

3/17/09: Event Advisory: USCIRF Co-Hosts Documentary Film and Discussion on Turkmenistan

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}Please join us for a screening of &ldquo;Shadow of the Holy Book&rdquo; A Documentary Film on Turkmenistan
Wednesday, February 18, 2009 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Ford House Office Building
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Room 108 Screening Co-sponsored by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom

and the U.S. Helsinki Commission

The film "Shadow of the Holy Book," directed by award-winning Finnish director Arto Halonen, examines how some of the world's biggest international companies have secured lucrative contracts with former President Niyazov's dictatorial regime, including funding translations of the Ruhnama, Niyazov's so-called "spiritual guide."

The Ruhnama embodied the grotesque personality cult of former Turkmen president Niyazov which dominated the country's public life for almost two decades. A generation of Turkmen schoolchildren was forced to study the Ruhnama at the expense of genuine education. "Shadow of the Holy Book" also looks beyond the Niyazov regime to the new government of President Berdymuhammedov who has ruled the country since early 2007.

The documentary questions the morality of international companies doing business with the dictatorship of oil-and-gas-rich Turkmenistan, and if their activity helps to hide, or even promote, Turkmenistan's dismal human rights record.

The film screening (52 minutes) will be followed by a discussion featuring:

Farid Tuhbatullin is a former political prisoner and the current director of the independent Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, based in Vienna. An environmentalist and civic leader, he was arrested in December 2002 on politically motivated charges and later sentenced to three years of imprisonment. He was amnestied under international pressure in 2003 and is now a political refugee in Austria, where he is a leading voice for human rights in Turkmenistan.

Arvind Ganesan is the director of Human Rights Watch's business and human rights program, and is involved in research, advocacy, and policy development for Human Rights Watch on issues involving business and human rights, with a primary focus on the energy industry. Currently, his program focuses on human rights issues related to the extractive industries, labor rights, trade, and the economic interests of militaries.

The discussion will be moderated by Catherine Cosman, who was on a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom delegation to Turkmenistan in August 2007 and Janice Helwig, a Helsinki Commission Policy Advisor who organized a hearing on Turkmenistan in 2008.

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}For further information please contact Cathy Cosman at 202-523-3240 ex 125 or Janice Helwig at 202-225-1901.
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