



**Human Rights Watch Statement
Item 6: UPR Outcome Report on Turkmenistan**

19 March 2009

Human Rights Watch welcomes the UPR process of Turkmenistan as a crucial opportunity to foster positive change in the policies of one of the most repressive governments in the world. Indeed, because the Turkmen government continues to threaten and punish those who question its policies, however modestly, it is only through the UN and other external mechanisms that its human rights practices can be effectively scrutinized with a view to seeing them addressed.

We were pleased to see a number of states use the review to send a strong and unequivocal message about the necessity of concrete and meaningful human rights improvements, and recommend specific steps toward that end.

Mr. President, we were encouraged by the Turkmen government's acceptance of a number of the recommendations made – including that it act against any form of harassment and intimidation of journalists, ensure effective freedom of worship for all religious communities, and take effective measures to allow NGOs to register and work freely – and we urge it to follow through by implementing these steps as a matter of urgent priority.

We regret that it ultimately decided not to/particularly welcome its decision to accept the recommendation on granting access to the country for all UN special procedures who have requested an invitation. Currently at least nine such special procedures have longstanding requests for visits.

We further regret/welcome its decision to reject/accept the recommendation to allow the ICRC [and other independent monitors] access to places of detention. The need for the Turkmen government to create space for independent human rights monitoring, including as an important means to prevent torture in places of detention, has been repeatedly highlighted by a number of international expert bodies, including the UN Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights.

Another area of pressing concern raised by a number of states during the UPR is the severe repression of civil society, with independent activists and journalists facing a constant threat of government reprisal for their work. We therefore regret/welcome the Turkmen government's decision not to/to accept the recommendation that it protect human rights defenders from persecution and end restrictions on the media.

Finally, Mr. President, we deeply regret the Turkmen government's decision to reject at the outset a number of recommendations considered by human rights experts, both local and international, as being among those most pressing to address, and that could have led to immediate relief for victims of human rights abuses. These include releasing political prisoners, undertaking a nationwide, transparent review of all political cases of past years, and lifting arbitrary travel bans on human rights defenders.

Unknown numbers of people languish in Turkmen prisons following unfair trials on what would appear to be politically motivated charges— with at least two such prosecutions having taken place during President Berdymukhamedov's rule. The harsh repression that prevents civic activism impedes determining the exact number of political prisoners, but some of their cases are well-known, such as those of Mukhmetkuli Aymuradov, Annakurban Amanklychev, Sapardurdy Khajiev, and Gulgeldy Annaniyazov, and were raised during the UPR.

As to the travel bans, while some individuals previously prevented from traveling abroad have now been able to travel, the system of restrictions on foreign travel inherited from the Niyazov era de facto remains in place, and some people continue to be arbitrarily forbidden from traveling. Human Rights Watch documented dozens of cases in which individuals were barred from travel in the two years of President Berdymukhamedov's rule.

Mr. President, the Turkmen government's refusal to remedy these entrenched abuses is hard to reconcile with its stated commitment to human rights.

We urge the Turkmen government to reconsider its position on these and the other recommendations made during the UPR that it chose to reject. And we encourage Turkmenistan's partners to help ensure adequate follow up on all of the recommendations made, by making them an integral part of their ongoing dialogues, bilateral and multilateral, with the Turkmen government.

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