



Genocide and Politicide Watch: Uzbekistan 6 March 2012

Uzbekistan gained its independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on August 31, 1991. President Karimov has been in power ever since. A new constitution was adopted, establishing a separation of powers between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. In reality, however, Uzbekistan is a full autocracy. President Karimov has the power to dissolve the parliament and to appoint the judges. Further, there is a clan division in Uzbekistan which is associated with political power. The highest positions in Uzbekistan are exercised by members of the Samarkand clan of President Karimov and the Tashkent clan.

The Uzbek government violates human rights on a large scale: torture, absence of due process, lack of freedom of expression and association. Freedom House identifies Uzbekistan as one of the nine least free countries in the world. Islamists and political opponents, including Tajiks, are the main victims of this repressive regime.

Firstly, there is the situation of the Tajiks. In 1929 Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which previously formed one country, were separated. However, ethnic Tajiks still represent a large minority within Uzbekistan, especially in the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Figures in this regard are even underestimated, as during the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic the Uzbek nationality was imposed on ethnic Tajiks living on Uzbek territory as part of a policy of "Uzbekization". In the 1980s the Tajik community made secessionist claims, but these claims later evolved into a campaign for greater participation by ethnic Tajiks in political, economic and cultural life. President Karimov considers the Tajiks to be political opponents. His response has been repression.

Secondly, the Uzbek government upholds a tradition of persecuting Islamists. This policy is once again politically motivated. In Central Asia there are several Islamic groupings such as Hizb ut-Tahrir which want to establish a caliphate – an Islamic state unifying the many Muslim countries into a revival of the caliphate of the middle ages. Under the pretext of the "war on terror" the Uzbek government infringes the human rights of Islamists in Uzbekistan on a large scale. They are subject to even tougher restrictions regarding freedom of expression and association, arbitrary imprisonments, torture and forced disappearances.

The repression in Uzbekistan was most brutally expressed by the Andijan Massacre on May 13, 2005. That day protests broke out in Andijan because of an unfair trial against local businessmen for alleged Islamic extremism. The government forces randomly shot hundreds of unarmed demonstrators. Estimates of the death toll are uncertain due to the denial and cover-up by the Uzbek government. Eventually, the government acknowledged the death of 187 persons, while human rights organizations speak of approximately 750 casualties. No official has ever been held accountable for the killings, but fifteen persons were convicted for organizing protests in Andijan. Hundreds of civilians fled to neighboring country Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek government continues to use reprehensible practices to cover the truth on the Andijan Massacre, including forced return of refugees, torture of witnesses and intimidation of civil society initiatives.

Uzbekistan is at stage 5 of Genocide Watch's 8 stages of genocide: Polarization.