



human rights *first*

November 30, 2005

The Right Honorable Jack Straw
Foreign Secretary
The Foreign Office
London, United Kingdom

Dear Secretary Straw:

We write to you in the context of the British presidency of the European Union to urge the Government of the United Kingdom, on the occasion of the 13th Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on December 5-6 in Ljubljana, Slovenia, to call for the immediate initiation of an independent investigation into the use of force by the government of Uzbekistan against civilians in the city of Andizhan on May 13, 2005. We urge you to work toward this objective with other foreign ministers of European Union member states, and with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, to whom we have written separately.

Human Rights First recently issued a report on the human rights crisis in Uzbekistan, *Karimov's War*, which focuses on the growing crackdown on human rights defenders and other civil society organizations; a copy of that report is enclosed. We recognize that previous calls by the OSCE and other international governmental organizations for an independent investigation of the Andizhan killings have been rejected by President Islam Karimov and his government. However, we believe that existing OSCE mechanisms offer the best, and perhaps last good, opportunity to move forward in a cooperative manner with this much-needed inquiry.

Specifically, OSCE participating states should act promptly to seek an investigation under the procedures specified in Paragraph 12 of the OSCE's "Moscow mechanism", as amended:

(12) If a participating State considers that a particularly serious threat to the fulfillment of the provisions of the CSCE human dimension has arisen in another participating State, it may, with the support of at least nine other participating States, engage the procedure set forth in paragraph 10. The provisions of paragraph 11 will apply. *Moscow 1991 (Par. 1 to 16) as amended by Rome 1993 (Chapter IV, par. 5).*

The Uzbek government's deployment of military forces and use of automatic weapons against what appear to have been thousands of unarmed men, women, and children in

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Andizhan represents an egregious violation of OSCE human rights standards. In addition, a severe crackdown on independent journalists, human rights monitors, defense lawyers, and other human rights defenders immediately followed the May 13 events. The government's trial and conviction of fifteen men in relation to the uprising in Andizhan have been widely criticized as falling short of international standards. Repression within Uzbekistan is at its worst since the fall of the Soviet Union fourteen years ago. The growing perception among the Uzbek populace that its government will continue to persecute citizens with impunity is likely to lead to further unrest and insecurity within the country and potentially beyond its borders.

This situation therefore meets the above-cited criterion of a "particularly serious threat" to fulfilling OSCE provisions and standards. The Moscow mechanism empowers the United States and other OSCE participating states to seek implementation of OSCE mechanisms in order to address core human rights concerns. An investigation launched at the request of ten OSCE participating states conducted by independent experts would permit an objective exploration of the causes of the unrest leading to the protests in Andizhan on May 13, as well as the activities of that day. In contrast, the failure to employ this mechanism in the face of extreme human rights abuses could call into question the capacity and willingness of OSCE participating states to advance the human rights protections so central to the organization's mission for the past three decades.

Thank you very much for your consideration and your leadership in promoting human rights and democracy throughout the OSCE region.

Sincerely yours,



Neil Hicks
Director of International Programs

Cc:

Mr. Michael Matthiessen
Personal Representative of the EU High Representative on Human Rights
General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union

Enclosure