

Uzbekistan: human rights situation

Uzbekistan's human rights record is widely decried. A UN report has described the use of torture as 'systematic'. An EP resolution calls on the EU High Representative, the EEAS and EU Member States to push Uzbekistan to make tangible human rights improvements.

Political situation

Uzbekistan's political system is highly [authoritarian](#). Though the [constitution](#) provides for a presidential system with separation of powers among the executive, legislature, and judiciary, the executive under [President Islam Karimov](#) dominates national political life and exercises near complete control over the remaining branches. Karimov's re-election for a third seven-year period as president in 2007 deprived Uzbek voters of their genuine choice, stated the [limited observer mission](#), carried out by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

According to an [OSCE](#) assessment, the December 2009 parliament elections were not free or fair, because of restrictions upon the eligible candidates and government control on the media and on the way campaigns were funded. The OSCE's [preliminary assessment](#) of the parliamentary elections held on 21 December 2014 identifies only limited improvements. The next presidential election is due on 22 March 2015.

Human rights

Widespread torture and ill-treatment

As highlighted in the UN's [concluding observations](#), made in December 2013 in response to Uzbekistan's fourth periodic report, there are consistent allegations that torture and ill-treatment are routinely used by law enforcement, investigative and prison officials, often to extract confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings. In its 8 November 2011 final judgment in the [Yakubov v. Russia](#) case, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), of which Uzbekistan is not a member, stated that Uzbekistan's use of torture against detainees is systematic, unpunished and encouraged by law enforcement and security officers.

Harassment, arbitrary imprisonment and alleged torture of human rights defenders

Uzbekistan has locked up thousands of people including human rights defenders on politically motivated charges, with prisoners typically being kept in abysmal conditions and subjected to torture and ill-treatment, said Human Rights Watch (HRW) in a September 2014 [report](#). This report presents findings on the treatment of 34 of Uzbekistan's most prominent people imprisoned on politically motivated charges. The findings have been confirmed by the UN in its concluding observations cited above.

The events in Andijan in 2005

[HRW](#) reports that there have been no investigations into the numerous claims over the violence used by government forces to quash the mainly peaceful protest in Andijan in May 2005. The official death toll stands at 187, but other sources place the number at [700 or more](#), and speak of numerous detentions. There is no record of prosecutions of law enforcement personnel for using excessive force against civilians, or for arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment of persons taken into custody in connection with the Andijan events. The Government of Uzbekistan has rejected recommendations by numerous bodies, including the [United Nations Human Rights Council](#) and the [UN Committee against Torture](#) to allow an impartial inquiry.

Forced labour

Uzbekistan is one of the largest exporters of cotton in the world. [HRW](#) and the [Cotton Campaign](#) coalition report that the government has continually [forced](#) adults and children as young as 10 to pick cotton under terrible conditions. The two NGOs claim that the Uzbek Government refuses to allow international monitors into the country unless the mission's mandate is limited to child labour, and Uzbek officials feature on the monitoring teams. Following up on the conclusions of a joint International Labour Organization (ILO)–Uzbek

monitoring mission, the [ILO](#) urged the government to strengthen its efforts to ensure the [effective implementation](#) of national legislation prohibiting compulsory labour for children under 18.

Violence against women

Uzbekistan has no legislation prohibiting domestic violence and the latter is generally perceived as a 'private matter' rather than a 'criminal act'. This accounts for the widespread failure across the legal system to prevent domestic violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. The Uzbek Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law ('UBHRRL') points out in its [2013 report](#) that official views dismissing the severity of domestic violence are shaped in part by the lack of an exact translation for 'domestic violence' in the Uzbek language. According to [BBC interviews](#) and a [report](#) from the NGO [Open Society Foundations](#) (OSF), the government requires doctors to sterilise women that have given birth to two or more children, in accordance with a programme for curbing the country's population growth. In [a report](#) from March 2014, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination raised the alarm about [a report](#) with accounts of forced sterilisations of Roma women and female human rights defenders.

Freedom of religion and beliefs

According to the criminal code, all religious organisations must register with the government. Using anti-terrorism rhetoric, the government has a highly institutionalised programme involving censorship, torture, and surveillance as tools to identify community members with 'extremist' behaviour, one such example being Wahhabi imams. Uzbekistan often brands evangelical Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses as 'extremist' for practicing religion outside the state-sanctioned structures. In its 2014 [annual report](#), the US Commission on International Religious Freedom ([USCIRF](#)) highlighted Uzbekistan as a country of particular concern.

Press freedom

The NGO [IREX](#) indicates that the [mass media](#) is heavily self-censored and there are many taboo subjects journalists do not dare cover. The government continues to block access to websites and blogs delivering opinions contrary to those held by officials. Independent-minded journalists are still harassed and arrested. In its World Press Freedom Index 2014, [Reporters without Borders](#) ranks Uzbekistan 166th of 180 countries.

UN human rights conventions

As a UN member since 1992, Uzbekistan has ratified most [UN human rights conventions](#), with the exception of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. The UN has invited Uzbekistan to sign and ratify these conventions and protocols. The death penalty was fully abolished in [2008](#). Uzbekistan is not a [state party](#) to the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court ([ICC](#)).

Uzbekistan and the EU

Bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and the EU have been governed by a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement ([PCA](#)) since 1999. Article 2, the so-called '**human rights clause**', insists on respect for democracy and the fundamental and human rights which constitute an essential element of the agreement. Article 95(2) specifies that if either party considers the other has failed to fulfil an obligation under the Agreement, it may take appropriate measures. The EU has never applied the human rights clause. In [November 2012](#), then EU High Representative Catherine Ashton visited the country but did not publicly voice concern about its worsening human rights situation. In its [2014 world report](#), HRW expressed regret that the EU's position on human rights in Uzbekistan remained weak, with no policy consequences for Tashkent's failure to meet the [EU's reform expectations](#) set out by the Council in 2010. The [Cotton Campaign coalition](#) regrets that apart from strongly condemning Uzbekistan for using child labour in its cotton industry, the EU continues to allow the country to benefit from reduced trade tariffs for its cotton exports to the EU, despite its own rules that these benefits should be withdrawn.

On 23 October 2014, the EP adopted a [resolution](#) on the Human Rights Situation in Uzbekistan, calling for the immediate and unconditional release of all persons imprisoned on politically motivated charges, and calling on the Uzbek authorities to eliminate all forms torture and ill-treatment. The resolution also appeals to the EU High Representative, the EEAS and EU Member States to urge Uzbekistan to make human rights improvements.