



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Turkmenistan: Case of Mr. Begmedov

Delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 25, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The United States is deeply concerned about the recent abduction, beating, and forced resettlement of Mr. Sazak Begmedov, a 77-year old Turkmen citizen. Turkmen authorities seized Mr. Begmedov near his home in Ashgabat on August 31, forced him into a car and beat him before confiscating his passport and forcing him onto a flight to Dashoguz. There, police reportedly refused to register Mr. Begmedov's complaint about his resettlement, but insisted that he must inform them whenever he travels. We understand that Mr. Begmedov was subsequently hospitalized as a result of injuries sustained during his forced resettlement.

Mr. Chairman, as Mr. Begmedov was shown no arrest warrant or resettlement order, we suspect that his forcible resettlement was extra-judicial. Moreover, we have reason to believe that the action taken against Mr. Begmedov stems from the fact that he is very closely related to people critical of the Government of Turkmenistan who are living outside the country.

Our Embassy in Ashgabat, in concert with the German and UK Embassies there, as well as the OSCE Center, presented a Note Verbale on Mr. Begmedov's case to the Government of Turkmenistan on September 10. And although the Government has not responded formally to this Note Verbale, the U.S. Embassy did receive an oral reply which, I am sorry to say, did not relieve any of the concerns expressed in the Note Verbale and summarized in my statement here this morning. We therefore call again on the Government of Turkmenistan to return Mr. Begmedov to his home in Ashgabat, a move that would demonstrate Turkmenistan's compliance with human rights obligations that it freely undertook as a member of the United Nations and of the OSCE.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to add that while I was in Ashgabat last week, I was unable to secure permission from Turkmen officials to meet with our former colleague Batyr Berdiev, or with his wife in spite of numerous repeated requests to do so throughout the day while there was ample opportunity to arrange such a meeting. Nonetheless the door was entirely shut on our ability to meet with either our former colleague, or with his wife. As I told Foreign Minister Meredov, such a visit would have done much to dispel concerns about the well-being of Mr. Berdiev and others arrested following the events of November 25 and would be a positive sign of Turkmenistan's willingness to engage with the OSCE. And I would therefore like to renew the calls that we and others have made for the Government of Turkmenistan to permit immediate and unrestricted access to all prisoners. Thank you.