

October 3, 2006

UN: Rights Council Misses Opportunity on Uzbekistan

Absence of Public Scrutiny Following Andijan Deplorable

Geneva — The United Nations Human Rights Council yesterday squandered a crucial opportunity to mount a principled response to the Uzbek government's abusive crackdown on human rights following the massacre of hundreds of unarmed protesters in May 2005, Human Rights Watch said in a [briefing paper](#) released today.

Instead of agreeing to a public review of the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, the council decided to continue to examine it in private, as it has done for the past several years.

“The council's decision sends the message that perpetrating a massacre and refusing to cooperate with the international community carry no real consequences,” said Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “This is unacceptable.”

Monday's meeting concluded the first discussion by the UN's highest human rights body of the situation in Uzbekistan since the Andijan massacre. In spring 2005, the Commission on Human Rights decided to keep Uzbekistan under a confidential procedure known as 1503 (after the resolution which created it), based on a purported increase in the government's willingness at the time to address endemic human rights violations. The Andijan massacre, which took place just weeks later, exposed the commission's decision as grossly misguided and raised the expectation that its successor body would ensure adequate action at the earliest possible opportunity.

But even with the benefit of hindsight, the new Human Rights Council failed to remedy this error. The council also ignored the fact that the Uzbek government has steadfastly refused to allow visits by any of the UN monitors who have long been seeking access to the country. These include Michele Picard, the independent expert on Uzbekistan, appointed by the commission as part of the 1503 procedure, who has not been able to carry out a single visit to the country.

In deciding not to move Uzbekistan to public consideration, the Human Rights Council also failed to heed the recommendation of Louise Arbour, the UN high commissioner for human rights, who called for Uzbekistan to be subjected to a “public mechanism of scrutiny” in her July 2005 report on the Andijan massacre.

In a briefing paper published today, Human Rights Watch analyzes an Uzbek government memorandum from June 2006, which was prepared in response to a December 2005 UN General Assembly resolution that was critical of Uzbekistan's human rights record. The memorandum denies the existence of any human rights problems in the country, and rejects the international community's concerns about human rights as “unfounded.” The

Human Rights Watch briefing paper contrasts some of the assertions made in the memorandum with its findings on the ground.

“It is hard to imagine a more straightforward example of a country situation meriting the council’s public scrutiny than Uzbekistan,” said Cartner. “The government denies its complicity in human rights abuses and has gone to great lengths to mislead its partners about its record. This is one of the reasons that scrutiny should be public, and not behind closed doors.”

The Human Rights Council was established in June, and is still developing its procedures for addressing situations like that in Uzbekistan. While many members object to continuing the practices of the Commission on Human Rights such as resolutions censoring abuses in particular countries, few proposals have been made concerning how the new council should approach country situations. Human Rights Watch addressed this issue in an earlier briefing paper released on September 15. The council’s failure to act on Uzbekistan in part reflects this limbo.

The council has however considered human rights violations by Israel in both its regular sessions and in two special sessions. Its reluctance to date to apply similar standards to other country situations calls into question the council’s overall credibility and evenhandedness.

Human Rights Watch called on council members to redouble efforts to develop and agree on effective methods to address country situations, and to reconsider their approach to Uzbekistan at the earliest possible opportunity.

“The victims of human rights abuses in Uzbekistan deserve much better from the Human Rights Council,” said Cartner. “Bringing the Uzbek government’s abuses into the light of day is the least that victims should expect from this body.”

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