



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Statement on Uzbek Journalist and Human Rights Defender**

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The United States would like to take this opportunity to note some specific positive developments in Uzbekistan on religious freedom and human rights, and to follow-up on a few cases of concern. We commend the Government of Uzbekistan's decision in late September to drop religious extremism charges against Protestant Aimurat Khayburahmanov in Karakalpakstan, and to release from custody in mid-October human rights activists Dilmurd Mukhiddinov and Mamarajab Nazarov. These cases are discrete but important examples of how the Uzbek government is making progress toward meeting its OSCE commitments.

Nevertheless, the United States shares a deep concern about the issues raised by the Representative of Freedom of the Media Miklos Haraszti about the sentencing by authorities in Karakalpakstan on October 10th of journalist Salidzhon Abdurakhmanov to ten years' imprisonment on drug charges. The facts surrounding Mr. Abdurakhmanov's arrest and trial suggest that he may have been targeted by local authorities for prosecution as a result of his reporting. The timing of this sentencing was especially disappointing, as it followed on the heels of an EU-sponsored conference in Tashkent on media freedom.

The United States is also concerned about the October 23<sup>rd</sup> sentencing in Karakalpakstan of human rights activist Akzam Turgunov to ten years' imprisonment on extortion charges. We are disturbed by reports that a police officer poured boiling water on Mr. Turgunov's back during his pre-trial detention. We understand that a court investigation dismissed these allegations, but we have received credible reports to the contrary.

The United States notes that despite the positive developments cited earlier, further steps by the Government of Uzbekistan are needed to bring its practices into line with its OSCE commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The United States therefore urges the Government of Uzbekistan to review these two cases and to consider releasing Mr. Abdurakhmanov and Mr. Turgunov.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.