

**Remarks of Gulambek Umarov on Behalf of
The Sunshine Coalition of Uzbekistan**

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Introduction

My name is Gulambek Umarov and I am the son of Dr. Sanjar Umarov, the Chairman of the Sunshine Coalition of Uzbekistan. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of my father and the leadership of the Sunshine Coalition. My father himself would be here today to address the Commission, if he was not currently imprisoned in an Uzbek prison colony as a result of his calls for social and economic reform in Uzbekistan. During the time given to me, I'd like to provide the Commission with some background on why the Sunshine Coalition was founded, how the Coalition fits in the political landscape of Uzbekistan and how the Coalition members intend to continue my father's work calling for the dialogue and peaceful reforms in Uzbekistan.

The Sunshine Coalition was founded in April of last year by a new generation of businessmen, artists and intellectuals who had come to prominence after the Republic of Uzbekistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union. These likeminded individuals became increasingly concerned about the multi-faceted economic, social and environmental crises facing Uzbekistan. They envisioned Sunshine Uzbekistan as a way to engage all of Uzbekistan's stakeholders in a dialogue about how to bring peaceful reform to our beloved country. The Coalition's leadership includes many highly educated individuals who have benefited from the best of Soviet and Western educational institutions. Their professional experiences include leading the development of political organizations, economic development, and social reforms. The Sunshine Coalition has always worked for dialogue and reform within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and deplores any forceful attempts to gain power.

The Sunshine Coalition shares many of the concerns of the veteran political movements such as the "Erk" and "Birlik" parties. "Erk" and "Birlik" have a long history and a deep understanding of the social processes in our multinational republic. With regard to freedom of speech, human rights and other fundamental democratic principles, our voice is one with "Erk" and "Birlik"

parties. We stand together against any form of violence towards civil society. We are as one for reforms aimed at improving the life of Uzbekistan's citizens. And, the Sunshine Coalition applauds their contribution in redefining our national identity.

But there are differences. If there were none, then we would all be one party. As mentioned earlier, "Erk" and "Birlik" are veteran opposition movements which were born during the Soviet period of Gorbachev *perestroika*. Consequently, their views on the problems facing Uzbekistan today are rooted in that era. However, the present crises facing Uzbekistan today are very different from those of the Gorbachev era. Our Coalition was created as a contemporary response to the crises facing Uzbekistan today. Our leadership and members understand that we cannot forget the lessons of the past, but we also understand that we must live in the world of today so that we can build a better future for our children and grandchildren. And, the only practical way to build a better future for our fellow citizens is engaging the current regime in a dialogue about reform of Uzbekistan.

Sanjar Umarov – the Chairman of the Sunshine Coalition

The members of the Sunshine Coalition have no illusions about how difficult it will be to engage the current regime in a dialogue. And by way of illustration, I would now like to say a few words about my father, Sanjar Umarov, the Chairman of the Sunshine Coalition. Dr. Sanjar Umarov was educated as a physicist and a mathematician and left the academic world for the business world in the late 1980's. For the first 14 years of Uzbekistan's independence, he participated in developing several major projects in agriculture, telecommunications, and oil & gas sectors. However, beginning in 2003, he saw that private entrepreneurs were being increasingly stifled by the corrupt Uzbek bureaucracy. Therefore, he felt compelled to give up private business in order to help create a coalition of progressive thinkers that would work on developing and promoting economic and social reforms in Uzbekistan. His work bore fruit in April of 2005 with the founding of the Sunshine Coalition of Uzbekistan. Subsequent to its founding, Sanjar Umarov was elected as the Chairman.

The month after his election as Chairman, the Government of Uzbekistan undertook a coordinated and intensive campaign against him and all those associated with him. As a result of this campaign, over 500 people lost their jobs, hundreds of individuals were interrogated and dozens of criminal cases were opened against anybody related one way or another with leadership of the Coalition and its supporters. Despite the great pressure, my father continued to express his view that the only solution to Uzbekistan's growing social and economic crises was the opening of a dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan. Sadly, on October 22, 2005 Sanjar Umarov was arrested and sentenced in record time to 10.5 years of imprisonment near the city of Bukhara. We remain hopeful that the baseless charges against my father will ultimately be dismissed by the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan.

Unlike most political trials in Uzbekistan, my father's case received wide international attention as an example of how the regime is abusing human rights and the rule of law. In response to my father's unfair treatment by the prosecutorial bureaucracy, in early November, 2005, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution expressing its concern about his detention and mistreatment. This resolution was sponsored by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar, as well as Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist and Senator John McCain. In mid-December 2005, the U. S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a companion resolution, sponsored by Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Congressman Christopher Smith, and many others, also expressing concern about the treatment of Sanjar Umarov. The passage of these resolutions was significant, as both Houses of Congress have not passed a common resolution concerning an individual human rights case since the Mandela Freedom Resolution in 1984. I would like to take this opportunity to express our family's deep appreciation for the actions of the House and the Senate. We also thank the UN Committee on Human Rights for their attention and many other human rights organizations that have spoken out on my father's behalf.

The prospects for the Sunshine Coalition

Despite Sanjar Umarov's continued imprisonment, the work of Sunshine Coalition continues through programs like the International Economic Advisory Council. This Council is assisting

the Coalition's leadership in defining a concrete set of reform proposals that can serve as a basis for beginning a dialogue with the current regime.

The Sunshine Coalition remains optimistic about the potential for reform in Uzbekistan, but at the same time, understands how difficult the road ahead may be. The only way forward for Uzbekistan is creating a meaningful dialogue with the current regime through which the citizens of Uzbekistan can realize their hopes and dreams. We ask our Uzbek brothers and sisters around the world to join our effort to change Uzbekistan through peaceful, constructive dialogue.