

cized the vagueness of the National Plan and noted that “the signs of openness which are on occasion expressed by governmental authorities may be challenged by military powers, which still have an unusual influence on Turkish politics.” The European Commission’s November 2001 Regular Report concluded that on human rights, “the situation on the ground has hardly improved.”

United States

The State Department’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000* surveyed the continuing abuses, giving examples of restrictions on speech and the press, extrajudicial killings and torture. The report blamed incommunicado detention and impunity for the persistence of torture. It documented child labor, violence against women, and spousal abuse.

Its description of “an upsurge in the rate of returns” of displaced Kurdish villagers gave a more optimistic picture than warranted. The conclusion, apparently based on official Turkish government pronouncements, was not borne out by Human Rights Watch investigations. The State Department’s *Trafficking in Persons Report* stated that Turkey did not meet the minimum standards nor had it made significant efforts to combat trafficking of women and girls to Turkey for forced prostitution.

Technical issues slowed contractual negotiations on the sale of 145 attack helicopters to Turkey by U.S. manufacturer Bell Textron. This class of equipment was implicated in past human rights violations in Turkey, making the pending sale, which is subject to U.S. Congressional approval, highly controversial in the United States.

Relevant Human Rights Watch Reports:

Small Group Isolation in F-type Prisons and the Violent Transfers of Prisoners to Sincan, Kandira, and Edirne Prisons on December 19, 2000, 4/01

TURKMENISTAN

HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

In 2001, Turkmenistan isolated itself from the international community and continued to stifle all forms of dissent, to hound religious and ethnic minorities, and to exercise strict control over all media and expression.

President Saparmurad Niazov’s cult of personality reached new levels. “President for Life” in the year 2000, in February he declared his intention to remain president only until 2010, when he promised multicandidate elections without opposition candidates. On October 19, the government’s highest legislative body

declared that *Rukhnama* (Book of the Soul), written by President Niazov, was a holy text, and officials indicated that it would be comparable to the Bible and the Koran.

In January, President Niazov added about 1,000 agents to the National Security Committee (or KNB), bringing their number to 2,500. Successor to the KGB, the KNB exercised truly pervasive surveillance over the population, using intimidation, searches without warrants, arbitrary detention, and torture to dissuade all dissent.

In response to international pressure, Turkmen authorities released in December 2000 two dissidents, Nurberdi Nurmamedov and Pirkuli Tangrikuliev, imprisoned since January 2000 and August 1999, respectively. President Niazov signed a decree pardoning the two after their videotaped statements of “repentance” were broadcast on television.

Mukhmatkuli Aimuradov, a political prisoner since 1994, continued to serve an eighteen-year prison sentence. Notwithstanding his worsening health, the authorities limited family visits and delivery of food parcels and medicines, and denied his petition to have his sentence reduced.

Since 1997, the government has officially allowed only two religious denominations, Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox Christianity, and viciously persecuted those who followed other faiths, which were considered illegal. Religious persecution worsened after a January 26 presidential speech tasked the KNB with reinvigorating the struggle against “various non-native religious groups intent on fracturing our society.” Pentacostalists, Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Hare Krishnas bore the brunt of this new crackdown. Police and KNB agents interrogated and intimidated worshippers, confiscated their literature, and prevented group worship. The government also continued to deport religious activists who were not citizens of Turkmenistan.

At least fifteen believers were tortured or ill-treated during police and KNB interrogations about their beliefs or “illegal” religious activities. On March 11, KNB agents detained seven Hare Krishnas at a wedding in Mari, and beat them on the soles of their feet to punish them for adherence to an “incorrect” faith. A court sentenced them to five days of detention on trumped-up charges of “hooliganism.”

In January 2001, President Niazov claimed that in 2000 law enforcement agents had confiscated 350,000 religious books and 80,000 cassettes that were “incompatible with our faith.” In March, authorities banned the sale of Bibles in Russian or Turkmen.

By March the government had closed the last Pentacostalist and Baptist houses of worship. Several families were evicted from their homes in retaliation for praying at unsanctioned gatherings.

In February, Shahgildy Atakov, an imprisoned Baptist pastor convicted in 1999 on unfounded charges of alleged financial misdealings, was transferred in serious condition to a prison hospital in Mary. The authorities had reportedly offered to release Atakov provided he take an oath of allegiance to the president. When he refused, state agents beat him and forcibly medicated him with psychotropic drugs. The government denied Atakov’s ill-treatment but ignored diplomats’ requests to meet with him. On March 23, Atakov was transferred to the remote Turkmenbashi prison facility. Also in March, his wife, Artigul Atakova, and five children were

forcibly relocated to Kaakhka, where local authorities reportedly threatened to deny parental rights to Atakova unless her children participated in the school ritual of swearing allegiance to the president.

At least six Jehovah's Witnesses were serving prison sentences, mostly for conscientious objection to military service. Authorities in some cases reportedly brought new charges against conscientious objectors when they finished out their terms.

Islamic groups also suffered state harassment. On June 25, President Niazov stated that he had ordered the official head Turkmen Muslims to close the last *madrassah* (religious school) in the northern city of Dashoguz. Only the department of theology at Ashgabad University, which is under strict police surveillance, had the right to teach Islamic studies. The Shiite community had been denied registration since 1997, although some communities had permission to gather for prayer on major holidays.

Law enforcement agencies stepped up pressure on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In November 2000, a special commission in Turkmenbashi composed of the KNB, procuracy, tax police, and local government officials launched "inspections" to intimidate thirty NGOs that had participated in a seminar on democratization sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Umid (Hope), the NGO that had organized the conference, was forced to cease its operations. From July through September, the Ministry of Justice and procuracy repeatedly summoned forty-eight environmental and humanitarian NGOs, some of which had previously been denied registration, to warn them that any activities pursued by unregistered NGOs were illegal.

The government systematically stifled all media freedoms, and imposed pre-publication state censorship. The authorities forced people to subscribe to Turkmen newspapers, even if they did not speak Turkmen. In March state libraries were instructed to confiscate the works of about twenty authors who either "inaccurately depicted" the country's history or had emigrated for political reasons.

The government went to extraordinary lengths to block all information about the human toll of the December 6, 2000, earthquake in western Turkmenistan. President Niazov publicly stated that no one had perished, though dozens were reported dead, and declined all foreign assistance.

Beginning in the third quarter of 2000, the government took unprecedented action to curtail freedom of movement. It declared two of Turkmenistan's five provinces "closed"; travel there required a special pass. In several of the country's largest cities, local authorities banned the sale of homes to residents of other cities and strictly enforced *propiska* (obligatory residence permits) rules. Several people were denied permission to travel abroad on political or religious grounds. In 2001, the government gave few visas to foreigners, and in numerous cases KNB agents warned individuals not to issue invitations to their friends and relatives abroad, required for Turkmen visas.

To discourage contact with foreigners, on June 4 President Niazov signed an order requiring a fee of U.S. \$50,000 to register a marriage with a foreigner.

President Niazov's grandiose construction projects for Ashgabad required the destruction of many homes, and according to diplomats, homeowners in numer-

ous cases were not paid the full amount of promised compensation, or received nothing. Those who had the right to alternative housing in some case did not receive it.

In December 2001, President Niazov amnestied 11,774 of the country's 19,000 prisoners, but prisons remained overcrowded and horrific. Corruption pervaded the amnesty process.

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

The government does not allow domestic human rights NGOs. Due to emigration, Russian Community, an unregistered entity, collapsed. The organization had defended the rights of ethnic minorities and assisted them in emigration matters. On May 2, KNB agents interrogated one of its former activists, Viacheslav Mamedov, after he visited the OSCE in Ashgabad. They accused him of giving the OSCE a "political document" and banned him from traveling to the capital to meet with foreigners without first informing them.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

United Nations

Turkmenistan declared its support for a U.N.-led campaign against terrorism, and agreed to allow the United Nations to deliver humanitarian aid through its border with Afghanistan.

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

For the fourth year in a row, Turkmenistan failed to sign a substantive Memorandum of Understanding with the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, one of the conditions under which the OSCE had agreed in 1998 to establish a center in Ashgabad. Nonetheless, Chairman-in-office Mircea Geoana met with President Niazov in June 2001 for talks on security and human rights issues, and claimed to have made steps toward "re-engaging Turkmenistan on the human dimension of the OSCE."

In February, the head of the OSCE center in Ashgabad requested permission to visit Shahgildy Atakov, but officials ignored the request. He also publicly noted that President Niazov's decision to hold elections in 2010, while positive in setting a limit to his presidency, effectively cancelled the elections scheduled for 2002. Also in February, OSCE representatives attempted to monitor the trial of Nurberdi Nurmamedov; officials barred them entry, despite having invited them to attend.

Despite hindrances to its operation, the OSCE Center sponsored a number of seminars and events on human rights issues.

European Union

The ratification of the E.U. Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Turkmenistan remain stalled, due to human rights concerns. But the PCA's Interim Agreement extended full trade benefits, squandering the European Union's leverage with Turkmenistan.

After the September attacks in the United States, the European Union began to reevaluate its engagement with Central Asian states bordering on Afghanistan. Within this context Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel, representing the E.U. presidency, visited Turkmenistan to discuss cooperation on terrorism, border control, and drug trafficking.

United States

In the post-September 11 context of U.S. policy toward Central Asian states, Turkmenistan's human rights record took second place to its strategic location, sharing a border with Afghanistan. The Bush administration's list of countries of particular concern for religious freedom, released in October, did not include Turkmenistan. In August, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom had recommended its inclusion.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)

In a letter to President Niazov in July 2001, the EBRD threatened to cut off all activities in Turkmenistan if political and economic reforms were not enacted within a year, citing "grave concerns about the state of democracy and the lagging pace of political and economic transition." The EBRD had ended public sector lending to Turkmenistan in April 2000.

UNITED KINGDOM

HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks in the United States, the United Kingdom proposed emergency measures that threatened to undermine civil liberties and the rights of refugees and migrants. Three years after the 1998 Multi-Party Agreement was negotiated in Northern Ireland, the agreement's human rights provisions were not yet realized. Contentious outstanding issues included the creation of a representative, accountable police force, and the establishment of public inquiries into the murders of two slain defense lawyers.

On September 27, British Home Secretary David Blunkett suggested that Afghans who might flee their country were not entitled to seek refuge elsewhere.