

**COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION
IN EUROPE**

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June 3, 2004

His Excellency Saparmurat Niyazov
President
Republic of Turkmenistan
Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Dear President Niyazov:

We write urging you to institute genuine reforms concerning the freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief for the people of Turkmenistan. As a participating State in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Turkmenistan promised to ensure and facilitate the freedom of the individual to profess and practice a religion or belief, alone or in community with others. We are particularly mindful of the fact that you personally signed the original Helsinki Final Act document on behalf of your country, unreservedly accepting all OSCE commitments and obligations.

The lack of religious freedom in Turkmenistan, despite several recent decrees supposedly intended to improve the legal protection for religious groups, is particularly disturbing. Over the past year, the Helsinki Commission has followed the multiplicity of new laws and presidential decrees governing religious freedom. Concrete action must follow that allows religious communities of all faiths, regardless of registration, to operate freely and openly without harassment or intimidation. OSCE commitments make clear that the full enjoyment of religious freedom by individuals, either alone or in community with others, to freely profess and practice their faith.

To date, only two applicant religious communities have been registered under the latest decrees purporting to relax the registration process. We are also troubled by your March 29 statement on state television that Muslim communities could “not build any more mosques,” and that the mosques “should not choose the mullahs themselves” but that would be a government responsibility. These limitations all contravene OSCE commitments and international norms you have personally agreed to implement in Turkmenistan.

Of particular note, we are quite concerned about the imprisonment of a number of individuals. On March 2, a court convicted the former Islamic leader of Turkmenistan, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, sentencing him to 22 years in jail. In addition, the situation for Kurban Bagdatovich Zakirov is most troubling, as he has been repeatedly jailed for conscientiously objecting to military service. As an example of your desire to facilitate religious freedom for all,

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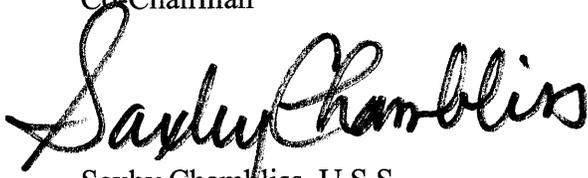
we urge you to unconditionally release Mr. Ibadullah and Mr. Zakirov, as well as the five other Jehovah's Witnesses currently in jail (Rinat Babadzhanov, Shohrat Mitogorov, Ruslan Nasyrov, Rozymamed Satlykov, and Aleksandr Matveyev).

The need for Turkmenistan to immediately improve its appalling record on religious freedom is clear, so as to avoid State Department designation as a "Country of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. We urge you take the initial steps to increase religious freedom by registering without delay all applicant religious groups, allowing them to operate freely and openly, and releasing the aforementioned prisoners.

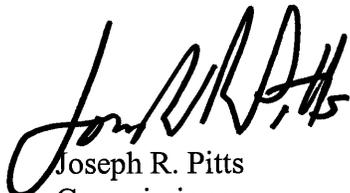
Sincerely,


Ben Nighthorse Campbell, U.S.S.
Co-Chairman


Christopher H. Smith, M.C.
Chairman


Saxby Chambliss, U.S.S.
Commissioner


Benjamin L. Cardin, M.C.
Ranking Member


Joseph R. Pitts
Commissioner


Frank R. Wolf, M.C.
Commissioner

cc: The Honorable Tracy Jacobson, U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan