

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to the Commission this morning. We very much welcome the attention that Congress has given to Uzbekistan and support the leadership of the Commission on these issues.

Uzbekistan has joined a short list of countries – Zimbabwe, North Korea, Burma, Belarus and others -- that have refused to live up to their international obligations and have chosen isolation over development and connections to the world. Realistically there is very little the United States can do to change the behavior of nations that are determined to abuse human rights and concentrate the wealth of their lands in the hands of a small group. The leaders of the countries care only of remaining in power and have no concern for progress. General sanctions on these regimes have little impact – indeed they often hurt the very victims of these governments. Diplomatic pressure alone is normally shrugged off. Very limited European sanctions imposed after the killings in Andijon have had only a marginal impact although they did send a signal; broad sanctions are unlikely to have any impact as long as Uzbekistan maintains close relations with Russia, China and India.

Islam Karimov has repeatedly shown a disregard for the international standards that he voluntarily signed up for when Uzbekistan became independent. His views have shaped the Uzbekistan we see today where a handful of officials control the economy while hundreds of thousands of people have to leave the country to survive. He won't change; there are no prospects for reforms in Uzbekistan as long as he is in power and reforms may not come quickly even when he is gone. It is time to reject any idea that Karimov is somehow a "good tsar" misled by bad official around him; he is at the epicenter of corruption and violence in Uzbekistan. There is little likelihood he will give up power this year; even if he formally steps down from the presidency, he is likely to maintain his grip through other means. Nowadays, even his neighbors, none of them democrats, are embarrassed by the coarseness of his rule.

There are limits on what can be achieved but U.S. policy should focus on what can be done as long as Karimov remains in power and plan ahead for when he is gone. This means:

- ❑ Making it clear that the United States sides with the Uzbek people, not with the Karimov regime.
- ❑ Doing anything possible to crack open the closed Uzbek economy.
- ❑ Keeping alive Uzbek intellectual and political life.
- ❑ Improving the resilience of neighboring countries in case unrest in Uzbekistan spills over their borders, as it did after the Andijon massacre.

There are many ways that Congress can help the people of Uzbekistan:

- ❑ **Opening the Uzbek economy:** This is an almost impossible task but vital; it will involve maintaining a dialogue with Russia and China on economic issues and working with the Europeans to maintain a consistent front that economic reforms are essential to the welfare of the Uzbek people. It must be made clear to

Uzbekistan that it will not have a full relationship with the United States as long as it maintains such a punitive economic regime.

- ❑ **Keeping the flow of information open to Uzbekistan.** This can be done on the internet, through broadcasting and by providing information for the millions of Uzbeks living outside the country. The Voice of America is closing its Uzbek service; Congress should urge them strongly to keep it going and should help RFE/RL and others expand their broadcasting. Support for the internet sites that report on Uzbekistan should also be a priority.
- ❑ **Supporting Uzbeks outside the country.** Millions of Uzbeks are now working in neighboring states and Russia. Many are victims of abuses; supporting self-help groups, the media, legal groups that provide protection and other areas of support, education and training to these migrant is vital. Reaching these people would influence large number of Uzbeks even if those in the country are cut off from these sorts of program by their obstructive government.
- ❑ **Education.** Many Uzbeks express deep anxiety about their children's future in a country where education has suffered from the government's heavy hand. Providing opportunities outside the country is essential; it doesn't have to be in the United States, indeed it may be more useful and cost effective to support higher education in Turkey, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Russia. The US government should waive any requirements that recipients of US funding immediately return to their home country; those who do go back now may be subjected to persecution. There is a need to support a continuing study of Uzbek culture and society outside the restrictions imposed by Karimov. U.S. funding for this sort of work would help eventually rebuild intellectual life in Uzbekistan under a new regime.
- ❑ **Supporting the neighbors:** Uzbekistan is at risk of conflict and that conflict is likely to affect its neighbors. The population simmers with anger and nobody knows how Karimov's succession may play out. Andijon showed how vulnerable the neighboring countries were. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all need help building up their ability to withstand any shocks that may emerge from Uzbekistan. Improving training for border guards and police in issues including refugee law and protection will be essential. There is an urgent need to improve public health systems, support for migrant laborers and provide alternative transport and energy arrangement for these countries so they are not subject to Uzbek pressure.
- ❑ **Tackling the criminal nature of the regime:** Karimov has created a mafia regime that extracts wealth from people and concentrates it in the hands of a tiny number of people. It is hostile to foreign relations, open trade, the development of small business; everyone down to the sellers of vegetables in bazaars suffers from the predatory behaviour of this government. The fruits of this criminal economy are stashed overseas. This is a point of vulnerability for these elites; the freezing of North Korean assets in Banco Delta Asia in Macau made financial institutions reluctant to deal with the regime in Pyongyang or any of the banks that it works with. It proved a surprisingly effective pressure point on the regime. Congress should direct the Treasury Department to subject Uzbek companies, particularly those involved with the criminal elite, to similar scrutiny and measures, unless the

government takes steps to reduce corruption and exploitation. Officials involved in state companies connected to the security forces and to companies that act as fronts for elite Uzbek interests should be denied visas.

- ❑ **Congress should use the full range of its powers:** Congress should prohibit any assistance of any kind to the government of Uzbekistan and bar provision of any credit or licenses for the sale of any military or police weapons or equipment to security forces of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is in clear breach of the International Freedom of Religion Act that allows for an array of measures to be taken against the government. It is worth signaling to the Uzbek people that the United States stands for economic, religious and political freedom.
- ❑ **Support civil society:** U.S. officials should speak out when repression occurs and, to the degree possible, the U.S. should support civil society groups in Uzbekistan who are independent of the government, particularly those that are courageous enough to speak out against the abuses committed by the government. Congress also should provide support to those human rights groups investigating Uzbekistan's violation of international prohibitions against the use of torture and other gross violations of internationally respected human rights.