26 March 2010

To:  
H.E Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary-General of the United Nations

CC:  
H.E. Navanethem Pillay  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Dear Secretary General,

I write to you from CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, an international alliance of civil society with members and partners in over a hundred countries. CIVICUS supports citizen’s rights and democratic freedoms across the globe. CIVICUS supports the freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

On the 22nd of March, representatives of CIVICUS, Open Society Institute, and civil society leaders from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan met with Ms. Maria-Luisa Chavez, Chief of NGO Relations, DPI and Mr. Brian Vitunic, Middle East and West Asia Division, DPA to discuss human rights concerns and threats to civil society in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, in advance of your upcoming visit to Central Asia.

Understanding that your imminent tour will focus primarily on regional stability and energy resources, we would like to underscore the importance of democratic values of plurality, government accountability and civic freedoms in the efforts to achieve peace and security.

CIVICUS, in solidarity and partnership with regional colleagues would like to stress the following recommendations, which we hope your esteemed office will highlight in your discussions with relevant Heads of State:

- Urge Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to implement accepted recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review:¹
- Urge for greater protection of Uzbek and Turkmen citizens’ rights to freedom of expression, including lifting restrictions on censorship of the media and arts, a right enshrined in the countries’ international obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;²
- Urge for the greater protection of Uzbek and Turkmen citizens’ rights to freedom of association. In Turkmenistan, the current law on freedom of

¹ See Annexes 1&2 for detailed recommendations.  
² See Annex 3: CIVICUS advocacy actions on restrictions to civil society freedoms in the past year.
association is severely prohibitive, and not a single NGO has been able to get registration since 2004. In Uzbekistan, restrictions on foreign funding and numerous barriers to entry and activity make it exceptionally difficult especially for independent human rights groups to operate:\(^3\)

- Urge the Uzbek government to implement recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment:\(^4\)
- Urge the Turkmen government to respect the fundamental freedom of movement in allowing free exit from the country, as well as free movement within the country, both of which are exempt from the 2008 Turkmenistan Constitution:\(^5\)
- Recommend that your Excellency meet with university students in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as a demonstration of your commitment to promoting the development of youth.\(^6\)

As you may notice from the supporting documents, the situation for civil society in the two countries is characterized by unjustifiable restrictions on the freedoms of association, assembly and expression. Activists have to operate in an atmosphere of fear and repression.\(^7\) In your capacity as the highest functionary of the United Nations, we urge you to highlight these issues with the state authorities. Peace, security and economic prosperity cannot be achieved without pluralism and respect for democratic principles. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are some of the most repressive regimes in the world,\(^8\) and we cannot condone the legislative and operative attacks on civil society any longer. It is civil society, in fact, that has historically been the champion of the principles of peace and security, social and economic justice and human rights enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter. We ask you here that you help the civil society in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan realize these principles in their countries. We are confident that your communication of the aforementioned concerns will make a difference.

With kind regards,

\[\begin{center}
\text{Ingrid Srinath}
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Secretary General
CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

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\(^3\) See Annex 4: NGO Law Analyses for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan by the International Center for Non-for-Profit Law.

\(^4\) See Annex 5: Recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Torture to Uzbekistan.

\(^5\) See Annex 6: Analysis of Constitution done by Turkmen civil society.

\(^6\) Please see Annex 7: CIVICUS statement on the ban which prohibited students from studying abroad, which was later repealed.

\(^7\) Annex 8 is a Common Vision of Civil Society in Turkmenistan to the international community which underscores this point for the country.