



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

---

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# Testimony :: Galima Bukharbaeva

Correspondent - Institute for War and Peace Reporting

I would like to thank Senator Brownback, and other distinguished members of the commission for giving me this opportunity to testify the massacre in Andijan on May 13, where I was myself with 6 my colleagues journalists, among the people.

I am Galima Bukharbaeva, journalist from Uzbekistan, working as a country director of IWPR in Uzbekistan since 2000.

I was there. I was on Bobur Square in Andijan among thousands of Andijan citizens, when at 5:20 p.m. local time on 13 May the merciless authorities of Uzbekistan opened fire on their own people.

Before the attack the government did not warn unarmed people to leave the square. Thousands of people were unarmed and they were not forced by rebels to stay on the place. Everybody, whom we speak to came the square by own will, either only to look or to protest.

It was not Islamic uprising. I did not hear any "Allah akbar" outcries, or any demands to build Islamic state. People demanded justice, human rights, economic and social reforms, the monument of Bobur was a tribune for the demonstrators. They did not have even political demands, as the resignation of the president Karimov.

I did not see any foreign fighters – mujahedins from Chechnya or Afghanistan. The armed people were belong to the group of friends and relatives of the 23 businessmen, who were arrested a year before and were trailed in Andijan city court since February 2005.

At the time of the government's attack there were no shootings from the rebel's side, or aggressions. All armed person were inside the governor's office or on the yard of the building, surrounded by fence. And huge demonstration of Andijan unarmed citizens was taking place on the square.

Government's troops attacked complete unexpectedly for everybody, who was at that moment on the main square of Andijan.

The shooting of Andijan citizens, everyone who was on the square at that time – children, teenagers,

women, the elderly, journalists – took place in cold blood, without mercy or pity. It was simply professional mass murder.

One after another, armored personnel carriers drove along the avenue past the square, and on each one several special soldiers sat facing in different directions. They were in camouflage uniform, in black flak jackets and helmets.

The soldiers shot at the backs of people running in terror from the APCs, shooting from automatic weapons. As they were sitting on the APCs, forming a circle with their backs, they could shoot people fleeing in all directions, and their bullets flew in a 360-degree radius.

One of the soldiers tried to kill me. A bullet from his weapon hit the backpack which was on my back, and went through it, passing through my notebook and my journalist identity card.

During the shooting, when I fled in terror from bullets along with the other people, I felt an animal fear – I had never been so scared before. The bullets fell on us like hail, and I saw people running next to me falling down.

It seemed that all of Andijan had been turned into a slaughterhouse, and all its inhabitants turned to cannon fodder.

President Islam Karimov ignored the opinion of an entire people, the capital of the most densely populated part of the region, the Fergana Valley. He scorned the life of every person who was there.

Why this unrest happened.

As I understand, this unrest was closely connected with the trial of 23 businessmen charged with belonging to the religious organisation Akromiya. The hearing of this case finished at the Andijan city court on 11 May, and the court withdrew to deliver a sentence.

All journalists were waiting for the announce of verdict, we thought it would be on Friday May 13.

These 23 businessmen were arrested in summer 2004, one year they were detained in the cellar of the National Security Service in Andijan and were tortured.

Their families and lawyer tied all legal acts to proof that they are not guilty, the last press-conference was given by them in Tashkent 10 days before massacre on May 3 in the office of Freedom House in Tashkent.

And even prosecutor of this trial said in an interview on May 11, that all 23 defenders did not commit anything, that they only set up religious organization Akromiya and were members of it. We have a tape recorder with this interview. And the text is included to my testimony documents.

One of the leaders of this unrest Sharif Shakirov, His two brothers weere among the 23 businessmen on trial, explained to us in interview on May 13, seating in the governor's office, how this unrest

started.

On the last two days of the court hearings on 10 and 11 May, up to 5,000 people gathered outside the court building who came to express their support of the businessmen on trial.

This crowd was so large because it was not ordinary people who were on trial, but successful businessmen, heads of various manufacturing companies. These 23 businessmen provided jobs to 2,000 people. Their employees, friends and relatives filled the entire park by the court building on Tuesday and Wednesday, German journalist Marcus Bensmann was in Andijan on the day of last hearings and BBC journalists as well.

The authorities seemed to ignore this peaceful demonstration by the court. There were almost no police there.

But later, as Sharif Shakirov told us, it was revealed that starting on Wednesday and Thursday, i.e. 11 and 12 May, the National Security Service arrested 6 new people, who were standing outside the court.

Through the city traffic police department, cars began to be arrested which were parked by the court building.

And as we found out later the verdict was announced secretly on Thursday 12 May in the jail, and 23 businessmen got sentences from 12 to 22 years of imprisonment.

This exhausted their patience, and people began to gather and decided to go to the traffic police department together and demand for their cars to be released. But they had no success at the traffic people. Their anger only grew, and then an attack was made on a military unit, where the rebels seized weapons, at around midnight.

Then they attempted to free their 6 arrested people at the NSS, but with no success. The NSS withstood the attack. According to Shakirov, this is where the most people died, around 30.

After the NSS the rebels moved to the prison, freeing all prisoners, including the 23 businessmen.

At 1 a.m. May 13 they seized the Oblast khokimiyat building.

When asked what they wanted and what their demands were, Sharif Shakirov replied that they demanded truth and justice. He said that in the morning, they had appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin through the Reuters news agency to regulate the conflict.

When asked what they controlled, Shakirov said that they only controlled the khokimiyat building. Evidently, they did not imagine that the Andijan citizens would help them, that the entire centre would be blocked with cars, in order to stop a storm by the authorities.

At that moment, the rebels held around 30 hostages. Shakirov said that they were the soldiers who

shot at them, whom they disarmed with their bare hands, police, NSS employees and provocateurs who they were able to recognise in the crowd.

Later we interviewed another leader Kabuljon Parpiev. It was about 16.00 p.m.

Parpiev said that the rebels had had short talks with Interior minister Zakir Almatov.

The minister rang the rebels in the morning and asked them what they wanted. They did not have any political demands. Parpiev said that they only want the Uzbekistan Constitution to be observed, they want freedom and justice.

The rebels also demanded for Akrom Yuldashev to be released from jail. Yuldashev was imprisoned in 1999 on charges of creating the organisation Akromiya.

According to Parpiev, Yuldashev did not create any organisation, but wrote a book which became a spiritual guide for many of them.

In reply to this demand, Almatov promised to ring back later. In the afternoon, there was another call from the minister.

This time Almatov said that it would not be possible to free Yuldashev, as the judge is against it.

Then, said Parpiev, the minister began making threats.

“He told us that there would be a storm anyway, he said that even if they had to kill 300-400 people, they would take the rebels,” Parpiev told us.

I asked Parpiev if he was afraid.

Calmly, looking me straight in the eyes, he said: “Can you call this life? It is better to die.”

I went out and interviewing people on the square. At that moment square was full of people, speeches on the Bobur monument was continuing.

People surrounded me and the other journalists and began to tell us about their problems. Once more, the main topic of the interview was poverty, unemployment, and political lack of rights.

Children also ran along with us, I saw about 5-6 boys, and thought to myself that this was not the best place for them, as I had no doubt that the building would be stormed. I thought that the storm would start at night when people left the square, and only rebels were left in the building.

At that moment, at 5:20 p.m., APCs appeared on the avenue, with two or three vehicles driving one after another. People were frightened and began running, and I also ran, but the APCs drove past at high speed.

I calmed down, thinking that of course the authorities would not shoot, as almost the whole town was

on the square. Young people began dragging beaten up cars on to the avenue, to block the road for the new APCs.

But literally two minutes later, a new line of APCs appeared. As they drove up to the square, they opened fire without warning, and everyone ran. I also ran..

The bullets flew at such a rate that it seemed hail was falling on all sides. When the shooting began I was five metres from the avenue.

I ran in fear amid the roar of weapons, and saw several men who were running next to me fall down. It was very frightening, extremely frightening. Then I saw a ditch beside the square, and I jumped into it and lay on my stomach. There were several teenagers there with me.

The shooting stopped for a while. The first row of APCs had done their work. I climbed out of the ditch. I saw people carrying the dead and wounded – they took them to the territory of the khokimiyat and placed them there.

But scarcely a minute had gone by when a second row of APCs appeared which also opened fire.

When the shooting began again, I saw five corpses in the place where we had been, they were young men.

Then I decided that I needed to get out of there.

I began to retreat, when I saw that on the curb by the edge of the square there were around 10 elderly Uzbeks sitting there, sitting in the Eastern fashion with their legs crossed, and not trying to flee. They looked towards the avenue where the APCs were driving past.

I did not have the time to ask them why they were sitting there and were not leaving, I simply remembered this picture, and will probably remember it for the rest of my life.

As I ran away from the square, and on the way we say that new APC were approaching the square from all even small street. There were Andijan citizens standing on the road, women and men, they began waving their hands to show us that we could run into their lane.

From there, I got out of the centre of town along narrow makhallya roads. A military helicopter constantly hovered over us. Evidently, it reported from above on all the people's movements.

I had the impression that everyone was being followed, everyone who lives in this city or was there at the time. Everyone who was in the centre of Andijan on 13 May was classified as an Islamic terrorist.

In the hotel only when I went to get my notebook with telephone numbers, I opened my backpack and saw that a bullet had passed through my notebook, along with the IWPR journalist identity card. My clothes and the things in my backpack were stained with ink, as it turned out that the bullet had smashed my pen to pieces.

It is hard to say how many people were killed on May 13-14 in Andijan. Andijan is in fear. Uzbek government does everything to hide this massacre, to destroy evidences. They repress people and journalists, they arrest even taxi drivers, who served journalists, and other locals – stringers and fixers.

High official police source in Andijan gave us secretly an interviews and said that that days were killed up to a few thousand people, he was eyewitness when governments tried to hide bodies in mass graves in all over Uzbekistan.

I ask US government for help and assistance.

1. I ask President of the USA George Bush to condemn this massacre.
2. I ask US government to use all their pressure to convince Uzbek governments to let international commission to come to Uzbekistan for independent investigation.
3. If Uzbek government will not let this commission to investigate event in Andijan, then I ask to start sanctions against Uzbek government, reconsider your relations with Uzbekistan, limit or stop some kind of cooperation, including military, and even to remove an American airbase in Khanabad, Karshi.
4. I ask not to give US visa to all members of Uzbek government, if they will refuse in independent investigation.
5. I ask US government to act through international organizations as NATO, UN, OSCE for letting international commission to come to Uzbekistan and to condemn massacre in Andijan.
6. I ask to help to new government of Kyrgyzstan to save life of uzbek refugees and to protect them from pressure from Uzbekistan. And I ask to help UN to send refugees as soon as possible to third countries.
7. To make clear statement that Uzbek government should not prevent of work of local and international journalists in Uzbekistan. And to stop repressions and abusing local journalists in

the Uzbek press.

8. I ask to help to release as soon as possible human rights defenders, who were arrested after Andijan massacre.
  
9. I ask for help and financial assistant for local human rights group and journalists, who still doing great job in Uzbekistan, besides all treats.