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COUNTRY SUMMARIES

Central Asia

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has suffered serious setbacks to its rights record since December 2010, when its chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) came to an end. In particular, the last two years have seen a marked decline in respect for fundamental freedoms such as freedom of religion, freedom of association and assembly, freedom from torture, and the right to a fair trial. In October, Vladimir Kozlov, a political opposition leader, was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison in an unfair trial on charges such as “inciting social discord,” which are incompatible with human rights law. Other outspoken critics have also been put behind bars in recent months, including oil workers who alleged they had been ill-treated and tortured in custody.

During brief but bloody clashes on December 16, 2011, police and government troops opened fire on civilians, including striking oil workers, in [Zhanaozen](#), shooting 12 dead. Three other civilians died in the clashes and dozens of police officers were wounded, according to official figures. In response, authorities opened a criminal investigation and detained hundreds of people. Authorities later brought criminal charges against 37 people and on June 4, 2012, convicted 34 of the 37 defendants, 13 of whom will serve prison time. Several oil workers who provided information to journalists and international organizations during the seven-month strike are amongst the thirteen [imprisoned](#).

Human Rights Watch documented allegations of ill-treatment and torture by people who witnessed or were subjected to physical abuse by police in custody between December 16 and 19, who described how police variously kicked and beat detainees with truncheons, stripped them naked and walked on them, and subjected them to freezing temperatures, as well as during the trial by defendants who testified that they had suffered beatings, suffocation, psychological pressure, and other [ill-treatment](#), apparently to coerce testimony against themselves or others. In addition, [Bazarbai Kenzhebaev](#), 50, died from a ruptured small intestine and blunt abdominal trauma, injuries he apparently sustained in custody after he was detained on December 16.

An Aktau court sentenced Zhenisbek Temirov, the former head of the Zhanaozen temporary detention facility, to five years in prison in relation to Kenzhebaev's death, but no police officers were held accountable for the torture that led to his death. Authorities [declined](#) to open a criminal investigation into the 37 defendants' credible allegations of ill-treatment and torture in their trial, thereby failing to investigate in a manner capable of bringing the perpetrators to justice. Authorities in Kazakhstan have done little to tackle the broader problem of impunity for torture in places of detention in Kazakhstan.

On October 8, 2012, unregistered opposition party *Alga!* leader [Vladimir Kozlov](#) was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison on overbroad criminal charges, including "inciting social discord," and "calling for the forcible overthrow of the constitutional order," following an investigation shrouded in secrecy and an unfair trial. On November 19 an appeals court upheld Kozlov's conviction and sentence. The offense of "inciting social discord" is so vague and broad that it can be used to criminalize lawful behavior protected by human rights law, such as freedom of opinion, expression, and association. Oil worker Akzhanat Aminov and civil society activist Serik Sapargali, who were tried along with Kozlov, were found guilty on related charges and given five-year and four-year suspended sentences, respectively.

The government keeps tight control over freedom of assembly in Kazakhstan. Peaceful public meetings of a political nature that do not support government policies are likely to be denied a permit. Between December 2011 and April 2012, dozens of people, including opposition activists who held rallies in Almaty, were fined or handed 15-day [administrative sentences](#) for organizing and participating in unsanctioned protests under restrictive freedom of assembly rules.

The environment for freedom of expression in Kazakhstan is also restrictive. Libel is a criminal offense. Following the outbreak of violence in Zhanaozen in December 2011, Kazakh authorities declared a state of emergency, temporarily blocking several key websites, including Twitter, across Kazakhstan. Other websites such as LiveJournal remain blocked in Kazakhstan. On April 19, 2012, assailants attacked [Lukpan Akhmedyarov](#), a journalist with the independent newspaper *Uralskaya Nedelya*, stabbing him eight times and shooting him with a traumatic (non-lethal) weapon in what his colleagues believe was in response to his civic activities and critical reporting. To date, no one has been held accountable for the attack.

Kazakhstan's labor legislation does not meet international norms concerning [workers' rights](#), which adversely affects thousands of workers employed in the country's petroleum sector. Burdensome collective bargaining requirements and a broad prohibition on the right to strike in Kazakhstan's petroleum sector violate workers' rights. Proposed amendments to Kazakhstan's law

on unions and administrative and criminal codes would further restrict workers' rights and do not appear to meet international standards on freedom of association.

In 2011 the government adopted a restrictive new religion law, which imposed “a complex four-tier registration system, bans unregistered religious activity, imposes compulsory religious censorship and requires both central and local government approval to build or open new places of worship,” according to Forum 18. All religious groups operating in Kazakhstan were required to undergo compulsory re-registration by October 25, 2012. However, according to human rights groups, hundreds of small religious communities have been forced to close, unable to meet the 50-person membership requirement for re-registration.

The EU should urge the government of Kazakhstan to:

- Promptly and impartially investigate all allegations of torture and ill-treatment in connection with the Zhanaozen violence, including the circumstances leading to Bazarbai Kenzhebaev's death, and hold the perpetrators accountable.
- Repeal or amend to be compatible with international human rights law article 164 of Kazakhstan's Criminal Code—“inciting social discord”—as it fails to meet the principle of legality or necessity.
- Immediately release from detention anyone convicted on the overbroad and vague charge of “inciting social discord” and urgently review their case.
- Call for Vladimir Kozlov's release following his conviction on vague charges and an unfair trial.
- Cease detaining and fining individuals for exercising their right to peacefully protest and allow future peaceful protests to proceed without undue police interference.
- Review the legislation on freedom of peaceful assembly and amend any laws and regulations on demonstrations that are not in conformity with Kazakhstan's international human rights obligations on freedom of assembly.
- Adopt measures to protect the physical safety of journalists, including prompt and thorough investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for acts of violence and intimidation against journalists, including when such perpetrators are public officials.
- Respect and promote freedom of association and the rights of workers to form independent labor unions, conduct strikes, and collectively bargain with employers, in accordance with Kazakhstan's obligations under international human rights law.
- Amend the 2007 Labor Code to bring it into conformity with International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions 87 and 98 by lifting broad restrictions and prohibitions on the right to strike except in cases where a strike would “endanger the life, safety or health of the whole or part of the population” and by clearly defining provisions for collective

bargaining so that workers, employers, and intermediaries can understand and easily follow provisions in the law.

- Amend the religion law adopted in 2011 so that it is in conformity with Kazakhstan’s international human rights obligations on freedom of religion and association.

Kyrgyzstan

While the situation in Kyrgyzstan has largely stabilized in the two and a half years since June 2010 inter-ethnic violence rocked the southern part of the country—which left hundreds killed, thousands injured, and more than 2,600 homes destroyed—and the government has adopted some welcome human rights reforms, authorities continue to violate fundamental human rights, in particular in the south, where ethnic Uzbeks continue to be subjected to detention, torture, and extortion schemes without redress in connection with the [June 2010 violence](#).

Dozens of trials related to the June 2010 violence were seriously flawed by violations of the defendants’ rights from the time of detention through conviction and were marked by harassment and physical attacks against [lawyers](#) in southern Kyrgyzstan who defended ethnic Uzbek clients. While investigations into the June 2010 violence have stagnated, trials continue to date with the justice process skewed to scapegoat ethnic Uzbeks. For example, on October 25, 2012, courts in southern Kyrgyzstan sentenced two ethnic Uzbeks to life in prison following unfair trials on charges related to the June 2010 inter-ethnic violence. An Osh court overturned a previous milder sentence handed to Mahamad Bizurukov, an ethnic Uzbek and a Russian citizen, and jailed him for life, despite Bizurukov’s allegations of torture and court hearings that were plagued by physical attacks on Bizurukov and his lawyers. The same day, a court in the Jalalabad region sentenced another ethnic Uzbek defendant, [Shamshidin Niyazaliev](#), to life in prison.

In the last two years, hundreds of mostly ethnic Uzbek defendants have been found guilty and [sentenced](#) to prison terms ranging from several years to life, based primarily on confessions that many alleged were coerced under torture. While the authorities have adopted a national torture prevention mechanism and amended the criminal code to bring the definition of torture in line with international norms following Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez’s December 2011 visit, it is too early to assess how effective these measures will be. Impunity for torture and ill-treatment is still pervasive. This is especially the case in the context of investigations and trials related to the June 2010 violence, where torture has gone largely unpunished, even in the rare instances when prosecutorial authorities have opened criminal cases against police officers.

For example, on April 20, 2012, four officers were acquitted on multiple charges, including “abuse of power,” despite credible torture allegations by Sharabidin Yuldashev, an ethnic Uzbek currently

-serving a 16-year prison sentence on charges related to the June 2010 violence. On October 18, 2012, the Supreme Court upheld the acquittal verdict. In another telling example, repeated delays in proceedings against four police officers charged with torture have meant that over a year later, no one has been held accountable for the death of [Usmonzhon Kholmiraev](#), an ethnic Uzbek who succumbed to internal injuries after he was beaten by police in custody in August 2011. Despite the severity of the accusations against the officers, none of them are currently under remand.

Most human rights defenders in Kyrgyzstan are able to work without fear of harassment by the authorities; however, activists who have exposed violations following the June 2010 violence have faced hostility, and Azimjon Askarov, a prominent human rights defender who has worked on documenting police treatment of detainees, remains wrongfully imprisoned. He was found guilty of involvement in the gruesome killing of a policeman and injuring several officers during mass disturbances in the southern city of Bazar-Kurgan in June 2010. On December 20, 2011, the Supreme Court upheld Askarov's [life sentence](#), despite a prosecution marred by serious violations of fair trial standards, allegations of torture, violence, and threats. Prosecutorial authorities have refused to open a criminal investigation into the allegations. In May 2012 the Prosecutor General's office refused to re-consider the case on new evidence.

In July 2011, the authorities improved the environment for media freedoms in Kyrgyzstan by decriminalizing libel. However, over the last year, authorities have placed some undue limits on freedom of expression and there were some attacks on journalists. In February 2012 state-controlled KyrgyzTelecom began enforcing a June 2011 parliament resolution to block Ferghana.ru, an independent Central Asia news website, which it adopted after Ferghana.ru's critical reporting on the June 2010 violence. KyrgyzTelecom continues to block the site, although it can be accessed through other providers. On September 28, 2012, authorities [banned](#) a documentary film about gay Muslims which was to be screened that day during the One World human rights film festival in Bishkek, calling it "extremist."

The Kyrgyz government has not effectively addressed long-standing problems of gender-based violence, including police abuse of gay and bisexual men who are frequently subjected to entrapment and extortion schemes, widespread domestic violence, and bride abduction, despite a recent legislative initiative to increase the maximum jail sentence for bride kidnapping from three to ten years.

The EU should urge the government of Kyrgyzstan to:

- Conduct an independent review with the participation of international legal experts of all proceedings related to the June 2010 violence. Reopen proceedings in cases in which the

authorities have not properly investigated allegations of torture, or in which there have been serious violations of defendants' fair trial rights.

- Issue and widely publicize directives stating that acts of torture and other ill-treatment by law enforcement officials will not be tolerated, that reports of torture and ill-treatment will be promptly and thoroughly investigated, and that those found responsible will be held accountable.
- Direct the General Prosecutor's Office to fulfill its responsibility under Kyrgyz law to investigate, in a thorough, impartial, and timely manner, all torture allegations against law enforcement officials, regardless of rank and whether the victim or family has filed a formal complaint.
- Take action to provide lawyers protection if their security is threatened as a result of their professional activities.
- Review the case of Azimjon Askarov in light of grave concerns that his detention and prosecution have been politically motivated and that he has been subjected to serious ill-treatment.
- Rescind undue restrictions on the media, respect freedom of information, and tolerate all forms of legitimate speech.
- Issue a clear statement at the highest political level that prevention of domestic violence—including bride abduction—is a priority policy issue and develop a more effective state response to domestic violence and bride kidnapping.
- Enforce existing criminal laws against assault and abduction and prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence and kidnapping to the fullest extent of the law.
- End and repudiate all violence and harassment by police and other agents of the state against lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people. Credible, independent oversight bodies including the Office of the Ombudsman should be empowered to investigate all allegations of police and official misconduct.

Tajikistan

While the Tajik government has exhibited a willingness to engage with the EU on certain areas of human rights, the overall situation in the country remains poor. In 2012 the government persisted with enforcing a repressive law on religion. Authorities restrict media freedoms and journalists have been targeted for their work. Women and girls in Tajikistan face severe gender-based discrimination and domestic violence; violence in the home affects women and children alike. In recent months, Tajik authorities have periodically blocked internet access to the country's leading independent news agency, Asia-Plus, and to social media websites such as Facebook.

In July dozens of deaths and numerous injuries were reported in Khorog, the provincial capital of Gorno-Badakhshan, after the Tajik government sent troops to the region to arrest those responsible for the fatal stabbing of the local state security chief. By late July, official sources reported that violent clashes had killed 17 government soldiers, 30 gunmen, and 20 civilians, but independent sources reported a greater number of civilian casualties. Human Rights Watch has not been able to verify the casualty reports.

In October 2012 a court in northern Tajikistan granted a petition by the Ministry of Justice to [shut down](#) one of Tajikistan's leading human rights organizations on charges that appeared politically-motivated. The group, the Association of Young Lawyers "Amparo," investigates torture and serves as an advocate for the rights of army conscripts and other vulnerable groups. The rights group was shut down on what appear to be minor charges.

Beyond investigating cases of torture and ill-treatment, Amparo also conducts training and summer camps for various groups, primarily youth, to raise awareness about constitutional protections and international human rights norms. The Justice Ministry filed a motion to liquidate Amparo on June 29, 2012, the day after ministry officials visited the group's Khujand office to conduct an unannounced, wide-ranging audit. The visit came just weeks after a representative of Amparo spoke publicly about the need to monitor reports of torture and severe forms of hazing in Tajikistan's army at a civil society seminar on torture organized by the European Union in Dushanbe.

Torture remains an enduring problem and is used to extract confessions from detainees, who are often denied access to family and lawyers in pre-trial custody. Despite periodic discussions with the International Committee of the Red Cross, authorities have not granted them access to places of detention.

While torture is practiced with near impunity, authorities took a few positive steps to combat it. In early 2012, Tajikistan's criminal code was revised to include a definition of torture in line with international law. In March, authorities announced they would implement some of the recommendations on torture from the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review, including ensuring access for detainees to legal and medical assistance when in custody and amending the Criminal Procedural Code to ensure that the identity of law enforcement officers involved in arrests is recorded.

The authorities also allowed a visit by UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez in May 2012. In a statement issued at the conclusion of his mission, Mendez reported that "pressure on detainees, mostly as a means to extract confessions is practice ... in various forms, including

threats, beatings (with fists and kicking but also with hard objects) and sometimes by applying electric shock.” The statement further said that “[torture] happens often enough and in a wide variety of settings that it will take a very concerted effort to abolish it or to reduce it sharply.”

In September 2012 authorities instituted the first-ever criminal prosecution under the newly amended article on torture. A court in the Khatlon province sentenced police officer Mashraf Aliyev to seven years’ imprisonment on charges of “torture” and “abuse of powers.” Prosecutors charged Aliyev after minor Khoushvakht Mahmadsaid, a suspect in a theft investigation, was found hanged at home in the village of Kulobod following torture and beatings the officer allegedly used to coerce a confession.

In July 2011 Ilhom Ismanov and 52 other defendants were put on trial in Khujand for alleged membership in the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Amnesty International reported that during a pre-trial detention hearing on November 12, 2010, the judge ignored Ismanov’s testimony that he had been tortured, including with electric shocks and boiling water, and that other defendants have since made similar allegations of torture and ill-treatment in pre-trial detention, which have also not been investigated

Despite removing slander and insult from the criminal code, making them misdemeanors subject to fines, Tajik authorities continue to clamp down on media freedoms. Government officials often file debilitating defamation suits that seem aimed at muffling media. In February 2011 Khikmatullo Saifullozoda, the editor of opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan newspaper *Nadjot*, was beaten outside his home in Dushanbe by unidentified assailants and was hospitalized. The United States and European Union “strongly condemn[ed]” the attack. Authorities opened a criminal investigation but no one has been held accountable.

In June 2011 veteran BBC journalist Uronboy Usmonov was detained on charges of membership to the banned religious organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, but was released on bail after an international outcry. Authorities persisted in prosecuting Usmonov on charges of complicity in the activities of a banned religious extremist organization, and on October 14, 2011, he was sentenced to three years in prison, but was released under amnesty. At his trial, Usmonov testified that he had been tortured in pre-trial detention. He denied the charges against him, explaining that his contact with the group was part of his work.

During the last several years, Tajik authorities have further tightened restrictions on religious freedoms, and pursuant to newly adopted legislation, the government now extends far reaching controls over religious education and worship. The 2009 Tajik religion law establishes onerous and intrusive registration requirements for religious groups; criminalizes unregistered religious

activity, private religious education, and proselytism; sets strict limits on the number of mosques and their size; allows government interference with the appointment of imams; requires official permission for religious organizations to provide religious instruction and communicate with foreign co-religionists; and imposes state controls on the publication and import of religious literature.

In 2011 new administrative and penal code provisions set new penalties, including large fines and prison terms, for religion-related charges. In recent years, the Tajik government has destroyed a synagogue, a church, and three mosques, and it has closed down hundreds of unregistered mosques, including 50 in early 2011. In August 2012, media reported that Tajikistan's Committee on Religious Affairs, a government agency, had launched the installation of surveillance cameras in mosques, and that 40% of mosques already had been equipped with the cameras.

A new parental responsibility law also came into force in August 2011, banning minors from any organized religious activity except in official religious institutions. Women are not permitted to go to mosques or wear headscarves in educational institutions, and men are not permitted to wear beards in public buildings.

There is also a growing list of banned religious organizations, although the government has not been transparent about how it reaches the determination of what constitutes "extremism" or "terrorism." Several of the banned groups are peaceful minority Muslim and Christian groups. Local media continue to report on prosecutions of alleged members of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Jamaat Tabligh movement.

The EU should urge the government of Tajikistan to:

- Publicly acknowledge the scope and gravity of the problem of torture in Tajikistan; ensure that prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations are carried out into all allegations of torture and ill-treatment; and implement the recommendations of the UN special rapporteur on torture based on his visit to the country earlier this year.
- Rescind undue restrictions on the media, respect freedom of information, including on the internet, and tolerate all forms of legitimate speech, including criticism of the government and its policies.
- Issue a clear statement at the highest political level that prevention of domestic violence is a priority policy issue and develop a more effective state response to domestic violence.
- Amend the restrictive 2009 religion law, the 2011 parental responsibility law, and other relevant legislation on religion to bring them into conformity with Tajikistan's international and OSCE commitments, including eliminating legal and other restrictions on peaceful religious practice and worship for all denominations.

- Support the development of a strong, vibrant, and independent civil society by allowing the unimpeded operation of independent local human rights and other civil society groups in Tajikistan, including by reinstating the registration of the Association of Young Lawyers “Amparo” and fully exonerating convicted BBC reporter Uronboy Usmonov of all charges.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan has one of the most repressive governments in the world. The much-vaunted new law envisaging, for the first time, the registration of parties other than the ruling party and the founding of a new political party—by one of the Turkmen president’s close associates—are notable steps but in no way change this assessment. Independent civil society activists and journalists cannot work freely in the country. Human rights defenders both in Turkmenistan and in exile face a constant threat of government reprisal and work under extremely dangerous circumstances.

The Turkmen government continues some of the worst human rights practices, including forcibly detaining dissidents in psychiatric and, most recently, drug treatment facilities and sending into internal exile those who fall out of government favor. In October 2012 the authorities sent a former government minister—Geldymyrat Nurmammedov, who had openly criticized the government—for six months of forced treatment for drug addiction even though he had no history of drug use.

One day after speaking with Radio Free Europe’s Turkmen Service, Radio Azatlyk, in February 2012 about the presidential election, Natalia Shabunts, one of very few openly active human rights defenders, found a bloody sheep’s head on her doorstep in Ashgabat, an apparent attempt to intimidate her.

Soviet-style show hearings, where defendants’ rights to fair trial and due process are not respected, are still common in Turkmenistan.

The country remains closed to any independent human rights scrutiny. No independent organization has been permitted to monitor the human rights situation inside the country, and no international agency—governmental or non-governmental— has had access to detention facilities. No fewer than ten UN special procedures remain unable to carry out country visits despite longstanding requests for access due to the government’s refusal to issue the required invitations. A visit in September 2008 by the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion— the first, and only, UN special rapporteur to visit the country— gave rise to hope that it would be followed by a more sustained opening of the country to independent human rights monitoring. Nearly four years later, however, no further visits have materialized. An International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

delegation visit to a prison in March, while welcome, should not be confused with the kind of systematic and unfettered access that would permit ICRC to carry out its core mandate.

This month marks the 10th anniversary of the November 2002 alleged assassination attempt on former president Saparmurat Niyazov. Several dozen persons convicted in relation to this—including former Foreign Minister Boris Shikmuradov and Turkmenistan’s former ambassador to the OSCE, Batyr Berdiev—remain victims of enforced disappearances. Their fate is unknown, and their whereabouts have not been disclosed even to their families. Human Rights Watch is aware of unconfirmed reports that several defendants in the 2002 plot case have died in detention.

Unknown numbers of individuals continue to languish in Turkmen prisons on what appear to be politically motivated charges. The justice system lacks transparency, trials are in many cases closed in political cases, and the overall level of repression precludes any independent human rights monitoring from taking place. These factors make it impossible to arrive at a reliable number of alleged political prisoners or evaluate the legitimacy of the charges laid against them. A number of well-known political prisoners continue to serve lengthy sentences on trumped-up charges, including Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiev, who worked with human rights organizations prior to their imprisonment in 2006, and political dissident Gulgeldy Annaniyozov, whose relatives have had no information about him since his imprisonment in 2008. A number of arrests in the past 24 months indicate that the Turkmen authorities’ use of [imprisonment](#) as a form of political retaliation continues unabated.

Concerns over political imprisonment are compounded by credible allegations of widespread torture and ill-treatment and of enforced disappearances in custody. People profoundly fear talking about mistreatment they or their relatives have endured at the hands of the authorities out of fear of government retaliation. Human Rights Watch is aware of several cases in which individuals detained in Turkmenistan reported that they had been held incommunicado and subjected to ill-treatment, including [torture](#). To the best of our knowledge, in none of these cases has an effective investigation into these allegations taken place.

Turkmen authorities continue to restrict peoples’ right to travel freely by means of an informal and arbitrary system of travel bans commonly imposed on, but not limited to, civil society activists and relatives of exiled dissidents. Such a ban can be arbitrarily imposed on anyone, including students studying in foreign universities or citizens traveling abroad for business or medical treatment. In late August the migration office of Ashgabat the airport without explanation barred

dozen of students from travelling to Bulgaria and Russia to commence their studies. Turkmen authorities continue to ban the right of Turkmen citizens to exit the country for medical treatment in neighboring Iran and Russia, most recently in October.

There is a complete lack of media freedoms in Turkmenistan. All print and electronic media are state-controlled. It is very difficult for foreign media outlets to cover Turkmenistan because they often cannot access the country. Internet access remains limited and heavily controlled by the state. The country's only internet service provider is state-operated, political opposition websites are blocked, and continued attacks on other websites are still in place. The government is known to monitor electronic and telephone communications.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion is severely restricted in Turkmenistan, where no congregations of unregistered religious groups or communities are allowed. Religious communities have been unable to register for years and those few that have managed to register are being raided, and their congregants are being harassed. Local officials harass and threaten religious followers for printing religious materials without state approval. In the past years the Turkmen government imprisoned Jehovah's Witness members under fabricated charges—such as distribution of pornography—ill-treated, ostracized for abandoning Muslim faith, and forced them to revert to Islam. Jehovah's Witness members are systematically persecuted for refusing to perform compulsory military service. The Turkmen government has not taken the steps necessary to implement the recommendations of the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion following her visit in 2008.

Expropriation, evictions, and house demolitions have taken place in Ashgabat for more than a decade and on such a scale that clearly violate the government's obligation to protect the right to home, adequate housing, private property, and appropriate compensation, infringing upon international human rights obligations. While official statistics are not available, Human Rights Watch estimates that in the past decade the projects have displaced thousands of residents. Property owners who have sought to challenge officials regarding evictions and demolitions have been subjected to threats and intimidation by government authorities. The demolitions make way for construction as part of a massive urban renewal project initiated in the late 1990s, with [further demolitions](#) scheduled to continue through 2020 in other areas of Ashgabat.

The EU should urge the government of Turkmenistan to:

- Release all those imprisoned on politically motivated charges, including human rights activists Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiev and the dissident Gulgeldy Annaniyozov, and stop the practice of using imprisonment, including forced incarceration in psychiatric and drug treatment facilities, as a tool for political retaliation.
- Undertake a nationwide, transparent review of all cases of political imprisonment of the past years in order to establish the real number of political prisoners and ensure that victims of abuse are provided with justice.
- Allow human rights activists, civic groups, and journalists to operate freely and without fear of persecution.
- Ensure unfettered access to the country, including to places of detention, for independent human rights monitors, including UN special rapporteurs, ICRC, NGOs, and other independent experts who have requested access.
- Disclose the whereabouts and relevant information on the fate of all the defendants of the 2002 alleged assassination attempt on former president Niyazov and release their imprisoned relatives; afford those in detention full due process, including visits from their family members, and conduct a review of their convictions.
- Thoroughly investigate all allegations of torture and ill-treatment, make public the results of such investigations, bring perpetrators to justice, and provide victims with an adequate remedy, including compensation.
- Lift arbitrary travel bans imposed on activists, relatives of opposition members, students, and others, and dismantle the system that allows for government interference with residents' ability to leave and return to Turkmenistan.
- Remove excessive restrictions on the right to freedom of religion, freedom of the media, and freedom of expression.
- Halt all evictions, expropriations, and demolitions until they can be carried out in a manner consistent with Turkmen national law and Turkmenistan's international commitments; create a mechanism for investigating past cases of unlawful expropriation and demolition and providing adequate compensation to victims.

Uzbekistan

With the exception of the abolition of the death penalty in 2009, the Uzbek government has made no substantial improvements in its human rights record and has persistently failed to fulfill the human rights criteria formulated by EU foreign ministers in various Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions, most recently in October 2010, when the Council reviewed its decision one year earlier to lift the remaining sanctions on Uzbekistan—the embargo on arms sales—with a view “to

encourage the Uzbek authorities to take further substantive steps to improve the rule of law and the human rights situation on the ground.”

Uzbek authorities have failed to take any “substantive steps” to improve the human rights situation, which remains atrocious. Quite the opposite, with respect to several of the above criteria, human rights abuses have only intensified.

Torture and ill-treatment are used systematically in places of detention to coerce confessions. Muslims who practice their faith outside state controls are persecuted, with hundreds convicted on religious extremism charges every year and many others re-tried on spurious prison violation charges to keep them incarcerated years after their original sentences are complete.

While Uzbek authorities released human rights defender [Alisher Karamatov](#) in April 2012, well over a dozen human rights activists, independent journalists, and opposition figures remain in prison in Uzbekistan in retaliation for their work or criticism of the government, and authorities continue to imprison more. For example, Gulnaza Yuldasheva, a member of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders, was sentenced in July 2012 to seven years in prison on trumped-up fraud charges for investigating police involvement in human trafficking.

In recent months, the Uzbek government has widened its crackdown on independent civil society, prosecuting rights activists and independent journalists on trumped-up charges, such as fraud or defamation. The government has arbitrarily detained and harassed those at liberty who have attempted peacefully to exercise their right to freedom of assembly. For example, on November 2, 2012, authorities arrested Adelaida Kim, a member of the Uzbek Human Rights Alliance, for staging a peaceful demonstration in front of the Prosecutor General’s office.

In September 2012, during the peak of the cotton harvest, authorities in Jizzakh arrested Uktam Pardaev, a rights activist well known for his reporting on police abuses, torture, and forced labor. Pardaev was beaten by several officers during the initial arrest and then held for over 15 days on minor administrative charges of “hooliganism” and “resisting arrest.” Pardaev, local activists, and Human Rights Watch believe that Pardaev was most likely arrested to prevent him from monitoring the rights of children and adults mobilized to pick cotton.

In May 2012 rights activist [Gulshan Karaeva](#) was violently attacked and threatened after she publicly refused to become a government informant.

In its increasing crackdown on activists and journalists, Uzbek authorities, in March 2012, [deported](#) two well-known international journalists, the BBC’s Natalia Antelava and Viktoriya Ivleva

of Russia's *Novaya Gazeta*, when they arrived at the Tashkent international airport attempting to visit the country.

At the end of January 2012, just days before his 13-year prison sentence was set to expire, Muhammad Bekjanov, former editor of the political opposition newspaper *Erk*, was given an additional five-year sentence for alleged violations of internal prison rules. Bekjanov has been jailed since 1999, and along with another jailed journalist, Yusuf Ruzimuradov, has been imprisoned longer than any other reporter worldwide, according to the [Committee to Protect Journalists](#).

Habeas corpus (judicial review of detention), which the Uzbek government claims is an indication of an improvement in its rights record, fails to protect detainees against torture. The legal standard is weak, habeas hearings are closed proceedings, and judges approve requests by prosecutors to arrest defendants in nearly every case.

Human Rights Watch has [documented](#) cases in which authorities poured boiling water on an activist, hung detainees by their wrists and ankles, subjected them to rape and sexual humiliation, and asphyxiated them with plastic bags and gas masks.

In January 2009 the Uzbek government formally abolished the independent bar association, forcing all lawyers in the country to re-take the bar examination. As a result, the country's most outspoken and independent criminal defense lawyers were disbarred. In February of this year, the government-controlled bar association upheld a lower commission's ruling to disbar one of the country's leading independent lawyers, Ruhiddin Komilov.

Human rights defenders in prison for [no reason](#) other than their legitimate human rights [work](#) include: Solijon Abdurakhmanov, Azam Formonov, Nosim Isakov, Gaibullo Jalilov, Rasul Khudainasarov, Ganihon Mamatkhanov, Yuldash Rasulov, Dilmurod Saidov, [Akzam Turgunov](#), and Gulnaza Yuldasheva.

Several are in serious ill-health and at least seven have suffered torture or ill-treatment in prison. Another activist, Jamshid Karimov, was reported to have been released in 2011, but is missing, prompting fears that authorities may have detained him or otherwise restricted his movements.

The government refuses to allow domestic and international organizations to operate in Uzbekistan without interference. In March 2011 Uzbek authorities forced Human Rights Watch to [close](#) its Tashkent office by persistently preventing HRW staff from receiving visas and [accreditation](#) over many years.

The Uzbek government's record of cooperation with international bodies, in particular the UN, remains very poor. The Uzbek government continues to refuse access to the ten UN special procedures who have requested access.

Widespread use of government-sponsored forced labor, including both child and adult labor, to collect the annual cotton harvest is a pervasive human rights concern in Uzbekistan. While activists have noted a shift in the government's strategy in moving away from exploiting the youngest children on a massive scale, the exploitative forced labor system remains as strong as ever. There is no evidence that the government has taken any meaningful steps to implement relevant International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, though the government adopted a National Action Plan in 2008 and introduced legislative amendments in December 2009. The Uzbek government has rebuffed ILO requests to gain access for its independent monitors to visit Uzbekistan.

There have been recent reports of a renewed government campaign to carry out the [forced sterilization](#) of women based on the monitoring of well-known independent rights activists in various regions of Uzbekistan.

The EU should urge the government of Uzbekistan to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all wrongfully imprisoned human rights defenders, journalists, members of the political opposition, and other activists held on politically motivated charges.
- End the crackdown on civil society and allow domestic and international human rights organizations to operate without government interference, including by promptly re-registering those that have been liquidated or otherwise forced to cease operating in Uzbekistan, and by issuing visas and accreditation for staff of international nongovernmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch.
- Take meaningful measures to end torture and ill-treatment and the accompanying culture of impunity, including by implementing in full the recommendations of the UN special rapporteur on torture and the Committee against Torture.
- Ensure genuine media freedom, ease harassment of journalists, and allow domestic and international media outlets, including those that have been forced to stop operating in Uzbekistan, to register and grant accreditation to foreign journalists.
- Allow unhindered access for independent monitors, including UN special procedures that have been unable to visit due to the government's refusal to issue the required invitations, and implement recommendations by independent monitoring bodies, including UN treaty bodies and special procedures.

- End forced child labor in the cotton sector; allow independent monitoring and involve independent nongovernmental organizations in assessments of child welfare, particularly as they relate to the cotton sector.
- End religious persecution, including by decriminalizing peaceful religious activity and ending the imprisonment of thousands of people for their nonviolent religious expression.