



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

**The Andijan Massacre Ten Years Later:
The Human Rights Situation in Uzbekistan**

Thursday, May 21st, 2015
11:30 am – 12:30 pm
2255 Rayburn House Office

Opening Remarks

Welcome everyone, and thank you for attending today's briefing, *The Andijan Massacre Ten Years Later: The Human Rights Situation in Uzbekistan*. We have a great panel of experts, and I'd especially like to recognize and thank Mrs. Mohira Ortikova and Mr. Kayum Ortikov for their willingness to share their personal stories of enduring torture and fighting for human rights and justice.

Last week, on May 13th, we marked the 10th anniversary of the tragic Andijan massacre, when Uzbek government forces opened fire on thousands of mostly peaceful demonstrators who were protesting against government corruption, repression, poverty and official injustice. Hundreds of unarmed men, women and children were killed in the government's indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.

This anniversary is especially sobering, because an entire decade has passed, but there has been no accountability or justice for the victims of the massacre and their families. During these last ten years, Uzbekistan's record of repression of civil society and violation of human rights has worsened. The Uzbek government regularly imprisons and tortures human rights and opposition activists, journalists, religious believers, artists, and other perceived critics of the government. Ten years have passed, and the government continues to severely limit freedoms of religion, expression, assembly, association, and other basic rights.

Uzbekistan has been a partner in providing logistical and operational support for U.S. troops in Afghanistan. As U.S. troops withdraw from Afghanistan, the United States is looking to reconfigure its foreign policy towards the region. As we identify opportunities for engaging with Uzbekistan, I strongly believe that human rights should be a priority. Respecting human rights is not only the right thing to do, but it is the smart thing to do, and the strategic thing to do. History has shown us again and again that respect for human rights is a prerequisite for security and prosperity and for achieving U.S. interests. All too often, governments with records of ongoing internal repression prove to be vulnerable to instability and conflict, putting at risk enduring American interests.

Today's briefing seeks to commemorate the Andijan massacre, examine the continuing human rights abuses, and explore implications for U.S. policy. I look forward today to hearing recommendations on what the U.S. government, including the Congress, can do to help improve the human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

With that, I would like to turn over to our panelists. Thank you.