

**United States Department of State**

*Assistant Secretary of State for  
South and Central Asian Affairs*

*Washington, D.C. 20520-6258*

October 18, 2011

Open Society Foundations  
c/o Jeff Goldstein  
1730 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
7th Floor  
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Friends:

I am responding on behalf of Secretary Clinton to your September 27, 2011 letter regarding the provision of security assistance to Uzbekistan. The United States values civil society's important contributions to the discourse on a wide range of human rights and democracy issues. We support the important work that your organizations are doing, often under difficult circumstances, to promote human rights and civil society in Uzbekistan, and we believe that institutionalizing democratic principles and respect for human rights in Uzbekistan are in the interests of the United States.

The Department of State shares your concerns and actively seeks to improve Uzbekistan's democratic and civil society development and its record on human rights. Congress has prohibited the use of foreign assistance funds for assistance to the central Government of Uzbekistan unless the Secretary of State determines and reports to Congress that Uzbekistan is making substantial and continuing progress on specific issues related to promotion of democracy and respect for internationally recognized human rights. We have not thought it appropriate up to this point to provide such a certification, and have continued to provide limited assistance that involves working with Uzbek government institutions – in such areas as counternarcotics, health, and nonproliferation – by using certain available notwithstanding authorities and in consultation with Congress.

The Department of State remains concerned over continued reports of the Uzbek government's widespread use of forced child and adult labor in the centrally managed cotton harvest, including the harvest that is being conducted now. I and other Department principals raise this issue frequently with the government, including our urging the government to allow credible, outside parties (such as the International Labor Organization) to monitor the cotton harvest.

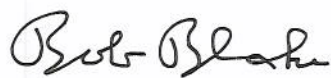
Currently, the statutory restriction cannot be waived on national security grounds. However, Congress is now considering legislation that, if enacted, would provide the Secretary of State the authority to waive application of the restriction for six months by certifying that such waiver is in the national security interest of the United States. Otherwise the current certification provision would remain the same. This limited waiver would allow the United States to provide defensive non-lethal equipment to enhance Uzbekistan's ability to protect its border with Afghanistan, through which cargo destined for U.S. forces flows.

The United States values its bilateral relationship with Uzbekistan, not only our cooperation on the Northern Distribution Network, but also our diplomatic engagement with Uzbekistan and its neighbors to promote stronger economic linkages throughout South and Central Asia. Enhancing Uzbekistan's defensive capacity, especially at its borders, enhances the security of the U.S. supply transit system to Afghanistan and helps Uzbekistan to defend itself against possible retribution from terrorists who oppose Uzbekistan's cooperation with the United States. This limited waiver and the provision of defensive border protection equipment to Uzbekistan would not in any way diminish our efforts to encourage respect for human rights in Uzbekistan. It also does not state that we think Uzbekistan has made substantial or adequate progress to date.

We consider the promotion of human rights to be an important part of our dialogue with Uzbekistan, and every high-level engagement with the Government of Uzbekistan includes discussion of human rights issues, including the Annual Bilateral Consultations and mid-year reviews. Secretary Clinton most recently raised these issues in her September 29, 2011 meeting with Uzbekistan Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ganiev. We will continue to engage with the Government of Uzbekistan on the range of human rights concerns at every opportunity, bilaterally and in multilateral fora.

Thank you again for your letter and ongoing attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Blake". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Robert O. Blake, Jr.