



**Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Uzbekistan  
Human Rights Watch**

**April 2023**

## Introduction

1. This submission details Human Rights Watch's key concerns regarding the Uzbek government's compliance with its international human rights obligations since its last Universal Periodic Review in 2018. On that occasion, Uzbekistan said a "broad administrative reform was being implemented," "unjustifiably restrictive registration procedures" had been eliminated for nongovernmental organizations, and that the state had made "efforts to prevent violence in places of detention" and "was endeavouring to guarantee the rights and freedoms of journalists."<sup>1</sup>
2. However, since its last UPR review, there has been a noticeable decline in respect for freedom of speech and the media, with outspoken and critical bloggers criminally prosecuted and imprisoned. Independent human rights groups are denied registration by the Justice Ministry and promised legal reforms have stalled. Consensual same-sex sexual relations between men remains criminalized, and impunity for domestic violence, ill-treatment, and torture is the norm. Authorities used unjustified lethal force responding to protests in the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan in July 2022.
3. On a positive note, Uzbekistan has been successful in eradicating systemic forced labor in the cotton harvest, and in March 2022, an alliance of nongovernmental organizations, trade unions, and business associations announced an end to the longstanding international boycott of Uzbekistan's cotton.<sup>2</sup> In 2021, Uzbekistan ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>3</sup>

## Conduct of Police and Security Forces

4. At least 21 people were killed and over 270 were injured in early July 2022 in Uzbekistan's autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, following protests over proposed constitutional amendments that began on July 1 in Nukus, the regional capital. Human Rights Watch research showed that law enforcement officers used excessive or unnecessary lethal force in response to the largely peaceful demonstrations in Karakalpakstan, leading to serious injuries and unlawful deaths of a number of participants.<sup>4</sup> Police initially detained more than 500 people, including the lawyer and activist Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, who had first called for a peaceful protest. In November, the Prosecutor General's office said 171 people were under arrest facing criminal charges in connection with the events.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Uzbekistan (A/HRC/39/7), July 9, 2018, [https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage\\_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/7](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/39/7).

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Williamson, "Uzbekistan Ends Systemic Forced Labor, Civil Society Says," Human Rights Watch dispatch, March 11, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/03/11/uzbekistan-ends-systemic-forced-labor-civil-society-says>.

<sup>3</sup> OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities celebrated in Uzbekistan, July 28, 2021, <https://www.osce.org/project-coordinator-in-uzbekistan/493906>.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Uzbekistan: Police Abuses in Autonomous Region Protests," November 7, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/07/uzbekistan-police-abuses-autonomous-region-protests>.

5. On February 9, seven months after the events, the Prosecutor General's office reported that three law enforcement officers were placed under arrest in an ongoing investigation into unlawful actions by police in Karakalpakstan in July. No further details were provided. A parliamentary commission established in July 2022 to investigate human rights abuses during the Karakalpakstan events has not yet reported its findings. Its composition raises concerns that it is not genuinely independent of government.
6. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*
  - Set up a genuinely independent, impartial, and effective investigation into the Karakalpakstan events, including into the deaths and severe injuries that occurred and the actions taken by the security forces, including the weapons they used, with a view to ensure accountability for human rights violations.
  - Review the use of certain categories of grenades used by Uzbek law enforcement in crowd-control settings.

### **Criminal Justice, Torture**

7. A serious lack of accountability for torture and ill-treatment persists in Uzbekistan. Despite pledges to do so, Uzbekistan has still not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
8. Dauletmurat Tazhimuratov, the activist and lawyer who was accused by authorities of organizing mass riots in Karakalpakstan, testified at trial that law enforcement officers beat him, including with a stun gun, after he was initially detained on July 1, and then again on July 4, after he was detained again. He said that the police stood on his head, causing him to lose consciousness. Authorities did not investigate his torture claims. On January 31, 2023, Tazhimuratov was found guilty and sentenced to 16 years in prison.<sup>5</sup>
9. The Muslim blogger Fazilhoja Arifhojaev, who is serving a seven-and-a-half year prison sentence for a Facebook post (see below), told his lawyer in late September 2021 that police handcuffed him to a pipe while he was in pretrial detention and made him sit in a stress position for nearly 12 hours, causing him excruciating pain.<sup>6</sup> Uzbek authorities did not investigate his allegations of torture and ill-treatment.
10. Since February 2021, when Uzbekistan's Prosecutor General's office published a draft of the new Criminal Code, its review has stalled. The draft Criminal Code, as published in February 2021, retains many problematic articles, including overbroad extremism and incitement provisions, and criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual

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<sup>5</sup> Uzbekistan: 16 Year Sentence in Autonomous Region Protests, Human Rights Watch News Release, January 31, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/31/uzbekistan-16-year-sentence-autonomous-region-protests>.

<sup>6</sup> Uzbekistan: Muslim Blogger Faces Eight Year Prison Term, Human Rights Watch News Release, December 9, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/09/uzbekistan-muslim-blogger-faces-eight-year-prison-term>.

relations between men, which are contrary to international human rights standards.<sup>7</sup>

11. Forced anal examinations, a form of violence and torture, were conducted on men between 2017 and 2021 and were used in prosecutions on criminal charges of consensual same-sex sexual relations.<sup>8</sup>

12. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*

- Publicly acknowledge the scope and gravity of the torture problem in Uzbekistan and meaningfully investigate all allegations of torture, holding perpetrators accountable.
- Ensure that the new Criminal Code meets international human rights standards and addresses various recommendations of UN treaty bodies by amending articles 159, 216, 244-1, and 244-2 related to offenses against the state and extremism and article 157 on treason; repealing article 221 allowing for arbitrary extension of sentences of political prisoners; decriminalizing “defamation” (art. 138) and “insult” (art. 139); amending the definition of torture contained in article 235 to comply with article 1 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Convention against Torture), and with article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; repealing article 120, which criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual relations between men; and amending other restrictive provisions in the criminal code.<sup>9</sup>
- Sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.
- Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and implement the statute in national legislation, including by incorporating provisions to cooperate promptly and fully with the ICC and to investigate and prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes before its national courts in accordance with international law.

## Freedom of Speech

13. Despite the Uzbek government’s pledges to protect the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media, including an express pledge to decriminalize defamation, freedom of speech and the media have increasingly come under threat in Uzbekistan.

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<sup>7</sup> Uzbekistan: Draft Criminal Code Offers Little Meaningful Reform, Human Rights Watch News Release, March 10, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/10/uzbekistan-draft-criminal-code-offers-little-meaningful-reform>.

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch, Uzbekistan: Forced Anal Testing in Homosexuality Prosecutions, May 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/05/uzbekistan-forced-anal-testing-homosexuality-prosecutions>.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Committee Against Torture, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan CAT/C/UZB/CO/5, January 14, 2020, <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhsjut9aDww3A3fMqDEftLPyqbeYxDfCWbn1ogeAFSU3PSPiYRszo%2B8eaYik6M3H4LuStZiEAaJob4ZXYo3nCHgGtGBuqDErPV8vSDNVf5uu bb> and United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Uzbekistan, CCPR/C/UZB/CO/5, May 1, 2020, <https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=6QkG1d%2FPPrICAqhKb7yhsj07MIYGKLOR0JAcDdFOt9%2FmNbr457d5EDoO02gGTLkJDd0XlnHhi3DnhjOdNPKjrJh9MB4nu%2Fexi%2FgB%2BHFymilWiOJAibtSI0jRdOeWD%2Fe5>.

14. Uzbek authorities have prosecuted and imprisoned bloggers on spurious charges, leading to a notable decline in speech and media freedoms in the last two years. Defamation and insult, including insulting the president, remain criminal offenses. In March 2021, Uzbekistan adopted amendments to the criminal code making online criticism of the president a criminal offense.<sup>10</sup> A draft Information Code, published in mid-December 2022, includes provisions that would violate freedom of expression, if adopted.<sup>11</sup>
15. In May 2021, a Surkhandaryo court sentenced the outspoken blogger Otobek Sattoriy to six-and-a-half years in prison on dubious slander and extortion charges.<sup>12</sup> His sentence was upheld on appeal. Miraziz Bazarov, a Tashkent-based blogger who publicly alleged corruption in the government and has spoken out in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights, was attacked by an anti-LGBT mob in March 2021 and hospitalized.<sup>13</sup> Upon being discharged from the hospital, authorities brought politically motivated charges of insult against him. He was convicted in January 2022 and sentenced to three years of restricted freedom.
16. On January 26, 2022, the Muslim blogger and government critic Fazilhoja Arifhojaev was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years in prison on charges of threatening public security for reposting and commenting on a social media post about whether a Muslim should congratulate non-Muslims on their religious holidays.<sup>14</sup> His sentence was upheld on appeal.
17. On February 3, 2022, a Khorezm court sentenced Sobirjon Babaniyazov to three years in prison for insulting the president online. Valijon Kalonov, a 52-year-old government critic from Jizzakh who had called for a boycott of the 2021 presidential elections, is being held in a psychiatric hospital in the Samarkand region, after a court ruled in December 2021 that he should undergo compulsory psychiatric treatment.
18. In response to the outcry in Karakalpakstan over then-proposed constitutional amendments, Uzbek authorities appeared to have disrupted internet access in Karakalpakstan starting June 27, 2022, with a complete shutdown from July 1.
19. On July 1, police arrested the Karakalpak journalist Lolagul Kallykhanova on accusations of encroaching public safety after she publicly spoke out against proposed constitutional amendments.<sup>15</sup> She was convicted on January 31, 2023 and was sentenced to a non-custodial eight-year sentence, with some restrictions on her activities.

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<sup>10</sup> Mihra Rittmann, "Free Speech Under Threat in Uzbekistan," Human Rights Watch Dispatch, February 17, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/02/17/free-speech-under-threat-uzbekistan>.

<sup>11</sup> "Uzbekistan: Bill Threatens Freedom of Expression," Human Rights Watch News Release, December 23, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/23/uzbekistan-bill-threatens-freedom-expression-media>.

<sup>12</sup> Mihra Rittmann, "Blogger Jailed for 6.5 Years on Dubious Charges in Uzbekistan," Human Rights Watch Dispatch, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/11/blogger-jailed-65-years-dubious-charges-uzbekistan>.

<sup>13</sup> "Uzbekistan: Independent Blogger Attacked," Human Rights Watch News Release, March 31, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/31/uzbekistan-independent-blogger-attacked>.

<sup>14</sup> "Uzbek Blogger Jailed for Facebook Post," Human Rights Watch Dispatch, January 28, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/28/uzbek-blogger-jailed-facebook-post>.

<sup>15</sup> "Uzbek authorities hold reporter incommunicado, restrict coverage of crackdown on protests," Reporters Without Borders News Release, July 12, 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/uzbek-authorities-hold-reporter-incommunicado-restrict-coverage-crackdown-protests>.

20. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*

- Respect freedom of expression, including a free press, by ending pressure on and any undue prosecution of media workers and bloggers.
- Release Otabek Sattoriy, Fazilhoja Arifhojaev, and Sobirjon Babaniyazov from prison and Valijon Kalonov from forced psychiatric hospitalization.
- Thoroughly and impartially investigate the violent assault on independent blogger Miraziz Bazarov and hold the perpetrators accountable; lift restrictions imposed on Bazarov, allowing him to resume his blogging activities.
- Ensure that any restrictions on freedom of information enshrined in the draft Information Code are strictly limited to the extent that is necessary and proportionate, and only for legitimate purposes, as provided for under international human rights law.

## **Civil Society**

21. Uzbekistan claimed in 2018 that it removed burdensome registration requirements for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and pledged to create an environment conducive to human rights and civil society activism, yet, Uzbek authorities continue to obstruct the work of independent nongovernmental organizations with excessive and burdensome registration requirements.<sup>16</sup>
22. The Justice Ministry has repeatedly denied registration to independent rights groups in recent years, often on trivial grounds. Agzam Turgunov, founder of the independent rights group Human Rights House, submitted his eleventh application for registration in January 2023, and at time of writing was awaiting response. Turgunov has been trying to register his organization since 2018.<sup>17</sup>
23. Authorities have still not passed the stalled draft NGO code, but on June 13 passed a decree requiring local NGOs that receive foreign funding to cooperate with a state-appointed national partner, ensuring state control over project implementation.<sup>18</sup>
24. Authorities continue to deny legal rehabilitation to more than 50 people, including human rights defenders, who since 2016 had been released from prison after having served politically motivated sentences under the late Uzbekistan president Islam Karimov.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> "Uzbekistan: Registration Barriers for Independent Groups," Human Rights Watch news release, January 7, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/07/uzbekistan-registration-barriers-independent-groups>.

<sup>17</sup> "The long road to registration: Human Rights House files lawsuit against Ministry of Justice's eight refusal to register the NGO," International Partnership for Human Rights News Release, September 23, 2021, <https://www.iphronline.org/the-long-road-to-registration-human-rights-house-files-lawsuit-against-ministry-of-justice-s-eighth-refusal-to-register-the-ngo.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Umida Niyazova and Lynn Schwiesfurth, "New Regulations in Uzbekistan Effectively Impose Government Control on NGOs," The Diplomat, August 26, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/08/new-regulations-in-uzbekistan-effectively-impose-government-control-on-ngos>.

<sup>19</sup> "Uzbekistan: The Right to Reparations of Political Prisoners," FIDH, December 2020, <https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/uzbekistan761ang.pdf>

25. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*

- Respect freedom of association by allowing independent human rights organizations, including international human rights groups, to register in the country, especially those that have been repeatedly denied registration.
- Adopt an NGO code in line with international standards and revise the June 2022 decree to eliminate the intrusive oversight over activities of nongovernmental groups.
- Provide persons formally imprisoned on politically motivated charges with legal rehabilitation, including vacating wrongful convictions.
- Ensure those released have access to adequate and appropriate medical care to treat all health problems linked to their imprisonment.

## **Freedom of Religion**

26. Uzbekistan accepted a recommendation to “adopt effective measures to promote freedom of religion” and revise extremism laws, yet Muslims who practice their faith outside state controls continue to be targeted by authorities with spurious religious extremism-related criminal charges.<sup>20</sup> In July 2022, a Bukhara court sentenced Bobirjon Tukhtamurodov to five years and one month imprisonment for participating in a banned religious organization.<sup>21</sup> Other Muslims, including Oybek Khamidov, Khasan Abdirakhimov, and Alimardon Sultonov, were imprisoned on extremism-related criminal charges in 2022.<sup>22</sup>

27. A new religion law, “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations,” was adopted in July 2021. Uzbek authorities did not incorporate in full recommendations issued by international human rights bodies, in particular the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, despite government promises to do so.<sup>23</sup> The law prohibits all forms of peaceful missionary activity and bans non-state-approved religious education and the manufacture, import, and distribution of religious material.

28. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*

- Protect the right to freedom of religion by ending arbitrary persecution of Muslims who practice their faith outside state controls.
- Amend the new religion law so that the recommendations of international human rights bodies, including the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on

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<sup>20</sup> US Commission on International Religious Freedom, USCIRF Releases Report on Religious Freedom in Uzbekistan, September 2, 2022, <https://www.uscifr.gov/release-statements/uscifr-releases-report-religious-freedom-uzbekistan>.

<sup>21</sup> Felix Corley, “Uzbekistan: Judge jails Muslim as he ‘read literature...spread beliefs...met others,’” Forum 18 News Release, July 26, 2022, [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2762](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2762).

<sup>22</sup> See Mushfig Bayram, “Uzbekistan: Latest prosecution for teahouse Islam discussion,” Forum 18 News Release, April 8, 2022, [https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article\\_id=2730](https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2730).

<sup>23</sup> Joint communication by UN Special Rapporteurs OL UZB 4/2021, July 29, 2021, <https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gld=26562>.

Freedom of Religion or Belief, are reflected in full.

### **Counterterrorism and “Extremism”**

29. International human rights groups and bodies have repeatedly called on Uzbekistan to amend extremism-related Criminal Code provisions, which have been used to criminalize peaceful dissent and freedom of religion and belief. However, the draft Criminal Code, published in February 2021, only removes the reference to the “religious” nature of extremism in each article, but otherwise retains the provisions in full.
30. The UN Special Rapporteur for Protecting Human Rights while Countering Terrorism Fionnuala Ní Aoláin found after her visit to Uzbekistan in December 2021 that Uzbekistan’s “broad and vaguely defined” definitions of terrorism and extremism impinge on fundamental rights.<sup>24</sup> She expressed “deep concern” about fair trial guarantees and the use of so-called “expert” evidence in counterterrorism and extremism cases in Uzbekistan.
31. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*
  - Amend definitions of terrorism and extremism and ensure fair trial standards are upheld and that courts do not rely solely on so-called “expert” analyses to convict persons tried for terrorism and extremism-related offenses, in accordance with the conclusions and recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur for Protecting Human Rights while Countering Terrorism.

### **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

32. Men in Uzbekistan who engage in consensual same-sex sexual conduct face arbitrary detention, prosecution, and imprisonment under article 120 of the criminal code, which carries a maximum sentence of three years in prison. Gay men also face homophobia, threats, and extortion by both police and non-state actors.<sup>25</sup> According to the National Centre for Human Rights, a government body, 25 of 36 people convicted in 2021 under article 120 are serving prison sentences.<sup>26</sup>
33. Uzbekistan’s draft criminal code retains the offense, with the wording unchanged, under article 154. On his recent visit to Uzbekistan on March 15, 2023, UN High

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<sup>24</sup> A/HRC/49/45/Add.1: Visit to Uzbekistan – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, March 3, 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4945add1-visit-uzbekistan-report-special-rapporteur-promotion-and>.

<sup>25</sup> “Uzbekistan: Gay Men Face Abuse, Prison,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 23, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/03/23/uzbekistan-gay-men-face-abuse-prison>.

<sup>26</sup> For more information, see Association for Human Rights in Central Asia (AHRCA), the Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity (ECOM) and International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), “Like Living on a Different Planet: Gays, bisexual men and trans people vulnerable to abuse, imprisonment and discrimination,” March 28, 2021: [https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/30.05\\_LGBTQI-UZBB-in-eng.pdf](https://www.iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/30.05_LGBTQI-UZBB-in-eng.pdf).

Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk called for “legislation to decriminalise same-sex relations.”<sup>27</sup>

34. Uzbek police and courts have relied on the conclusions of forced anal examinations conducted between 2017 and 2021 to prosecute gay men for consensual same-sex relations.<sup>28</sup> Such exams are a form of violence and torture, according to the World Health Organization.
35. In August 2022, the Internal Affairs Ministry proposed a new law requiring compulsory medical examinations of so-called “dangerous groups,” namely men who have sex with men, sex workers, and drug users, to test for HIV.<sup>29</sup>
36. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*
  - Condemn gross abuses over people’s sexual orientation or gender identity and ensure the personal security, privacy, and nondiscrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Uzbekistan.
  - Decriminalize consensual same-sex conduct between men.
  - End the use of forced anal examinations against men who engage in consensual same-sex relations.

## Women’s Rights

37. Although the Uzbek government accepted in 2018 the recommendation to sign the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and pledged to continue efforts to eradicate gender-based violence, domestic violence remains a serious problem in Uzbekistan.<sup>30</sup>
38. Discriminatory attitudes, stereotypes about gender roles and pressure to address domestic abuse as a private “family matter” contribute to perpetuation of victim-blaming and normalization of violence against women and girls, including by authorities, as well as lack of accountability for perpetrators.<sup>31</sup> Domestic violence is not explicitly criminalized and the draft Criminal Code, published in February 2021, did not include a standalone offense of domestic violence.

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<sup>27</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Statement, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk concludes his official visit to Uzbekistan with a press conference, March 15, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/03/un-high-commissioner-human-rights-volker-turk-concludes-his>.

<sup>28</sup> “Uzbekistan: Forced Anal Testing in Homosexuality Prosecutions,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/05/uzbekistan-forced-anal-testing-homosexuality-prosecutions>.

<sup>29</sup> Kyle Knight, Uzbekistan’s Proposed Medical Testing Law Violates Basic Rights, Human Rights Watch Dispatch, September 7, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/07/uzbekistans-proposed-medical-testing-law-violates-basic-rights>.

<sup>30</sup> UNICEF calls for an end to violence against Women and Children in Uzbekistan, June 21, 2022, UNICEF News Release, <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/en/unicef-calls-to-end-violence-against-children>.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, “Uzbekistan: Failure to Protect Women from Domestic Violence (CEDAW submission),” International Partnership for Human Rights, February 14, 2022, <https://www.iphronline.org/uzbekistan-failure-to-protect-women-from-domestic-violence-cedaw-submission.html> and “Uzbekistan: Survey Reveals Troubling Levels of Tolerance for Domestic Violence, EurasiaNet, May 19, 2021, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-survey-reveals-troubling-levels-of-tolerance-for-domestic-violence>.

39. In its February 2022 conclusions on Uzbekistan, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted concern about the “high incidence of gender-based violence against women” and called on the government to explicitly criminalize domestic violence, effectively investigate and punish perpetrators, strengthen victim services and protection, and amend legislation to include a consent-based definition of rape, among other recommendations.<sup>32</sup>
40. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*
- Ensure that domestic violence is criminalized as a stand-alone offense.
  - Implement in full the conclusions of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and end impunity for violence against women and girls and hold perpetrators accountable.

### **Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

41. Uzbekistan in 2018 accepted the recommendation “to ratify the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol thereto,” but in the years since has not ratified the treaty.
42. In 2021, Uzbekistan assisted Western powers in evacuating thousands of at-risk Afghans by allowing planes to refuel and passengers to transit to safe, third countries, and by temporarily hosting hundreds of Afghan pilots and their families who covertly fled Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Uzbekistan closed its border to Afghans fleeing the country and has not come up with a long-term solution for the several thousand Afghans who currently reside in Uzbekistan on short term visas.
43. *Urge the Uzbek government to:*
- Sign and ratify the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention.
  - Allow fleeing Afghans access to and to seek international protection in Uzbekistan.
  - Provide Afghans who already have visas or residence permits to third countries permission to enter Uzbekistan so their paperwork can be processed while they are in a safe location, before they continue onward travel.

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<sup>32</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination of Women, Concluding Observations on the sixth periodic report of Uzbekistan, Adopted by the Committee at its 81<sup>st</sup> Session, 7-25 February, 2022, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fUZB%2fCO%2f6&Lang=en).

<sup>33</sup> Hugh Williamson and Mihra Rittmann, “Uzbekistan Should Do More to Help Afghans,” Human Rights Dispatch, September 8, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/08/uzbekistan-should-do-more-help-afghans>.