ANNUAL REPORT 2009

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Annual Report of the

United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

May 2009

Commissioners

Felice D. Gaer

Chair

Michael Cromartie

Dr. Elizabeth H. Prodromou

Vice Chairs

Dr. Don Argue

Preeta D. Bansal (until February 9, 2009)

Imam Talal Y. Eid

Dr. Richard D. Land

Leonard A. Leo

Nina Shea

John V. Hanford, III, *ex officio*, nonvoting member (until January 20, 2009)

James D. Standish

Executive Director

U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
800 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 790
Washington, DC 20002
202-523-3240
202-523-5020 (fax)
www.uscirf.gov

Professional Staff

Tom Carter, Director of Communications
Walter G. DeSocio, General Counsel
David Dettoni, Director of Operations and Outreach
Judith E. Golub, Director of Government Relations
Carmelita Hines, Director of Administration
Knox Thames, Director of Policy and Research

Dwight Bashir, Associate Director for Policy and Research
Elizabeth K. Cassidy, Associate Director for Policy and Research
Catherine Cosman, Senior Policy Analyst
Deborah DuCre, Receptionist
Scott Flipse, Senior Policy Analyst
Kody Kness, Assistant Director for Government Relations
Bridget Kustin, South Asia Researcher
Tiffany Lynch, Researcher
Jacqueline A. Mitchell, Executive Assistant
Muthulakshmi Anu Narasimhan, Communications Specialist
Stephen R. Snow, Senior Policy Analyst

ON THE COVER: Members of Pakistan's Women Action Forum in Lahore, Pakistan rally against the presence of Taliban and militants in the northwest of Pakistan on Thursday, February 12, 2009. The banners condemn religious extremism, domestic violence, and the burning down of girls' schools in Swat. (AP Photo/K.M. Chaudary)

Uzbekistan

Since Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, have been under assault. A restrictive law on religion severely limits the ability of religious communities to function and facilitates the Uzbek government's exercise of a high degree of control over religious communities and the approved manner in which the Islamic religion is practiced. The Uzbek government has continued to arrest Muslim individuals and harshly repress those groups and mosques that do not conform to government-prescribed practices or that the government claims are associated with extremist political programs. This policy has resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of persons in recent years; many are reportedly denied the right to due process and are subjected to torture. Though security threats do exist in Uzbekistan, including from members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and other groups that claim a religious linkage, these threats do not excuse or justify the scope and harshness of the government's ill-treatment of religious believers. The Commission recommends that the Secretary of State continue to designate Uzbekistan as a "country of particular concern," or CPC. The Commission's CPC recommendation for Uzbekistan should not be construed as an exculpatory defense of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, an extremist and highly intolerant organization that promotes hatred of the West, moderate Muslims, Jews, and others. Since 2006, the State Department has designated Uzbekistan a CPC.

Despite the constitutional separation of religion and state, the Uzbek government strictly regulates Islamic institutions and practice through the officially sanctioned Muslim Spiritual Board (the Muftiate). In 1998, the Uzbek government closed down approximately 3,000 of the 5,000 mosques that were open at that time. According to the State Department, a few independent mosques were allowed to operate quietly under the watch of official imams. In the Ferghana Valley, viewed as the country's most actively religious region, the state has confiscated a number of mosques and used them as warehouses or for other state purposes. Several years ago, the government introduced various administrative and other obstacles to daily practice in this region. For example, in the Andijon area, the regional head of administration instituted restrictions on Islamic practice, such as bans on the five daily public calls to prayer from mosques and on the preaching by mullahs at weddings. The State Department reported in 2006 that regional officials in Uzbekistan have been instructed that children should not attend mosque.

The state fully controls the training, appointments, and dismissals of Muslim leaders through the Muftiate. There are 10 state-controlled *madrassas* (including two for women) that provide secondary education in Uzbekistan and an official Islamic Institute and Islamic University in Tashkent that provides higher educational instruction. Despite the presence of a Shi'a minority in the country, there is no training for Shi'a religious leaders, nor does the government recognize foreign Shi'a religious education, though the State Department reports that Sunni *madrassas* offer some courses in Shi'a jurisprudence. The state also closes or confiscates privately-funded religious schools.

Over the past decade and particularly since 1999, the Uzbek government has arrested and imprisoned, with sentences of up to 20 years, thousands of Muslims who reject the state's control over religious practice, or whom the government claims are associated with extremist groups such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*. As of 2007, according to a State Department estimate, there were at least 5,000–5,500 such persons in prison, including individuals sent to psychiatric hospitals. According to international and Uzbek human rights activists, the only "crime" of these individuals is performing daily prayers and studying Islam. In 2008, the State Department reported that the Uzbek government has instructed some neighborhood committees and imams to identify local residents who might become involved in extremist activity or groups, using those who prayed daily or were overtly devout as criteria. Moreover, "authorities made little distinction between actual members [of the extremist group *Hizb ut-Tahrir*] and those with marginal affiliation with the group, such as persons who had attended Koranic

study sessions with the group." Human rights organizations report that many of those in detention were arrested on false drug charges or for possession of literature of a banned organization. Once arrested, they often are denied access to a lawyer or are held incommunicado for weeks or months. Many of those imprisoned or detained for charges related to religion are treated particularly harshly; prisoners who pray or observe Muslim religious festivals reportedly are subjected to further harassment, beatings, and torture in an effort to force them to renounce their religious or political views.

The use of torture continues to be widespread in Uzbekistan, despite promises from the government to halt the practice. The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, in his February 2003 report on Uzbekistan, concluded that "torture or similar ill-treatment is systematic" and that the "pervasive and persistent nature of torture throughout the investigative process cannot be denied." Reliance on the use of torture in detention did not significantly decrease, despite the Uzbek Supreme Court's 2004 decree banning the use of evidence obtained by torture or other illegal means. In 2007, the UN Committee against Torture confirmed numerous, on-going, and consistent allegations that torture continues to be used during criminal procedures, often before formal charges are brought. The Uzbek government has taken some limited steps to eliminate torture in detention, but there were numerous reports that ill-treatment remained routine and systemic and that those who engaged in torture were rarely punished.

Torture and other abuses are common in prisons, pretrial facilities, and local police and security service precincts. In August 2008, Forum 18 reported that "the threat or use of physical violence, including rape and the use of gasmasks to block victims' air supply," are among the methods used to "try to force adults and children to renounce their beliefs or to make confessions implicating themselves or others. Torture and threats often follow frequent police and secret police raids against unregistered religious communities, frequently while people are detained after arrest." In May 2008, authorities delivered to his family the body of Odil Azizov, who had been sentenced to a 15 year-term for alleged religious extremism; according to the State Department, there reportedly were signs of torture on his body. Informants reported several cases of medical abuse, including forced psychiatric treatment on political grounds. There were also reports of attempted suicides by prisoners. Convictions in the cases described above are based almost entirely on confessions, which, according to the State Department, are frequently gained through the use of torture. Human Rights Watch reported that particularly since the 2005 Andijon events (see below), it has become much more difficult to verify independently government claims of combating torture and improving prison conditions. What is more, Uzbek authorities reportedly do not release prisoners, especially those convicted of religious extremism, at the end of their terms. Instead, prison authorities often extend inmates' terms simply by accusing them—without judicial review—of new crimes and claiming that the prisoners still represent a danger to society. According to the State Department, in 2008 the Uzbek government permitted a prison visit by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The government of Uzbekistan does face threats to its security from certain extremist or terrorist groups that claim religious links, including the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which has used violence but whose membership reportedly declined after U.S. military action in Afghanistan in late 2001 killed its leaders. Uzbekistan continues to experience occasional violent attacks of unclear motivation. In May 2005, after several thousand mostly unarmed civilians gathered on the Andijon central square to protest the trial of 23 local businessmen for alleged ties to Islamic extremism, Uzbek armed forces fired without warning into the crowd. Estimated fatalities range from an official Uzbek total of 187 to over 700, according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that as many as 1,000 men, women, and children were killed. The Uzbek government continues to reject calls from the United States, the European Union

(EU), the OSCE, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for an independent international investigation into these events.

In the aftermath of Andijon, Uzbek authorities jailed hundreds of local residents, human rights activists, and journalists on suspicion of involvement in the events. Human Rights Watch reported in December 2008 that the Uzbek government "continues to seek out and persecute anyone it deems to have a connection to, or information about, the Andijan events." One such individual is Saidjahon Zaynabitdinov, who had shown journalists bullet casings reportedly used by Uzbek armed forces in Andijon and with whom the Commission met on its visit to Uzbekistan in 2004. In February 2008, Zaynabitdinov, together with five other political prisoners, was released from his seven-year prison term—the day before the Uzbek government met with officials from the EU. Relatives of human rights defenders have also been targeted in attempts to pressure activists to stop speaking out about human rights violations; relatives of human rights activists have reportedly been threatened, dismissed from their jobs, beaten, and sometimes arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned on fabricated criminal charges. The State Department reported that in several cases, the Uzbek government has pressured other countries forcibly to return Uzbek refugees who fled the Andijon events and who were under the protection of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In 2007, the UN Committee against Torture pointed to reports that some persons who had sought refuge abroad and were returned to Uzbekistan were kept in isolation in unknown places, and possibly subjected to breaches of the Convention against Torture.

Hizb ut-Tahrir, banned in most Muslim countries, purports not to engage in violence but is intolerant of other religions and has in some circumstances sanctioned violence. The group calls for a worldwide caliphate to replace existing governments and for the imposition of an extremist interpretation of Islamic law. Although it does not specify the methods it would use to attain those goals, it does, according to the State Department's religious freedom report, reserve the "possibility that its own members might resort to violence." In addition, the State Department reports that *Hizb ut-Tahrir* material includes "strong anti-Semitic and anti-Western rhetoric." Alleged members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* comprise many of the thousands in prison; in most court cases, however, Uzbek authorities have not presented evidence that these persons took part in violent acts. Many of those arrested are wrongfully accused of membership or association, sometimes due to alleged—or planted—possession of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* literature at the time of arrest. The State Department reported in 2008 that as many as 4,500 of the estimated 5,000–5,500 political prisoners being held in detention were imprisoned based on alleged *Hizb ut-Tahrir* membership. It was also reported that in November 2007, three men who had been convicted of membership in *Hizb ut-Tahrir* died at a prison in Andijon; the bodies of reportedly showed signs of torture. According to the State Department, local human rights activists reported in the past year that police and security service officers, acting under pressure to break up *Hizb ut-Tahrir* cells, frequently detained family members and close associates of suspected members.

After the May 2005 Andijon events, the number of court cases against independent Muslims in Uzbekistan reportedly increased markedly. Before May 2005, the authorities often accused arrested Muslims of being members of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*; since that time, however, arrested Muslims are usually accused—frequently without evidence—of being "Wahhabis" or members of another banned Islamist group, *Akromiya* (see below), which played a key role in the Andijon events. Although in Saudi Arabia the term "Wahhabi" usually refers to followers of a highly restrictive interpretation of Sunni Islam, in Uzbekistan, it is an official catchphrase used to refer to a wide range of Muslim individuals and groups, including genuine extremists, those that are political opponents to the Karimov regime, and those who practice Islam independently of government strictures. For the Uzbek authorities, all these groups and individuals are equally suspect and subject to government repression. In June 2006, police confiscated a copy of the Koran, the *hadith* (sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad), other religious books, and tape recordings of the exiled mullah Obid

kori Nazarov and his pupil Hairullah Hamidov, the Human Rights Initiative Group in Uzbekistan reported. The two men were arrested and accused of "Wahhabism," although reportedly they only sought independent religious education. Human rights sources indicate that Nazarov, forced to flee the country after the authorities branded him a "Wahhabi" leader, was not promoting extremism, but simply operating outside of government strictures.

The Uzbek authorities have also adopted repressive measures against entire families on charges of alleged religious extremism. Akhmadjan Madmarov, a human rights activist from the city of Margilan with whom the Commission met in 2004, is one example. In September 2007, Uzbek authorities extended by 16 and one-half years the sentence on Akhmadjan's son, Habibullah, charged with an alleged extremist conspiracy while he was in Navoi prison. Although one of Madmarov's sons was released on parole after he completed his seven-year term, another son and two nephews remain in prison; all have been charged with religious extremism, the State Department reported in 2008.

The Uzbek criminal code distinguishes between "illegal" groups, which are not properly registered, and "prohibited" groups, such as *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, *Tabligh*, a Muslim missionary movement which originated in South Asia in 1920, and *Akromiya*, a group based on the 1992 writings of an imprisoned Uzbek mathematics teacher, Akram Yuldashev, which, according to human rights defenders in Uzbekistan, espouse charitable work and a return to Islamic moral principles. According to the State Department, the Uzbek government has pressured and prosecuted members of *Akromiya* (also known as *Akromiylar*) since 1997, claiming that the group is a branch of *Hizb ut-Tahrir*, and that it attempted, together with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, to overthrow the government through an armed rebellion in May 2005 in Andijon. The charges against the 23 businessmen on trial at that time included alleged membership in *Akromiya*.

Followers of the Turkish theologian Said Nursi appear to be the latest movement to have joined the roster of officially "prohibited" groups in Uzbekistan, although reportedly the "Nursular" are only a voluntary group of Muslims studying about their religion. Most recently, two groups of Nursi's followers were tried on charges of religious extremism in February 2009, including a group of five journalists who were sentenced to eight years in prison for producing a journal, "Spring," supposedly linked to Nursi. In December 2008, a third group of nine men were arrested in Bukhara after a secret police raid on a home of where the nine were discussing Nursi's writings. The police confiscated 79 religious books and other materials, although they reportedly had no search warrants. At a closed court hearing in late December, a criminal court ordered their continued detention in isolation. Their trial on charges of belonging to an extremist organization began in late April 2009.

Uzbekistan's Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, passed in May 1998, severely restricts the exercise of religious freedom. Through regulations that are often arbitrarily applied, the law imposes onerous hurdles for the registration of religious groups, particularly minority religious groups, such as stipulating that a group must have a list of at least 100 members who are Uzbek citizens and a legal address; criminalizing unregistered religious activity; banning the production and distribution of unofficial religious publications; prohibiting minors from participating in religious organizations; prohibiting private teaching of religious principles; and forbidding the wearing of religious clothing in public by anyone other than clerics. Only six entities meet the law's requirement that religious groups must have a registered central administrative body so as to train religious personnel. The law also limits religious instruction to officially sanctioned religious schools and state-approved instructors, does not permit private instruction, and levies fines for violations.

The government modified the country's criminal and administrative codes in late 2005 to introduce heavier fines for repeated violations of rules on religious meetings, processions, and other religious ceremonies, as well as for violations of the law on religious organizations. Forum 18 reported

in 2007 that the Uzbek National Security Service (NSS or secret police), particularly its Department to Fight Terrorism, enforces controls on all religious activity. According to an official Andijon regional government document, a regional branch of the Muftiate and the state Religious Affairs Committee were ordered "to bring under constant close observation" all registered religious organizations. Methods included stationing agents in and around places of worship, planting hidden microphones in houses of worship, and recruiting spies within communities. They were also ordered to "strengthen the struggle with individuals conducting illegal religious education and organizing small religious gatherings."

The law's effects on minority religious groups are evident. Many churches, particularly evangelical churches with ethnic Uzbek members, did not apply or reapply for registration because they did not expect local officials to approve their registration applications. Other groups, particularly those with too few members to qualify for registration, reported that they did not want to bring themselves to the attention of the authorities and possibly invite harassment, the State Department reported in 2008. Churches whose registration requests have been repeatedly refused included Bethany Baptist Church in the Mirzo-Ulugbek District of Tashkent, the Pentecostal Church in Chirchik, the Emmanuel and *Mir* (Peace) Churches in Nukus, the Hushkhabar Church in Guliston, the Pentecostal Church in Andijon, the Baptist Church in Gazalkent, and the Adventist, Greater Grace Christian, and Miral Protestant Churches, all in Samarkand. No Baptist church has successfully registered in the country since 1999; however, some groups, such as the Council of Churches Baptists, refuse on principle to seek registration. In November 2007, the Tashkent City Civil Court revoked the registration of the Grace Presbyterian Church of Tashkent by invalidating its property title and thereby depriving it of the legal address required for registration. The Uzbek government continues to threaten to halt the practicing of the country's last registered Jehovah's Witnesses community in Chirchik. The 10 Jehovah's Witnesses applied for registration at the local, regional, and national levels and received either a denial or no official answer, the State Department reported in 2008.

Uzbek government repression of non-Muslim groups increased in 2008, including threats of violence and arrest, police raids, massive fines, confiscation and destruction of religious literature, disruption of religious services, and detentions. Like Muslims who practice their faith outside of state-sanctioned structures, Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses are frequently branded "extremists," and face ongoing harassment, detention, and arrest for "illegal religious activity," such as holding private prayer meetings or possessing "illegal" religious literature. In what may mark the start of a new repressive tactic, Uzbek police invited a Russian Orthodox priest to take part in a March 2009 raid on a group of Baptists holding a prayer meeting in a private house, Forum 18 reported. Also in March 2009, 20 officials raided the worship service of a registered ethnic Korean Baptist church in Tashkent, because official permission for the service had not been requested 10 days in advance; its pastor was later jailed for 10 days. After receiving an official warning for alleged violations of laws on public religious expression, the Presbyterian Church of Tashkent ceased regular worship in March 2008. In February 2008, a Baptist in the city of Ferghana was fined the equivalent of nine months' average wages for holding an unauthorized prayer meeting at his house, and the pastor of a registered Pentecostal church near Tashkent was fined over two months' average wages for violating the rules on teaching religion.

Although previously Protestants had not been threatened with lengthy prison sentences, in 2007 Pentecostal pastor Dmitri Shestakov from the city of Andijon was sentenced to a four-year term. Reportedly, Shestakov had been involved in the conversion of some ethnic Uzbeks to Christianity, but the official charges against him consisted of organizing an illegal religious group, inciting religious hatred, and distributing religious extremist literature. Four Jehovah's Witnesses, Abdumanob Ahmedov, Sergei Ivanov, Irfan Hamidov and Olim Turayev are serving prison terms ranging from two to four years on charges of teaching religion without

official permission or for organizing unauthorized religious meetings or organizations. Some regions, such as Karakalpakstan and Khorezm, are noted for particularly severe anti-religious campaigns, including expulsion of Hare Krishna and evangelical Protestant students from university and the state-ordered closure of almost all churches.

Although the Council on Religious Affairs (CRA) must approve all religious literature, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), NSS, Customs Service, and police may also suppress or confiscate religious literature, the State Department reports. Under the Religion Law, only seven registered religious organizations (an interdenominational Bible Society, the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, two Islamic centers, and Russian Orthodox, Full Gospel, Baptist, and Roman Catholic offices) have the legal right to publish, import, and distribute religious literature. Under 2006 amendments to the criminal and administrative codes, those who engage repeatedly in the "illegal" production, storage, import, and distribution of religious literature can be imprisoned for up to three years. Moreover, a secret 2006 instruction reportedly limits the press runs of any religious book to fewer than 1,000 copies.

It is remains very difficult to secure permission from the CRA and the Muftiate to publish Muslim literature, and the CRA chairman has reportedly said that the import of foreign literature for Muslims had practically ceased. Imam Obidkhon Nazarov, the exiled former imam of Tashkent's Tukhtaboi mosque, told Forum 18 in 2008 that even books by renowned Muslim scholars were no longer published in Uzbekistan, including those of Said Nursi, whose followers continue to face arrests, as noted above. However, in addition to some books and periodicals published by the state-controlled Muslim Board, the independent former Chief Mufti, Muhamad Sadyk Muhamad Yusuf, does publish materials and host a regular radio show. Nonetheless, even legal imports of religious literature are subject to confiscation by police, while unregistered religious minority communities are banned entirely from producing religious literature, especially in the Uzbek language. Uzbek authorities continued to seize and destroy religious literature from Protestants, Hare Krishna adherents, Jehovah's Witnesses and others. In July 2008, the CRA informed the Bible Society that it had denied the import of 11,000 Bibles and Bible-related books in Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Russian, Forum 18 reported.

The Uzbek government continues to restrict international travel for religious purposes. In April 2008, the Ministry of Justice rejected the visa renewal application of Rabbi David Gurevich, who is a dual American-Israeli citizen and Head Emissary of the Hasidic World Lubavitch Movement; in June 2008 he was deported. For many years, the Uzbek government has allowed only 20 percent of the country's official quota of 25,000 pilgrims to make the religious *hajj* to Mecca, according to the State Department; in 2007, only 5,000 were permitted to go. Those who go must be approved by local authorities, the secret police, the CRA's *Hajj* Commission, and the Muftiate. Furthermore, *hajj* pilgrims reportedly must travel on state-run Uzbekistan Airlines and pay the equivalent of 200 times the monthly wage.

The Uzbek government has intensified its efforts to isolate the people of Uzbekistan since the 2005 Andijon events, cracking down on both domestic and foreign-based NGOs, particularly those that focus on human rights, and closing almost three-fourths of them in 2006. None of the 17 or more foreign-funded organizations closed temporarily or permanently by court decisions in 2006 and 2007 were able to reopen during the past year. Human Rights Watch re-established an office in Tashkent in early 2008, but in May 2007 its Uzbek staff member, Umida Niyazova, had been given a suspended seven-year prison term for allegedly storing "extremist materials" on her computer, referring to the organization's report on the Andijon events. One day before a meeting between EU and Uzbek officials in February 2008, Niyazova was "amnestied." In July 2008, however, the Uzbek government refused to accredit Human Rights Watch's country director, thereby effectively ending that organization's presence in Uzbekistan. Foreign NGOs accused by

the Uzbek government of engaging in proselytism also remained closed, the State Department reported in 2008. The Justice Ministry controls the accreditation required for the foreign staff of any NGO, enabling the government to expel or deny entry to those it suspects of proselytism. In December 2008, the Ministry of Justice re-registered the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which distributes humanitarian aid, despite a threat the previous April to de-register the organization for allegedly violating Uzbek law.

Recommendations for U.S. Policy

In addition to recommending that Uzbekistan be designated a CPC, the Commission recommends that the U.S. government should:

I. Speaking in a Unified Voice in its Relations with the Uzbek Government

- ensure that U.S. statements and actions are coordinated across agencies to ensure that U.S. concerns about human rights conditions in Uzbekistan are reflected in all its dealings with the Uzbek government;

- following the European Union's October 2005 decision, reduce aid and arms sales to Uzbekistan and ban visits by high-level Uzbek officials in response to the Uzbek government's refusal to allow an independent investigation into the violence in Andijon in May 2005;

- ensure that U.S. assistance to the Uzbek government, with the exception of assistance to improve humanitarian conditions and advance human rights, be made contingent upon establishing and implementing a specific timetable for the government to take concrete steps to improve conditions of freedom of religion or belief and observe international human rights standards, steps which should include:

  --ending reliance on convictions based solely on confessions, a practice that often is linked to ill-treatment of prisoners, and implementing the recommendations of the UN Committee Against Torture (June 2002) and the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture (February 2003);

  --establishing a mechanism to review the cases of persons previously detained under suspicion of or charged with religious, political, or security offenses, including Criminal Code Articles 159 (criminalizing "anti-state activity") and 216 (criminalizing membership in a "forbidden religious organization"); releasing those who have been imprisoned solely because of their religious beliefs or practices as well as any others who have been unjustly detained or sentenced; and making public a list of specific and detailed information about individuals who are currently detained under these articles or imprisoned following conviction;

  --implementing the recommendations of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Panel of Experts on Religion or Belief to revise the 1998 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations and bring it into accordance with international standards;

  --registering religious groups that have sought to comply with the legal requirements; and

  --ensuring that every prisoner has access to his or her family, human rights monitors, adequate medical care, and a lawyer, as specified in international human rights instruments, and allowing prisoners to practice their religion while in detention to the fullest extent compatible with the specific nature of their detention;

- ensure that U.S. security and other forms of assistance are scrutinized to make certain that this assistance does not go to Uzbek government agencies, such as certain branches of the Interior and Justice Ministries, which have been responsible for particularly severe violations of

religious freedom as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA); and

- use appropriate avenues of public diplomacy to explain to the people of Uzbekistan both why religious freedom is an important element of U.S. foreign policy, and what specific concerns about violations of religious freedom exist in their country.

II. Encouraging Greater International Scrutiny of Uzbekistan's Human Rights Record

- work with other governments to urge the UN Human Rights Council to reverse its recent decision to end human rights scrutiny of Uzbekistan under confidential resolution 1503 and to address this situation in a public country resolution at the Council;

- encourage scrutiny of Uzbek human rights concerns in appropriate international fora such as the OSCE and other multilateral venues, and facilitate the participation of Uzbek human rights defenders in multilateral human rights mechanisms; and

- urge the Uzbek government to agree to a visit by UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Independence of the Judiciary and provide the full and necessary conditions for such a visit.

III. Supporting Uzbek Human Rights Defenders and Religious Freedom Initiatives

- respond publicly and privately to the recent expulsions of U.S. non-governmental organizations and the numerous new restrictions placed on their activities; unless these restrictions are rescinded, the U.S. government should make clear that there will be serious consequences in the U.S.-Uzbek bilateral relationship, including a ban on high-level meetings;

- continue the careful monitoring of the status of individuals who are arrested for alleged religious, political, and security offenses and continue efforts to improve the situation of Uzbek human rights defenders, including by pressing for the registration of human rights groups and religious communities;

- support efforts to counteract the Uzbek government's blockade on information into the country by increasing radio, Internet, and other broadcasting of objective news and information on issues relevant to Uzbekistan, including education, human rights, freedom of religion, and religious tolerance;

- continue funding for the Voice of America (VOA) Uzbek Language Service so as to meet the Broadcasting Board of Governors' stated goal of outreach to the Muslim world, including reaching the news-deprived population of Uzbekistan, as well as the large Uzbek diaspora in Afghanistan and other neighboring countries;

- increase foreign travel opportunities for civil society activists, religious leaders, and others in Uzbekistan concerned with religious freedom to permit them to take part in relevant international conferences;

- continue to attempt to overcome the objections of the Uzbek government in order to develop assistance programs for Uzbekistan designed to encourage the creation of institutions of civil society that protect human rights and promote religious freedom, programs that could include training in human rights, the rule of law, and crime investigation for police and other law enforcement officials; since such programs have been attempted in the past with little effect, they should be carefully structured to accomplish, and carefully monitored and conditioned upon fulfillment of, these specific goals:

  --expanding legal assistance programs for Uzbek relatives of detainees, which have sometimes led to the release of detainees;

  -- expanding "train-the-trainer" legal assistance programs for representatives of religious

communities to act as legal advisers in the registration process;

--specifying freedom of religion as a grants category and area of activity in the Democracy and Conflict Mitigation program of the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Democracy Commission Small Grants program administered by the U.S. Embassy; and

--encouraging national and local public roundtables between Uzbek officials and representatives of Uzbek civil society on freedom of religion; and

- increase opportunities in its exchange programs for Uzbek human rights advocates and religious figures, and more specifically:

--expand exchange programs for Uzbek religious leaders to include representatives from all religious communities; and

--ensure that the U.S. Embassy vigorously protests cases when an Uzbek participant in an exchange program encounters difficulties with the Uzbek authorities upon return to Uzbekistan, and if such difficulties continue, inform the Uzbek authorities that there will be negative consequences in other areas of U.S.-Uzbek bilateral relations, including a ban on high-level meetings.