

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

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August 1, 2000

Mr. Zokirjon Almatov
Ministry of Internal Affairs

Via fax: 7-3712-33-89-34

Dear Mr. Almatov:

As you will recall, Human Rights Watch is a non-governmental, non-profit organization which researches the state of human rights and works to improve them in over seventy countries around the world. We have maintained an office in Uzbekistan since 1996, and are registered there by the Ministry of Justice under number 234, and by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as number 53.

We value very highly the cooperation you have made possible with Human Rights Watch, and the meetings our executive director, Holly Cartner, has regularly held with the Ministry to advance our dialogue about human rights. We recall with gratitude that in 1997, you provided us with very useful information in your letter 6/983 of December 17. In the spirit of this cooperation, we are requesting additional information about activities of your Ministry in three areas of concern: efforts to combat torture, the status of human rights work, and the problem of domestic violence in Uzbekistan.

The problem of torture is one of the most complex and difficult human rights violations common, sadly, throughout the world. We are now preparing to publish a report on torture in your country, and are particularly concerned to fully and accurately reflect all of the efforts being made by the government of Uzbekistan to combat this problem. Because Human Rights Watch is committed to providing a full and objective picture of the human rights violations we document, we are appealing to you for information on the following issues. Any answers that you can provide to us before September 30, 2000, will be reflected in our published report.

1. How many complaints has your Ministry received regarding cases of physical mistreatment of detainees [*rukoprikladstvo*] by police officers in the years 1998-2000? How many of these complaints have resulted in criminal investigations being opened? How many criminal charges have been lodged? How many of these cases have resulted in convictions? If you can provide any recent examples of such cases, that would be very helpful.

2. During our October meeting, Deputy Minister Asadov stated that the Ministry has internal control methods to ensure that no mistreatment of detainees or other violations of the procedural code are committed during the process of arrest and investigation. Please describe these procedures.

3. Several

international organizations including the OSCE have indicated that they have contributed materials for human rights education courses at the Ministry of Internal Affairs Academy. We would appreciate receiving any and all information on these courses, including whether or not they are mandatory, and how they address the issue of torture, and whether or not you judge them to have been effective in preventing cases of torture.

The second issue which we would like to bring to your attention is an individual human rights case of particular concern to us, in which relatives of a prisoner are being harassed for their contact with human rights organizations. On August 23, Tavakkaljon Akhmedov was convicted by the Andijan regional court of violating articles 156, 159, 216, 242 and 244; he was sentenced to 17 years in prison. Since that time, Human Rights Watch representatives in Uzbekistan as well as local human rights organizations have spoken with his family on several occasions. Following these contacts, the Ok-Chopon neighborhood policeman came to the Akhmedov's house, entered without a warrant, and began to insult the family. He accused them of having complained to human rights groups and said that he knew such organizations gave the family a bulletin. He demanded they hand over any such documents, and threatened that "things would be worse for them" if they did not hand over the materials. Speaking to Akhmedov's female relatives, the police officer threatened to beat them if they did not give him the human rights documents. The Akhmedov family gave the officer the Human Rights Watch World Report chapter on Uzbekistan, which our representative had given them, as well as the contact information for our office in Tashkent. The police officer then warned them not to appeal to any more human rights organizations.

Such conduct by an officer of the MVD violates Uzbekistan's obligations under international law to protect human rights, in particular the rights to freedom of speech and association. We look upon such threats and intimidation as an attempt to interfere with the work of Human Rights Watch. We are convinced, however, that this conduct does not reflect the stated policy of your government, and sincerely hope that you will convey to your representatives in Andijan that such actions are unacceptable.

The last issue which we would like to discuss with you concerns another category of human rights violations, unfortunately one that is also widespread in every country of the world: the problem of domestic violence. In May-June of this year we conducted interviews about this problem with victims of domestic violence and with governmental officials across Uzbekistan. Several sources indicated that in 1999 and 2000 the Ministry of Internal Affairs has devoted a good deal of attention to the problem of domestic violence. In order that we may fully and fairly portray the actions of your government in combating this problem, we would very much appreciate any information on any decisions or measures which you have taken with regard to domestic violence. If you will convey this information to us before October 30, 2000, it will be reflected in our upcoming publication on this topic. In particular:

1. Currently, the MVD does not compile statistics on the number of domestic violence complaints lodged with the police. Are there plans to do so?

2. Has the MVD created or planned to create any training programs for officers to more effectively handle domestic violence complaints?

Please be assured that Human Rights Watch values very highly the opportunity to cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the consideration you have shown our organization. We look forward to continuing this constructive dialogue in the future.

Sincerely,

Rachel Denber
Acting Director

cc: Ambassador Sodyk Safaev