

Information for UPR Turkmenistan

Since taking office, President Berdymuhamedov has moved to address the Government's constraints in human rights treaty reporting, which resulted in part from unsystematic monitoring of international conventions and covenants and Turkmenistan's limited international exposure on complying with reporting requirements.

In March 2007, the Government of Turkmenistan requested the assistance of UN in four important areas including human rights. Soon after, the Government has informed UN of its intentions to prepare a report on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights. On May 3-5, 2007, the High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Turkmenistan and during the talks with the President, she expressed support to the current OHCHR/UNDP project and a new project that would expand the scope of the current one. The new project, "Strengthening the national capacity of Turkmenistan to promote and protect human rights," was developed with EC funding, and continues the partnership with OHCHR. The project is set to start around September/October 2008.

This new project uses a multi-phase, step-by-step approach that focuses first on further development of institutional, technical and human capacity of Government institutions to submit the overdue reports to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture, and the periodic reports, on schedule, to the treaty bodies covering the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The project will ensure building of long-term sustainable dialogue with a wide range of Government institutions on issues of human rights, provision of Government officials with international exposure, and experience and challenges of other countries, to develop policy options for improvement of the human rights situation in Turkmenistan. In parallel, the United Nations, with EC funding, is taking advantage of the unique opportunity to conduct awareness raising and sensitization of Government officials on their roles as duty bearers towards the people, while providing information on human rights and standards to the rights holders.

The current joint UNDP/OHCHR Project "Building reporting capacities of the Government of Turkmenistan" is the first human rights project implemented with the Government of Turkmenistan. The project was launched in August 2006 and has started in May 2007. The main implementing partner is the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights (NIDHR).

Objectives:

The project aims to support and strengthen the capacity of the Government of Turkmenistan to fulfil its obligations under the international human rights treaties which it has acceded to. In particular, the periodic development of state reports to the UN human rights treaty bodies and implementation of recommendations made by these treaty bodies, in legislation and practice in Turkmenistan.

Impact:

The main impact of this first joint project of the government and UNDP/OHCHR is that it has created a forum where human rights issues can be discussed and followed-up in a systematic manner in Turkmenistan. Furthermore, the project has produced some tangible outcomes.

First, a high-level **interdepartmental commission for monitoring the implementation of the international human rights instruments** (henceforth IC), chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs was established by presidential decree to coordinate the submission of overdue reports on human rights in Turkmenistan. Second, a **clear plan** on how and when to prepare the overdue reports was also established by this commission.

The Special Rapporteur on religious freedom or belief is due to visit Turkmenistan in September 2008.

Main project outputs:

Capacity building on treaty body reporting. The project has delivered hands-on training to the Turkmen government institutions in preparing the overdue and regular reports on human rights to UN treaty bodies. In July 2007 a workshop on the *United Nations' human rights treaty body system and special procedures* was conducted for ten researchers of the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights. In October 2007, a roundtable on *International and national human rights systems* was conducted for the members of the IC and its working group. A three-day workshop on *Reporting under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* was conducted in November 2007.

A series of five informational seminars on Human rights Conventions and the work of the Interdepartmental Commission on ensuring Turkmenistan's compliance with its international human rights obligations were conducted for the velayat, etrap (district) and village officials in all five regions of Turkmenistan during February 2008. A total of 130 participants from the regional departments of each velayat on education, health care, social welfare, economy and finance, culture, statistics, relevant departments of local hyakimliks (municipalities), law associations, trade unions, Democratic Party, Women's Union, Youth Union, and mass media participated in the seminars. The seminars were carried out jointly with the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights. The goal of the seminars was to familiarize participants with UN human rights monitoring committees, assess participants' knowledge on Turkmenistan's international human rights obligations and disseminate human rights reference materials. The participants were also provided with information on the work of the Interdepartmental Commission, a booklet in Turkmen language with the texts of the Core International Human Rights Conventions Turkmenistan has acceded to, and other documents that are essential in understanding the UN human rights monitoring system. As a result, the participants learnt more about Turkmenistan's human rights obligations and UN monitoring processes. The developed knowledge will help local authorities to apply human rights standards in their daily work and will impact their involvement in national reporting processes.

A seminar on the *Universal Periodic Review* was conducted in March 2008 to the members of the IC and its working group. As a result, the members of the IC are developing competence needed for the reporting on human rights to the UN. At local level, five trainings were conducted for local authorities of the five provinces of Turkmenistan, on UN human rights system and Turkmenistan's international human rights obligations, in February 2008. As a result, the participants developed knowledge on how to apply human rights standards in their daily work that will impact their involvement in national reporting processes. The Government of Turkmenistan proved very receptive to these trainings, workshops and roundtables and has cooperated and showed interest in organizing these events and ensured high level participation.

Technical advice: The project offered technical advice in the form of consultations on preparing an additional CERD report as requested in the CERD Concluding Observations issued in 2005. As a result, the Additional CERD Report was submitted to the CERD Committee on January 2008. The project has advocated for ratifying the Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the CEDAW Optional Protocol. The Government of Turkmenistan is currently considering the ratification of these two instruments. Furthermore, the project is offering consultations on Special Rapporteur mandates and its mission preparation. Further consultations within the framework of this project focus on UPR, preparation of the core expanded document and the report on the ICESCR.

Dissemination of human rights information: The project has made available information materials on human rights in Russian and Turkmen. Most notably, a booklet on “UN Human Rights Documents to which Turkmenistan is a party” was published in Turkmen, with support from OHCHR in February 2008. This publication was disseminated to all members of the IC and its working group and to local authorities and representatives of public organizations from all 5 velayats (regions) of Turkmenistan. The NIDHR has been very helpful to disseminate human rights information that the project provided to all relevant stakeholders.