

**Statement by Abdurahim Polat
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At the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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Mister chairman, distinguished members of the Commission,

I am grateful for this given opportunity to make this speech here at the US Helsinki Commission and participate in discussion of the situation, which is taking place after the shooting several hundred peaceful demonstrators in Uzbekistan.

I am making my third presentation to the members of the Helsinki Commission here. Perhaps some people are bored to hear what I will say again. On the positive side, I can only hope that this will be beneficial for Mr. Brownback, Chairman of the Commission to hear the voice of Uzbek Opposition for the first time, as opposed to Congressman Christopher Smith, who has heard us few times already.

I say my presentations are boring because time and time again I make the same statement: President Karimov is a dictator, democratic reforms are not taking place in Uzbekistan and Human Rights are not respected in the country.

I spoke here in 1999 after the terrorist bombings in Tashkent the same year, as Uzbek Authorities killed two members of our party who had no relationship to terrorism. After this, in summer 2001, the member of the executive committee of our party, former member of Uzbek parliament Mr. Shakhrukh Ruzimuratov was killed. I spoke in detail about this during the next session here in June 24, 2004. Today, we will talk about mass killings of peaceful citizens in Andijan, who are led by President Karimov himself. Overall, it is clear that developments in Uzbekistan are going only towards negative direction. We have a proverb for this: Not everything as bad as it seems, but in reality, it is even worse.

Let's look at some facts:

Two months ago, Uzbek Human Rights activists conducted protests at the Tashkent office of the American Organization, Freedom House. Do you think this demonstration was organized to support the activities of this organization in Uzbekistan? No, on the contrary, it was organized to against its activities, which lately is attempting validate activities of the Karimov's Regime and does not deal with the Human Rights protection activities.

Another example, Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan sent warnings recently to such organizations as NDI and IRI, clearly telling them not to cooperate with un-registered opposition parties. As a result, representatives of these organizations even afraid to hold meetings with the members of Birlik Party at their office locations, and often they have a meetings at barely visible "Chayhanas" (Tea Houses).

Therefore, it will not be coincidence if the Uzbek Democrats start protesting near the American Embassy in Tashkent, as the United States remained as the only western state that did not accuse the Uzbek authorities for their massacre of peaceful citizens in Andijan.

I am confident that the last events in Uzbekistan should be looked at in the context of the above-mentioned facts.

Andijan, May 13-2005

Early morning on May 13-2005, group of un-identified armed people first attacked military base, then local prison, and finally Regional Administration Building. Birlik Party issues statements in May 13 and May 15 condemning these unlawful and forcible acts. At the same time, we offered our help to the authorities to resolve the conflict, but no one was interested in our advice.

Armed Group, after taking charge the Regional Administration building, has requested to free people who were sentenced by Uzbek courts heavy-handedly without following elementary rules of justice system. It is important to note this is the exact demand put forward to the authorities by Uzbek and International Human Rights organizations.

After this, several thousand demonstrators gathered around the building supporting demands of this group.

Here we can already make first important conclusion: Several tens of lightly armed people can easily take charge of the power in the city. This indicates in regional locations the power of Karimov does not exist. Even Police and National Security Service are not willing to protect his regime.

At that stage, President Karimov, who is at the same time Commander-in-Chief of the National Army, swiftly arrives to Andijan and throws military to deal with the situation. Note that Army should get involved in dealing with external danger and usually is not trained to deal with such peaceful events. In doing so, Karimov completely dismisses the fact that there are several thousand peaceful civilians out there in addition to only tens of armed group. As a result, several hundred innocent citizens of the country were killed during the event.

Here we come to our second conclusion: President of the country and the Commander-in-Chief of the National Army steps into criminal act by forcing the army to perform activities which is not their responsibility in the first place.

And, finally, we have to remember the shooting down of hundred of innocent peoples have occurred in country which is a member of OSCE and strategic partner of US.

What to do next?

We have the whole international community just as the Uzbek democratic opposition reiterating that the repressive policies of the Government of Uzbekistan, absence of legal political opposition, absence of democratic reforms, absence of clear economic programs, and the poverty levels of the majority of population leaves no peaceful option to deal with such problems but to take the weapon in their hands to deal with the problem. This of course results in political and religious extremism.

As latest events are indicating, it is unlikely that the authorities will change their course after Andijan tragedy. However, Uzbekistan is a member of OSCE and signed a range of strategic agreements with International Organizations and the United States, which puts the authorities under obligation to respect the human rights and develop the democracy. Therefore it is necessary to do the following:

1. OSCE Commission should be established to investigate Andijan Tragedy.
2. USA should condemn the shooting of peaceful demonstrators in Andijan as did it other West countries.
3. OSCE and the US should require the Government of Uzbekistan to start democratic reforms, in particular, registration of the opposition parties, and in the first place, "Birlik" Party since it is the

most prepared party amongst others. This requirement should be made now without waiting OSCE commission results.

Furthermore, Uzbekistan should take steps to conduct constitutional reforms, where single chamber Parliament will be set up with the participation of the opposition with limiting powers of the President.

I am aware of the fact that western countries are worried that weak opposition and attempts to change the current set up of the governance in the country will result in destabilisation and enhancing power for Islamic extremism.

I completely disagree with this position. Not wasting too much time on this subject, let me point out that: First, it is impossible to set up atheistic state in Uzbekistan, which is what Karimov has attempted to do so far. Second, Uzbekistan will have a religious model over time, very similar to Turkish system. High secular educational level of population in the country gives enough optimism to hope that this will be the case.

Let me make few points about opposition. At this point in time Birlik is the most prepared democratic opposition in the country. Everybody knows that authorities have been trying to destroy us over the course of last 15 years. Most of similar national opposition movements around CIS, which were set up at the time of Gorbachev era, have disappeared. But Birlik is still functioning. We have over 20,000 registered members. Over the past two years, Ministry of Justice strictly followed Karimov's orders and refused Birlik to register five times. But both OSCE and US are keeping silent about this tough violence of political rights of peoples of Uzbekistan.

Nevertheless I believe Birlik is in a position to resolve any political problems. It is true that we may not have enough capabilities to work in executive bodies. But we know that many people who are working in the executive bodies under Karimov's regime are not supporters of this regime and they are ready to work with us.

In conclusion, I would like to say the following. Andijan tragedy has showed a real weakness of Karimov's regime. It will not last long. We have to be prepared to the change of power, and we are getting ready.

Many thanks for your attention.