services retain vast powers to detain perceived critics, and there is no genuine political pluralism. Many promised reforms remain unfulfilled. The Criminal Code still contains deeply repressive provisions that have been used to imprison critics, also in recent years. There are continued reports of torture and ill-treatment in detention and impunity remains the norm. The 2015 law requiring NGOs to receive advanced permission to conduct virtually any activity has a chilling effect and a draft NGO code circulated this year fails to reform such restrictions. Many civil society groups are not able to register. An August draft law on public assemblies fails to meet international standards. Forced labor, which is absolutely prohibited under international law, persists, including during the most recent [cotton-picking season in September-November 2020](#), despite a decree prohibiting forced mobilization and efforts to address child labor.

UN bodies in charge of monitoring states compliance with human rights treaties said no less. In April this year, the [UN Human Rights Committee](#) said it was concerned by Uzbekistan's repeated failure to implement its recommendations, continued restrictions on peaceful assembly and freedom of association and urged the government to bring its definition of torture and its counter-extremism law in line with its international obligations. In 2019, the [UN Committee Against Torture](#) raised concerns over "widespread, routine torture and ill-treatment" in detention sites and the lack of compliance with fundamental legal safeguards during arrest and detention. The election of Uzbekistan in October this year as a member of the UN Human Rights Council provides further grounds why Uzbekistan should be held accountable to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, as the Councils founding resolution puts it, and to genuinely improve its human rights record.

Given the gravity of those human rights issues, we are concerned that the regular monitoring of the implementation by GSP+ beneficiaries of their treaty obligations via the Commissions report published every two years and the use of existing communication channels, including the annual human rights dialogue would not create sufficient leverage to bring Uzbekistan in line with its commitments under the Regulation.

We, therefore, encourage you to press the Commission to acknowledge the seriousness of those concerns, call the government of Uzbekistan to urgently resolve outstanding concerns, and set up an enhanced monitoring and follow-up process, by:

The government of Uzbekistan should be pressed to address, inter alia, the following areas of concern:

While we are concerned about the Commissions decision to recommend Uzbekistans access to GSP+ given continued grave concerns on the countrys human rights record, we are confident that greater attention and increased monitoring and scrutiny could strengthen EUs leverage for human rights reforms.

We thank you for your attention to these important matters and remain available should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

Hugh Williamson  
Director, Europe & Central Asia Division  
Human Rights Watch

Possession of Extremist Material in Kyrgyzstan

Censorship and Freedom of the Media in Uzbekistan

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