

UZBEKISTAN: 3 YEARS AFTER ANDIJON



May 13, 2008

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2011

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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UZBEKISTAN: 3 YEARS AFTER ANDIJON

MAY 13, 2008

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 10:00 a.m. in room B-319 of the Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Ronald J. McNamara, International Policy Director, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Panelists present: Ronald J. McNamara, International Policy Director, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Masha Lisitsyna, Human Rights Watch, Europe and Central Asia Division; Shahida Tulaganova, documentary film maker, Co-Founder of the Uzbek-language newspaper Siyosat; Juliette Williams, founding Director, Environmental Justice Foundation; and Eric McGlinchey, Assistant Professor of Government and Politics, George Mason University.

Mr. McNAMARA. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Ron McNamara. I'm currently serving as the International Policy Director for the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

We welcome you to today's briefing, which is co-sponsored by the Helsinki Commission and the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation.

As it happens, Congress does not reconvene until late this afternoon, and unfortunately Congressman Alcee Hastings, our Commission Chairman, could not return from his district in Florida in time to open today's proceedings.

However, he is very much interested in the subject, having been a visitor to Uzbekistan numerous times. And we will report to him on the substance of today's briefing. Certainly, one of the questions many are asking is if the situation in Uzbekistan gotten worse, or has it largely remained the same as they were 3 years ago?

And we would like to ask our witnesses to discuss various aspects of the current situation in Uzbekistan today. Apart from the general issues of democratization and human rights observance, our panelists will also address the problem of child labor in the cotton industry.

Among our witnesses, we are fortunate to have an expert on the subject of child exploitation in Uzbekistan, a concern that has been drawing considerable international attention.

Finally, we would expect our witnesses to discuss the state of U.S.-Uzbek relations and the possibility for improving those ties.

In the order in which our experts will be speaking this morning, we have Masha Lisitsyna, from Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia Division. She was the primary author of the just-released Human Rights Watch report on Uzbekistan. And there are copies available outside of our briefing room today.

Then we'll hear from Shahida Tulaganova, a documentary film maker and a founder the Uzbek-language newspaper Siyosat.

Third, we'll hear from Juliette Williams, founding Director of the Environmental Justice Foundation, a U.K.-based nonprofit, and a principal author of "White Gold: Uzbekistan, Cotton and the Crushing of a Nation."

She has 16 years experience in field investigations, international advocacy and capacity-building for grassroots environment and human rights defenders.

And last but not least, we'll hear from Dr. Eric McGlinchey, Associate Professor of Government and Politics at George Mason University and a specialist on Central Asia. Professor McGlinchey has testified before the Commission previously, and we are delighted to have him back this morning.

So at this point, I will turn to Ms. Lisitsyna.

Ms. LISITSYNA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, everyone. I have the honor to present Human Rights Watch's latest report on Andijon, our third such report.

And we'd like to start with a remark that when we think about Andijon, we think about at least three tragedies that affect hundreds of people, and they still continue to affect people today.

One is the massacre itself, and I think everybody in the room knows that hundreds of people there were killed by Uzbek governmental forces.

And still to this day, the Uzbek government has not recognized its responsibility for this massacre and has not allowed an independent international investigation into the events.

The second is the crackdown, when hundreds of people were tortured after the events at Andijon. Hundreds of people continue to languish in Uzbek jails after the unfair trials, and they want them—the human rights defenders.

There has been some progress. The government has released eight of the human rights defenders. But we should remember that at least 12 other defenders are still in Uzbek jails today and have no hope for their prompt release and recognition of their rights.

And this whole tragedy—it's what our report speaks about. It's an ongoing tragedy. It's a repression that continues in Andijon.

The targets among the general population; also very specific groups of people who are described in our report that you are welcome to help yourself to copies outside of the room after the briefing.

The Uzbek Government continues to target those who stayed in Andijon and could have witnessed anything that happened on May 13, 2005. The report we just released documents that people continue to be interrogated to this day.

New criminal cases are started against the witnesses of those events. People are still tortured today. All the interviews in the report are from 2007 and 2008. These are all new interviews that we conducted outside of Uzbekistan.

And they're threatened with imprisonment, and they're forced to testify against the others, and most of the confessions are false.

Another group that has been targeted is relatives of anybody who fled the country and of anybody who is in prison. We documented constant repression against, I would say, all families. All the relatives we interviewed were summoned to the police. Some were beaten. Some were not.

Neighborhood committees (mahala), serve Uzbek Government as a source of local administration, always come to the homes, depriving these families of their social benefits.

And we documented also the repression of the children, who are often called by teachers in schools: "children of the enemies of the state."

And again, this happens today, three years after the massacre at Andijon. What happens—it's a little bit less visible. If directly after the massacre people were called like every day or every week to the police, now it's every month, 2 months, or every 3 months. It depends. But it still happens.

Families reported to us the constant surveillance. They often have unidentified cars waiting near their houses. Some women told us that they can't visit other families during the public holidays.

All of them or most of them are forced to sign a pledge not to leave Andijon, not to travel abroad, and not to go abroad to join their families.

And the new pattern that the report documents—is the extensive pressure on the families to call the refugees back to Uzbekistan. As you know, about 500 people fled Andijon, managed to flee Andijon in 2005, and most of them were resettled in western countries, including in the United States and Europe.

The Uzbek Government has put a lot of effort now to bring refugees back, and refugee organizations call this return of the refugees unprecedented. All families of the resettled refugees reported to us that they are asked by the law enforcement bodies to call their relatives back.

Some refugees, some of our interviewees, reported the whole scheme, how it should work, that some of the main defendants at Andijon trial, like important family, would get a deal from the security forces that if one of the refugees from the family would return, someone else from this family would be released from prison or would stop being tortured.

And then the returned refugee would tell others how great it is to be in Andijon, that everything is in the past now, and others will come back as well.

We did not manage to speak to any one of the returnees from the United States, but we spoke to people who returned from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and we spoke to a number of people who knew the returnees.

And they all told us that all the returnees are isolated. Most of them cannot find work. Employers are prohibited to hire more than one returnee—two persons can't be hired to the same place. Otherwise, the employer will have repercussions. And they only can communicate with each other undercover.

The report speaks more about the problems. I have limited time, so I will not go on into the repression that the Uzbek Government still exercises in Andijon.

I would just also mention that people who are released from prison connected to Andijon events are forced to work as informants for the government.

And in most cases, they're not only forced to report to the security forces, but also to sign false confessions, identify false people as participants of the event, report if they see anybody who might have been connected to Andijon, and also they're forced to ask other refugees to return.

The moderator spoke about the sanctions that the European Union imposed on Uzbekistan and recently suspended again.

Human Rights Watch thinks that if sanctions are suspended, the most important is to prolong the sanctions. OK, they might be suspended for 6 months, but the threat of sanctions should continue. They shouldn't be abolished altogether.

And there's also legislation on the foreign appropriations bill in the United States that should be considered in June that contains the threat as well of sanctions on Uzbekistan if considerable progress on human rights is not achieved.

Human Rights Watch believes that the sanctions do work, but the most important thing is to ensure human rights progress.

If the Government of Uzbekistan is able to demonstrate—would be able to demonstrate—considerable progress on human rights for sure, we wouldn't need the sanctions. But unfortunately, to date, this is still not the case.

And we think that the international community should not forget Andijon. The violations were not only 3 years ago but as our report documents but also continue still today. Thank you.

Mr. McNAMARA. Thank you very much.

Before turning to Ms. Tulaganova, I should mention that the format of our briefing today—should time permit at the end, we'll be happy to entertain questions from the audience.

Additionally, I should advise you that within 24 hours we'll have a transcript online at the Commission's Web site, our new and improved Web site, which is www.CSCE.gov.

Ms. Tulaganova?

Ms. TULAGANOVA. So 3 years after the Andijon tragedy, we hear the voices within the European Union and the United States saying that let's forget Andijon and move on.

But before we consider whether to move on or not, let's concentrate on the facts on the ground. I would like to compliment the speech of my colleague, Masha Lisitsyna, on human rights in Uzbekistan, as she brilliantly did on Andijon.

Now, some human rights statistics: the release of six or eight human rights defenders is great.

We have the statistics on civil society activists, which include journalists, opposition members and simple NGO workers. For the period of 2005 to 2008, 43 civil society activists were jailed. And at the moment, 27 are still in jail. Twenty-four were released.

Torture is still endemic in the Uzbek penitentiary system, as was stated in the U.N. report on torture in 2007.

The recent cases—and probably the most prominent are Mutabar Tojibaeva, the human rights defender who's still in prison and in very bad health. According to her daughters, she is severely tortured.

And then there is the case of Uzbek poet Yusuf Juma, who was arrested in December 2007. His house was attacked by the Uzbek security services, and he was jailed for 5

years. His only crime, as far as he's concerned, is to voice his opposition and protest against illegitimate Presidential elections in Uzbekistan.

Now, according to the information of his lawyer and his family, he was badly tortured, he lost weight, and he's in very ill health.

As far as the freedom of speech is concerned, the situation is not better. There were no improvements in Uzbekistan in this respect. Internet is still very controlled by the government. There is no access to opposition or any news [inaudible] as you probably know.

And the highlight of this whole thing was the murder of a Kyrgyz ethnic Uzbek journalist from Kyrgyzstan, Alisher Saipov, in October 2007 in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh.

He was the editor of the Uzbek-language newspaper Siyosat, which proved to be incredibly popular in neighboring Uzbekistan. The investigation still goes on, but we believe that he was killed by Uzbek security operatives.

Now, the silent victims of this regime are not adults but children. At least 2 million schoolchildren from the age of 9 to 15 every year are forced to work in Uzbek cotton fields, picking cotton.

This cotton industry profits only one segment—the political elite. Nobody else gets anything out of this cotton.

Our children are kept in inhumane conditions. They don't have adequate food or hygiene. They are kept there from two to three months, and they have no right to education, so potentially we're facing an illiterate generation.

The situation of poverty is getting worse. I think the only reason this country still survives is because we have the huge army of labor migrants abroad in Kazakhstan and Russia.

And I think the only reason that people are still not dying there of hunger is because every member of the family has somebody who is working outside of Uzbekistan.

Presidential elections in 2007 were absolutely illegitimate. We are very disappointed as a civil society that no one actually said anything—no one meaning not the European Union, not the United States—said anything significant condemning these elections.

And the fact is that everyone is dealing with an illegitimate president and an illegitimate government.

Now, we think that sanctions work, and we totally support the position of Human Rights Watch, because at least the government has something to fear.

In 2006, where the sanctions had their climax, we had nine civil society activists being released. In 2007, none of them were been released.

So I think in this case, sanctions should be continued, and the pressure should continue to be put on the Government of Uzbekistan. Many thanks.

Mr. McNAMARA. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Next will be Ms. Williams. At the end of her formal presentation, there will be a brief video presentation which I understand is available through your Web site.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you.

Good morning and thank you, everyone, for this very valuable and timely opportunity to speak to you today.

I want to again reiterate the comments that my colleague Shahida has made and make a direct link between severe human rights and environmental abuses and cotton production in Uzbekistan.

And we'll be showing a short film—it's 6 or 7 minutes long—which I hope will inspire you to take action on this.

Uzbek cotton production is one of the most exploitative enterprises in the world. It's governed and controlled by the dictatorship led by Islam Karimov.

Uzbekistan is the world's third largest exporter of cotton, and it provides the regime with around \$1 billion (U.S.) each year.

The government rigidly controls all aspects of the industry. It dictates cotton production quotas. It compels farmers to sell their cotton to state-owned export companies at a fraction of its true value. And it motivates producers with an array of more or less brutal forms of intimidation and control.

Underpinning the entire industry is the systematical use of forced child labor and slave wages in order to maximize profits to the state, with little or no return for laborers or wider society.

What this means is every time we buy a garment that contains Uzbek cotton, we are directly benefitting a small minority that is exploiting its own people for its own benefit, suppressing freedoms for the Uzbek people and meeting opposition with intimidation and violence.

Uzbekistan is, I believe, entirely unique in the world for its use of state-sponsored forced child labor. Each year, tens of thousands of children are made to work in the annual cotton harvest, with children as young as seven being given daily cotton quotas that they must fulfill. This is a Soviet-style regime.

An estimated 200,000 children are forced to work in the fields in the Ferghana region alone each year.

And alongside the forced child labor and other well-documented human rights abuses. Cotton production has been characterized by a really devastating environmental cost. It can take up to 20,000 pints of water to produce just one pound of Uzbek cotton.

The total failure of the government to reinvest in a crumbling Soviet-era infrastructure means that 60 percent of the water that's diverted from water courses and some of the natural rivers never even reaches the cotton fields—it's lost on the way.

As a direct result, the Aral Sea, which was once the world's fourth largest inland sea, has been drained to just 15 percent of its former volume. And this is what the United Nations has described as one of the most staggering disasters of the 20th century.

Such a system of exploitation has only been possible within the framework of totalitarian control. Efforts at liberalization, at dialogue, at outside pressure and engagement must be seen within this context.

Such has been the concern within Europe, where I'm based, that many of the EU's leading clothing manufacturers, retailers, and supermarkets, which include Tesco, the world's third largest retailer, have joined with us in a prohibition on selling products containing Uzbek cotton.

And this is a considerable achievement, and has required the implementation of supply chain tracking mechanisms, and has sent an unequivocal message of concern to the Uzbek government.

Along with this corporate action, European governments have publicly expressed their disquiet, most recently witnessed by the statement of the Dutch Foreign Minister, Maxime Verhagen, at the seventh session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, where he explicitly highlighted their opposition to the use of forced child labor in the Uzbek cotton industry.

Before showing the short film, I appeal to the Helsinki Commission and to people here today to engage in a full examination of the human rights and environmental abuses connected to cotton production in Uzbekistan.

This process would prove extremely valuable, as Uzbek journalists and civil society activists are intimidated, detained or are now in exile, and the regime continues to stifle the flow of accurate information and denies that child labor or other abuses are endemic in cotton production.

Our concern, EJF's concern, shared, I'm sure by the Commission, is to see rural families relieved of state-enforced poverty, an end to brutal repression and to secure a better future for the Uzbek people. Thank you.

Mr. McNAMARA. Thank you very much.

Yes, why don't we proceed with Dr. McGlinchey's presentation, and then if technical difficulties can be overcome, then we'll show the brief video?

Dr. MCGLINCHHEY. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. What I would like to do is address the question that the moderator posed—namely, can the United States encourage reform in Uzbekistan?

In the presentation, I will provide an answer, one answer. I am not quite sure if it's the right answer, but I'll try. I will also provide a caution. Let me just outline what the answer is.

The answer is that there are several underlying structural conditions that are changing which are conducive to an opening, a political opening, in Uzbekistan. The structural conditions that I'd like to cite in particular are three.

The first is the growing realization that Karshi-Khanabad, known here in the United States as K2, the air base in Uzbekistan, is not critical to U.S. operations or NATO operations in Afghanistan. In fact, one could call it relatively unimportant for U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan. That would be the first.

The second thing I'll point to is the political legacy concerns of the Uzbek leader himself, Islam Karimov. Increasingly, I would argue that Karimov is looking to his future, and it's one that I believe fills him with fright, if not outright terror.

And then the third one is what I essentially call a scissors effect, drawing from Soviet history, but this is the dual pressures of changing commodity prices or potentially changing commodity prices.

One is increased food prices that the Uzbekistan population itself faces. And the second, as Ms. Williams noted herself, is the potential for a decrease in revenues from the Uzbek cotton industry, which would result if the international boycott of cotton from that country is successful.

The caution which I'll talk about is simple, and that is political openings, while they present opportunities for reform, for engagement of autocratic regimes, equally present are opportunities for retrenchment.

It depends how a regime is going to react to these different structural conditions, these pressures. And I would say that it's as equally likely that facing these pressures the Uzbek Government may backslide rather than reform. It's incumbent upon the United States and the international community to encourage the positive outcome rather than the negative one.

Now let me just briefly talk about these structural conditions, first beginning with Karshi-Khanabad. I think the argument—and this has been presented well by people like Alexander Khuli—is that military bases in autocratic countries often encourage autocracy. That is, western military bases in autocratic countries may encourage rather than discourage increased autocracy.

And in the case of Uzbekistan, I think what we've seen is a very intelligent coupling of the international war against terrorism with Karimov's attempt to portray himself as a partner in this war against terrorism.

The trick here, though, is that while the United States and NATO are fighting real terrorist groups like Al Qaida and the Taliban, Islam Karimov is fighting people like domestic political reformers, human rights activists and business men whom he is portraying as militant Islamists.

The departure of the United States from K2, from Karchi-Khanabad, I think has fundamentally undermined the Karimov government's ability to portray itself as a partner in this war against terror.

At the same time, it's had no adverse effects, at least as far as I understand from my conversations with people at the U.S. Central Command, on operations, NATO operations, in the region.

And here, I would just urge the U.S. Congress as it considers the appointment of the next central commander after—you all know that Admiral Fallon has departed—to perhaps revisit some of the recent statements that Admiral Fallon made before Congress when he noted that the United States has begun new security dialogues with Uzbek government.

There is causality between U.S. bases or military bases writ large in autocratic regimes and growing authoritarianism. I would simply urge the Congress to raise this causality in its confirmation hearings when it considers the next commander of U.S. Central Command.

The second structural change is what I call political legacies or Islam Karimov's fear of his own political legacy. It's interesting for me as a scholar to reflect on what I call the class of 1991, the five leaders who came to power suddenly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in Central Asia.

Of these five leaders, only two remain. And I think if you look at what has happened since Andijon in May 2005, the decreasing positive legacy, the declining positive legacy, of people like President Akayev in Kyrgyzstan and, most recently, the literal dismantling of the legacy of Niyazov in Turkmenistan—the removing of statues and moving of statues—the outright rejection of political legacies of the previous leaders. I think it would be understandable to reason that people like Karimov, smart leaders like Karimov, are concerned about what the future holds for his legacy.

Rather than go down the path that his neighbors have in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, I don't think it would be a stretch to imagine that Karimov is looking north to Russia, to the Yeltsin-Putin succession, or the Putin-Medvedev succession.

Here I think there's an opportunity for the West. It's not too hard to imagine someone like Medvedev beyond his inclination toward Deep Purple and other Western hard rock bands, to also have an inclination for the West more broadly.

So although this may be a hand-picked successor, although this may be someone who pays respect to Islam Karimov, should he replace Karimov, nevertheless I think this is a real opportunity for the West to potentially engage whoever this might be.

And the engagement has to begin now, because those people are in the government today. I regularly speak to people within the Uzbek government both here—I'm not saying the mission here in Washington, but people who travel to Washington—and people from the Uzbek Government who are traveling throughout Central Asia.

And it is remarkable to note that although outwardly they may state the Uzbek Government's party line, there's considerable diversity of opinions and a healthy diversity of opinions within the Uzbek Government.

So engaging these people today I think will stand the United States and the international community well in the future.

The last structural change that I would argue has happened since May 2005 is this dual pressure on commodity prices. We all know well the pressures that rising food prices are having on autocratic governments throughout the world—not just autocratic governments, but just governments, period.

I mean, public frustration with the cost of food leads to increasing demands on the government, so that's clear. What I think has been well outlined by Ms. Williams is the potential effect a cotton boycott might have on the Uzbek Government.

This is an industry that brings the Uzbek Government—the figures I've seen—about \$1 billion in U.S. hard currency every year. Absent this easy ready access to these resources, it would be incredibly difficult for the Karimov regime to fund the instruments of repression that he has used to maintain power thus far.

So we have essentially a scissors effect that's going on here that is undermining the very fragile foundations, the already fragile foundations, of the Uzbek Government.

Just to sum up, and this is the caution, I do fear that these structural conditions can equally lead to repression as they can lead to reform. We've already heard about some of the repression that has occurred in recent years.

The sentencing of Umida Niazova in May 2007 to—initially, it was 7 years in jail. Then it was commuted to a 7 year suspended sentence. Now I guess that's changed as well—but still, the publicly shaming a human rights activist.

Alisher Saipov, a colleague who many of us have worked closely with in Kyrgyzstan—his murder in 2007—who security services have told me through intermediaries was carried out by Uzbek agents.

This would indicate that a vulnerable Karimov regime, a threatened Karimov regime, may turn toward repression rather than reform. So it's incumbent upon the United States to perhaps learn from best practices from the past.

We've learned from what's happened with Karshi-Khanabad and the challenges that go along with military engagement. What I would urge, rather than a military engagement or new security relationships, is a concerted focus on political engagement.

I know this is incredibly messy. Conditionality and sanctions don't always work. But I think if you look at past political engagement, particularly of the political activist

community, the human rights community, U.S. engagement in essence served as a lifeline to these people.

And I would urge that we maintain this engagement even at the cost of perhaps lessening sanctions, just so that we can maintain this lifeline to people like Umi Vinyazev, who have done such critical work in promoting political reform in this incredibly promising yet politically troubled country. Thank you.

Mr. MCNAMARA. I would ask, before opening up to questions, if Ms. Williams could just pitch her Web site, where the video can be viewed online.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Apologies. Sorry. The technical hitch continues. I have some copies of the short film if people want to get one from me. I'll put them on the table at back, and/or our Web site, which is on the back of the report.

Mr. MCNAMARA. Thank you.

For questions from the audience, we ask that you would use one of the microphones on the dais here. And if you could just identify yourself, any affiliation that you have, and if the question is being posed to a specific panelist, please do so.

A couple of thoughts that did come to mind with the mention of the infamous class of '91, as Professor McGlinchey put it. In the OSCE context, Kazakhstan and President Nazarbayev are slated to take over as the political leadership through the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010. It will be very interesting to see how they handle crises should they arise, including those potentially in Central Asia, including in places like Uzbekistan.

The other issue that the Commission has looked into, to some extent, is the whole question of sort of other actors and the whole question of the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

And we apparently do have the video, so before we lose it, let's go to that.

[Screening of video: "White Gold: Uzbekistan, Cotton and the Crushing of a Nation."]

Mr. MCNAMARA. One final point—there was some reference to a lifeline to civil society, and certainly the OSCE does maintain a mission on the ground in Uzbekistan.

Not surprisingly, it has been increasingly difficult for that mission to undertake meaningful activities since the massacre at Andijon. It has been very difficult, especially as it pertains to activities relating to human rights, or the human dimension, as we call it.

So that's another point that I wanted to make—

[Audio gap.]

Mr. MCNAMARA [CONTINUING]. Anyone from the audience with questions or if there's any response to any of the points, especially on the SCO and the relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. If you want to allude to those at some point, that would be great.

So the microphone is open for anyone who would like to pose a question. And again, please identify yourself and any affiliation.

QUESTIONER. Yes, David Sands of The Washington Times. Thank you.

You mentioned the Fallon visit, and also I understand the Karimov—was it the NATO summit—something in Bucharest? Do you think in some sense Karimov thinks he has won, that has waited things out and that the world has basically given him a pass, and has come back into the community of nations?

Dr. MCGLINCHEY. I'm sure our colleagues on the panel will have a lot to offer.

My sense is Karimov—I mean, recent government reports have rejected the rumor of flights, U.S. flights, into Uzbekistan. There is some discussion of U.S. personnel going through Kirmez.

But the rumor which followed on Fallon’s comments certainly has been rejected, and actually vociferously rejected, by the Uzbek Government.

So in that sense, it indicates to me that Karimov’s attention is not directed so much toward the United States and waiting the United States out as it is in maintaining good relationships with more proximate powers—namely, Russia and China—although the China-U.S. link is not certainly as replete with tension as the Russia-U.S. link is today.

So in that sense, I don’t think that’s the calculus that Karimov is using. I do think that he probably is fairly happy that people have begun to forget about Andijon. And in that sense, broadly, I think, he has successfully waited it out.

And that’s where, again, I would point to some of the challenges with sanctions. And we see in the case of Cuba, I think also in the case of Uzbekistan, that sanctions, if not done carefully, can in actuality produce the outcome that we least desire rather than the outcome we most desire. So it has to be done very carefully.

Mr. McNAMARA. Yes, Masha?

Ms. LISITSYNA. Yes, a quick comment. I just would like to stress for those who might not know, the sanctions on Uzbekistan are like arms embargo and visa ban for travel officials, so they’re not the kind—because they don’t touch the population.

And I would like just to say that it’s different messages that the [inaudible] government sends to Uzbekistan.

The European Union imposed sanctions 6 months after the massacre, and then Germany just gives a visa on the humanitarian grounds to the No. 1 official on the visa ban for medical treatment in Germany.

When we say that sanctions work, it just means that they should be taken seriously and implemented seriously by all the actors. It’s hard with the EU because it has also a lot of bilateral relationships.

So our fear is that these are not unified messages from Uzbekistan partners, just allow [inaudible] think that it can get away with it and just close the [inaudible] of Andijon.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes, I think that absolutely Karimov thinks that he has won. I think the sanctions regime imposed by the EU was so weak it’s rather like telling a child that it can—you know, you’re not allowed to do something, but you didn’t really want to do it in the first place. So it was just not really out there.

I think that what’s interesting now is that the message you are hearing from the corporate sector is way ahead of governmental action, and I think that they—I hope the United States will start to put this issue onto the agenda.

The EU is starting to do that. I know the Dutch, as I alluded to in my presentation, have raised the issue, and it’s starting to be on the agenda. Uzbekistan has been completely off the public and political radar for too long.

I think what we should be saying is that Uzbekistan is something akin to Burma and Zimbabwe, and why it isn’t on the front page of our newspapers. I think that we need to have government action now and political action that will secure a greater future for the Uzbek people.

We've sat by and ignored the situation for far too long.

QUESTIONER. Good morning. Jeff Goldstein from Freedom House. I have a question for Ms. Lisitsyna, and one for you, Eric.

I understand that Human Rights Watch has dispatched an expatriate staffer to Tashkent recently, and I'd be very interested in knowing how that's working out, what kind of access he has?

The broader question, when you spoke about supporting people who think differently, as opposed to, say, Azerbaijan and the first president Aliyev. Karimov seems to be doing everything possible not to groom a successor.

The people you speak with within the power structure in Uzbekistan—what are they telling you about what they expect to happen after Karimov departs the picture one way or another? And what is the likely role and how best can supportive people be who might want to change things after he goes?

Ms. LISITSYNA. Thank you for the question. Yes, we have a new country director who was allowed to enter Tashkent and went at the end of January—in February, I think, and he still doesn't have accreditation.

He has applied for accreditation. All delays are passed by now. And we have no answer from the Uzbek Government. So it's [inaudible] he can be in the country. He's legal in the country. He can travel. But he can't really work to the full extent, because he needs to be accredited. The person has to be accredited by the Uzbek Government, and he still isn't.

Dr. MCGLINCHEY. Of course, I'm going to be oblique in answering some of this, because if one's too direct then it can be problematic for our colleague in Uzbekistan.

The thing that I would stress is people who may outwardly parrot, echo, the Karimov line in public, in private conversations actually express nuanced, sophisticated—I would even go so far to say liberal views about politics and governance in Uzbekistan.

And there is an amazing potential—not even potential, real—I mean, it could be readily realized—resource among the bureaucratic elite in Uzbekistan. Many are well educated, certainly well aware of alternative forms of governments, well aware of what's going on in Kyrgyzstan, the failures that have happened there, well aware of transitions elsewhere—who have the knowledge that can be implemented should the Karimov government, for whatever reason, disappear.

That said, I think the overall tenor of what I'm hearing from people in Uzbekistan is this sense of continued decentralization of power. I think that's already occurring under the Karimov government.

I think if you go to the regions, it's painfully apparent, and I know Human Rights Watch has done a lot of work in the regions. And I think you guys—on a regular basis, when you deal with people in the security services, no one really knows who's telling whom what to do.

So I think there is this sense that continued decentralization would—that path would also be the path that would follow the departure of a Karimov government. You know, privately I'd be happy to say more. Just publicly, I'd refrain from actually getting into much detail.

QUESTIONER. Hi. Daniel Waggoner with the Center for International Private Enterprise.

My question is for Ms. Williams. Have there been any efforts to educate clothing producers or retailers about the human rights violations associated with the cultivation of cotton in Uzbekistan?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you. Yes, we definitely—and we're London based, so we've been talking very much. We've had outreach to predominantly EU retailers, some of which are Tesco, the world's third largest retailer, and Marks & Spencer, which is a large U.K. retailer—CNA, which has about 1,200 stores in 16 countries across Europe.

We've had very much focus on the EU. I think that when they see the film, they see we have a report, "White Gold," they see that and they are shocked.

We've been in to meetings with people who have been badgered about sweatshops over the years, who have been badgered about human rights violations within clothing manufacture, and they see the footage of children out in the field and they're truly shocked.

So the responses that we're now getting back from companies is how can we avoid Uzbek cotton. They don't want to be associated with something that has been linked to such profound human rights abuses, and not just the direct abuses of children being sent out, the state-sponsored forced child labor, which is, as I mentioned in my presentation, unique.

But the environmental costs where you have the Aral Sea being drained, and where you have a regime that is directly benefitting from the procurement of—by western companies procuring the cotton. So we're getting a good response now.

When I mentioned a few minutes ago that I think the corporate—the voluntary actions are happening. We do have companies that are saying, "We do not want to be associated with this regime."

And yet we have the political, the public forum, which is doing nothing, is doing very little, has these—a few sanctions here and there, but they're not actually getting to the root and branch that—we're not getting any kind of systemic change within the regime.

Karimov has won, unless we have some much stronger action. And I think governments do need to run and catch up with where the corporations are going on this situation and try and have measured time band responses that will secure some—a positive future for the Uzbek people.

Mr. MCNAMARA. Sure.

QUESTIONER. I'd like to follow up on that. I'm Josh Kucera, freelance journalist.

Could you talk about the—whatever efforts you've made in the United States to convince U.S. retailers or clothing manufacturers or anybody like that do the same thing that the Europeans are doing?

Oh, and another question. You said this is unique in the world. My understanding is Turkmenistan also forces school kids to pick cotton. Can you explain what the differences in those two countries are?

Ms. WILLIAMS. In the United States we're just starting to outreach a lot of the—I guess the big name brands, the Levis, the Nikes, the Gaps we've been talking to in Europe and are starting to talk to in terms of the U.S. headquarters now, so looking at getting an overall—a global policy.

What offices in the U.K. might say in response to our meetings, our information, and so on might be different to what the H.Q.s are doing. So it has been a slower process.

We believe that there will be a number of very, very large names coming out in the next few weeks to basically stand alongside the CNA, the Tesco's, the Marks and Spencers and other major retailers in Europe, and they will have the same message, which is, "We do not want to be associated with Uzbek cotton."

You're right, Turkmenistan until recently had forced child labor on a smaller scale, but certainly it was state-sponsored.

There was a similar situation with production quotas. So if the orders come down that you've got to fulfill these quotas, and the only way to do it, if the adults don't want to work, and you have got little mechanization, is to get the kids out.

It's been on the wane. And I understand all the colleagues here today might be able to correct me on this. It has been something that certainly in the post-Niyazov time has been—the general kind of liberalization has meant that children may still be out in the cotton fields, but it's not in the same rigid state-controlled situation.

It's not something where the order is unwritten, that they might be coming down from on high, this is what needs to happen, where stores are closed, on the same scale.

So yes, I would say in a historical context it was unique, but I think now today—and I think this coming autumn we'll see that Uzbekistan still remains as the one and only, unique in the world for its use of state-sponsored forced child labor.

Ms. LISITSYNA. It's a bit off topic, but very quickly, in Turkmenistan, I wouldn't speak about the general liberalization in Turkmenistan now.

Really, what Turkmenistan is doing is taking some very, again, visual actions [inaudible] is a cult of personality, so yes, the statue is taken down; yes, the names of the months are changed.

And yes, there is a decree that children should not be employed into the child labor and into the cotton fields. The research in Turkmenistan is still almost impossible. None of the human rights organizations have gained real access to the country.

Activists are still suppressed in Turkmenistan. It is still very hard to communicate; there are still problems with Internet access, et cetera. So I wouldn't say from our perspective at Human Rights Watch—yes, there is this decree. Yes, there is less child labor.

But maybe they don't know of—because it's still very hard to do the research in Turkmenistan, and it's one of the countries I work on. On the ground, it's almost the same as it was under Niyazov.

Ms. TULAGANOVA. When we talk about Central Asia and forced child labor, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan both produce cotton, but on a smaller scale, much smaller scale, than Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is one of the leading cotton producers in the world, number one.

No. 2, by formally abolishing child labor even during [inaudible], at least the Government of Turkmenistan acknowledged that they had child labor. In Uzbekistan, we see the total denial from the authorities of this fact.

And we had several statements from the Uzbek ministry officials saying that child labor doesn't exist in Uzbekistan, so at least, you know, in Turkmenistan they had the courage to formally recognize it.

As far as Tajikistan is concerned, yes, we know that child labor, forced child labor, is happening there, in a much smaller scale, again, because of the small cotton production.

And because it's happening in tiny little regions, and obviously this is not a state-sponsored thing but more related to the decision of the regional authorities.

QUESTIONER. I'm Mike Amitay at the Open Society Institute.

For Dr. McGlinchey and Ms. Tulaganova, if this \$1 billion windfall, let's say, for the Uzbek regime was somehow diminished by an international boycott or other types of sanctions, can you speculate on what would happen to the regime and to the society?

Ms. TULAGANOVA. Well, if the Uzbek Government won't liberalize the cotton sector—obviously, the cotton sector is so tied up with the liberalization of the whole economy, which I don't think they're willing to do now and not in foreseeable future.

I think we will face a situation when we have more people migrating to the neighboring countries to earn some money, if the Uzbek government will decide to introduce severe dictation of these honest people. So I think we will see [inaudible] in the space of not Tashkent but regional centers.

My colleagues already mentioned the food prices going up. We have seen reports in Buhara region and Jizak region of sporadic protests of the local populations protesting against increasing food prices.

So I expect that if there's going to be no \$1 billion industry, so we'll cut in a way the bloodline for the Uzbek elite earning money, and we'll probably expect some sporadic protests across the country.

I think Eric is in a better position to answer that question.

Dr. MCGLINCHEY. I'm in large agreement. I mean, I think really you're posing two questions, and it's actually one that I would pose to Ms. Williams as well as a co-traveler rather than as someone who questions the strategy.

The first question is would the boycott work. And my fear is although it might work in the West, I wonder about how it would be implemented in places like Russia or China, places where we know simply from our own experience with toy manufacturing in the United States it's very hard to police the supply chain.

So because cotton is a fungible good, like oil is—and we have experience with oil sanctions regimes—it's going to be hard to do. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't do it. Ethically, it's incumbent upon us to do it. But it begs the question will it work in the first place. I hope it does.

The second question—what would happen if it were to work—Central Asian governments are little changed from their Soviet predecessors. These are patronage politics regimes.

If you look at the countries that have survived relatively unscathed—Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—that's because they have easy access to readily exploitable rents.

Kazakhstan, of course, has oil. In Uzbekistan, it's gold, gas and cotton. If you remove the cotton factor, you still have gold and gas, but it's not as readily exploitable as cotton is.

So I mean, I think what we would see is a very—a considerable erosion of patronage politics. And in Uzbekistan, I think we're already seeing an erosion of patronage politics.

The system is not working. You see these desperate attempts by the Karimov government to build other networks of patronage. This Kamolot youth organization, for example, is just like the Komsomol, its predecessor. It's a desperate attempt to create a loyal youth, which isn't really working.

But I think you'd see an acceleration of this collapse of patronage politics and then a further fragmentation of the Uzbek state.

Ms. WILLIAMS. How do we trace—OK, the answer to the boycott. We have been in dialogue with European companies for—we launched our report, “White Gold,” back in early 2006.

It has taken almost 2 years for most of those big companies that have a huge number of clothing factories around the world to be able to be in a position where they say, “We now know where this commodity is coming from.”

Previously, there was an incredibly opaque supply chain. The way cotton is produced on the field, the various ginning and the process as it goes through, the way it's sold, the way it's traded, is incredibly complex and very opaque.

It's quite a tricky one to actually take the trail back, but we've been able to do that. We've worked very closely with companies. We basically said, “You can do this if you try hard enough, if you have the will to do it,” and it comes down to paperwork.

It comes down to some due diligence, and that's why the companies were so impressed by the problems that they were being presented with and the message that we were presenting to them from grassroots civil society activists in Uzbekistan that they wanted to do this.

And so it's taken them two years to trace the supply chain backwards. It is doable. Most of the cotton—Uzbekistan has very little in terms of in-country clothing manufacturing. Most of the cotton is exported.

It goes to places like Latvia. It goes to Russia, China. Bangladesh is a huge one in terms of the clothing, the retail sector, which ultimately ends up in European “High Streets.”

So the process for those companies and for us working with them, and with experts in supply chain and sort of commodity tracing has been to just track it back to the people that they're procuring from and take it each step of the way back.

And that's what we've been able to do. Hence, Tesco and Marks and Spencer being able to say categorically that they will no longer have any Uzbek cotton within their products by—actually, by July as well they're giving sort of the 100 percent guarantee and assurance.

I think that there are other things that can take place. CNA, which is this big European clothing retailer, told us recently that when they made their announcement, the public announcement that they would no longer buy Uzbek cotton, it really meant a lot, because they were buying directly from Uzbekistan.

They were one of the few big companies that were buying from apparel manufacturers within the Tashkent region. So we know that there are clear messages getting back to the government, and that's what we want.

We're not saying that Uzbek cotton is any worse than any other cotton. We're saying there just need to be changes within the way it's produced and traded, and there is a need to get a bigger benefit to the Uzbek people and get rid of the abuses that are associated with it.

So that's where we're up to now. I hope the boycott is a way of raising public awareness, political awareness and of corporations being able to publicly say, “We're taking a stance on this issue,” and we want to see action.

QUESTIONER. Hi. I'm Lauren Smith. I'm with the State Department.

And I'm just wondering—a follow-up on the boycott question. Do you see potential in other industries in Uzbekistan that may be less destructive, are, you know [inaudible] better places to work, or if this boycott went into effect, what would be a good industry to stimulate?

Ms. WILLIAMS. What we want to happen is liberalization within the cotton sector. We're not trying to replace it. Uzbekistan gets 60 percent of its hard currency from cotton. It's a huge—it's a major commodity. It's a major source of income for the regime.

What we're saying is that there can be some straightforward liberalization that means that people can make a decent livelihood and a living.

As we saw from the film, you have people who are saying, "I want to be on that side of the border," but they're not. They're working in Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan because they cannot make a livelihood in their homeland.

If Uzbek cotton farmers are compelled to sell their cotton produced—they're told how to produce this thing. They're given all of the input. They're told how to grow it, when to grow it, when to produce it. They're told which kids to pull out of school to harvest it.

They are compelled by the government to sell to one of three state-owned export companies which have a complete monopoly on the export. It's so tightly—it's so rigid.

If you were able to liberalize that end to get rid of the—this top-down mechanism and processing where farmers are able to decide how they grow their cotton and whom they sell it to, an extra liberalization, then you have a cotton sector that is like its neighboring cotton sectors.

To the north, you have cotton farmers who are making a good living out of this. You have cotton farmers who are now looking at organic cotton, who are getting fair trade prices for their cotton. That's not happening in Uzbekistan simply because you still have a Soviet-style quota production system.

And so there are policies that can be changed that will improve the sector, and that's what we're saying. We're not trying to encourage diversity or [inaudible].

We're saying the basis is there for sustainable livelihoods. You need to have some improvements in the way that this is overseen and in the way the production takes place.

Dr. MCGLINCHAY. Something quickly. I'd like to just slightly—I'd like to present an alternative view on this. I would like to basically flat out say that cotton in Uzbekistan and cotton in Central Asia writ large is not sustainable. It's an unsustainable industry.

So even if one changes the way cotton is—the pricing structure, the state boards that buy the cotton, like the state boards in Africa used to buy the coffee beans—in contrast to Africa, where coffee is sustainable, cotton in Uzbekistan or in Central Asia just flat out is not sustainable.

If one travels to the water basins in the mountains in Central Asia, it becomes painfully visible that this just can't go on.

You know, one of my alternative pursuits when I'm not being depressed about human rights abuses in Central Asia is to go up into the mountains, and every time I go up there, you see the glaciers retreating, and it's only a matter of time.

This is not a renewable resource. Water's not, unfortunately, a renewable resource in Central Asia, and the Aral Sea is almost tapped out, and now the glacier stores are

going to be tapped out, and in the long run something else besides cotton has to be promoted.

It doesn't mean in the short run that there can't be improvements in the industry. It's just in the long run. And I think the long run might not be as long as we think. It just can't go on.

Mr. MCNAMARA. Thank you very much.

And again, please do visit the Commission's Web site, www.CSCE.gov. Thank you very much.

[Whereupon the briefing ended at 11:15 a.m.]

APPENDIX

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JULIETTE WILLIAMS, FOUNDING DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE FOUNDATION

Good morning and thank you for this valuable and very timely opportunity to speak to you. My name is Juliette Williams and I am a founding director of the environmental justice foundation, a UK-based non-profit working internationally on environmental security and associated human rights.

Today, I want to make the direct link between severe human rights and environmental abuses and cotton production in Uzbekistan and show a short film that highlights our profound concerns.

Uzbek cotton production is one of the most exploitative enterprises in the world—governed and controlled by a dictatorship led by Islam Karimov.

Uzbekistan is the world's 3rd largest exporter of cotton, providing the regime with around 1 billion US dollars per year. The government rigidly controls all aspects of this industry: it dictates cotton production quotas; compels farmers to sell their cotton to state-owned export companies at a fraction of its true value; and motivates producers with an array of more or less brutal forms of intimidation and control.

Underpinning the entire industry is the systematic use of child labor and slave wages in order to maximize profits to the State, with little or no return to laborers or wider society. What this means is that every time we buy a garment containing Uzbek cotton, we are directly benefiting a small minority that is exploiting its own people for its own benefit, suppressing freedoms for the Uzbek people and meeting opposition with intimidation and violence.

Uzbekistan is, I believe, unique in its use of state-sponsored forced child labor. Each year, tens of thousands of children are made to work in the annual cotton harvest, with children as young as seven being given daily quotas they must fulfill. An estimated 200,000 children are conscripted to work in the fields in the Ferghana region alone.

Alongside this forced child labor and other well-documented human rights abuses, cotton production in Uzbekistan has been characterized by a devastating environmental cost. It can take up to 20,000 pints of water to produce just one pound of Uzbek cotton. The total failure of the Government to invest in a crumbling Soviet-era infrastructure means that that 60% of water diverted from water sources never even reaches the cotton fields. As a direct result, the Aral Sea, once the world's 4th largest inland sea has been drained to just 15% of its former volume, in what the United Nations has described as "one of the most staggering disasters of the 20th century".

Such a system of exploitation has only been possible within the framework of totalitarian control. Efforts at liberalization, dialogue and outside pressure need to be seen within this context.

Such has been the concern in Europe that many of the EU's leading clothing manufacturers, retailers and supermarkets—including Tesco, the world's third largest retailer—have joined a prohibition on selling products containing Uzbek cotton. This is a considerable achievement in that it has required the implementation of extensive supply chain tracking mechanisms, and it has sent an unequivocal message of concern to the Uzbek government.

Along with the corporate action, European Governments have publicly expressed their disquiet, most recently witnessed by the Statement of the Dutch Foreign Minister, Maxime Verhagen at the 7th Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council where he explicitly highlighted their opposition to the use of forced child labor in the Uzbek cotton industry.

Before showing the short film I appeal to the Helsinki Commission to engage in a full examination of the human rights and environmental abuses connected to cotton production in Uzbekistan. This process would prove extremely valuable and important, as Uzbek journalists and civil society activists have been intimidated, detained or are now in exile and the regime continues to stifle the flow of accurate information and deny that child labor or other abuses are endemic in cotton production.

EJF's concern, shared I am sure by the Commission, is to see rural families relieved of state-enforced poverty, an end to brutal repression and to secure a better future for the Uzbek people.

Thank you.



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