

The Honorable Secretary of State Hilary Clinton
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

October 13, 2009

Dear Secretary Clinton:

On September 21, 2009, Mr. Robert Blake, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs stated, "...human rights is not as big an issue in Turkmenistan as it is in some of the other Central Asian countries." As the United States develops its foreign policy towards Turkmenistan, we believe that it is critical for the U.S. to acknowledge the highly repressive conditions in which the citizens of Turkmenistan live. As a leader in the international community, the United States has an opportunity and a responsibility to call upon Turkmenistan to uphold basic human rights. Only then can progress be made towards stability and security in Turkmenistan and throughout Central Asia.

Turkmenistan is one of the world's most repressive countries and has a very poor human rights record under the leadership of President Berdymukhammedov, who followed the notoriously brutal dictator Saparmurat Niyazov.

In a letter to you written on June 19th of this year, Human Rights Watch outlined the most serious human rights violations in Turkmenistan, including the absence of freedom of association, restrictions on religious freedom and on freedom of movement, the continued problem of political prisoners, and the need for systemic reform.¹

Turkmenistan consistently receives the lowest ranking of "not free" in Freedom House's comparative assessment of global political rights and civil liberties across 193 countries, placing it on a par with Burma.²

According to the Failed State Index 2009³ estimated for 177 countries, the situation in Turkmenistan (59th place) is ranked as dangerous. The Fund for Peace also found that an alarming level of human rights violations persists in Turkmenistan, with a score of 8.9 out of a possible 10 points for "suspension of arbitrary application of the rule of law and widespread violations of human rights"—of the Central Asian states, only Uzbekistan was found to be worse with 9.2 points.⁴

The United States and Europe are engaged with Turkmenistan in an effort to secure natural gas and to provide alternatives to Russia's current monopoly on oil and gas entering the European market. We

¹ <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/06/19/letter-secretary-clinton-advance-her-meeting-turkmen-foreign-minister-meredov>

² <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2009>

³ http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=391&Itemid=549

⁴ http://www.fundforpeace.org/web/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=391&Itemid=549

understand the energy security concerns, but caution that engaging with repressive regimes such as Turkmenistan in an effort to secure hydrocarbons does not provide long-term security, but rather, strengthens anti-democratic tendencies both in and outside of government.

The European Parliament recently recommended to the European Commission that negotiations with key players in the energy sphere not take place at the cost of open dialogue on human rights issues in those countries.⁵

We encourage the United States to take a strong stance in defense of human rights in Turkmenistan and to include improvements in human rights as part of any dialogue with the leadership of Turkmenistan, particularly in discussions regarding energy.

We have attached a statement from Turkmen civil society activists, articulating their requests for US and European engagement with Turkmenistan.

We request that the US State Department and the US Embassy in Turkmenistan make a more concerted effort to understand the serious human rights concerns in the country and make human rights a priority in discussions with the Turkmen government.

We would be happy to provide additional information regarding human rights violations in Turkmenistan, and we thank you for your consideration of our concerns. We would also like to meet with your staff to brief them on human rights and environmental concerns in Turkmenistan. More information is also available on Crude Accountability's website: <http://www.crudeaccountability.org>.

Sincerely,



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⁵ <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc-y.aspx?DocsID=1240974>