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**UN Human Rights Council**  
**16th Session of the Working Group of the Universal Periodic Review**  
**Review of UZBEKISTAN**

**Geneva, 24 April 2013**

**Statement by AUSTRIA**

Thank you, Mr. President.

Austria welcomes H.E. .... and the delegation of Uzbekistan to the UPR and thanks them for their national report and presentation here today.

While taking note of legal reform steps in some areas as outlined in the National Report, Austria would like to recall the issues raised by Austria during Uzbekistan's first review in 2008 that have remained largely unconsidered.

Media freedom and freedom of expression is still an issue of great concern. Journalists and human rights defenders continue to face harassment, detentions and convictions on allegedly fabricated charges. In this context we would like to particularly mention the cases of Muhammad Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov who have been imprisoned longer than any other journalist worldwide.

The strong indications of continued use of torture and ill-treatment in the criminal justice system in Uzbekistan are another issue of concern. Allegations are rarely adequately investigated and prosecuted, which contributes to an extensive climate of impunity.

Austria is also worried about limitations and restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief and that members of non-registered religious groups are often branded as religious extremists and are under this pretext arrested or imprisoned.

Austria therefore offers the following recommendations:

- to take concrete measures towards genuine media freedom and freedom of expression in conformity with the ICCPR and to establish a climate conducive to safe and enabling working conditions for journalists, bloggers, media outlets and human rights defenders;
- to ensure that all cases of alleged torture are promptly investigated by an independent body, perpetrators are brought to justice and victims of torture are adequately compensated;
- to undertake effective measures against torture and ill-treatment including human rights training of law enforcement bodies
- to eliminate unjustified restrictions on the right to religious freedom and to stop persecution of individuals for their peaceful religious activity
- and to cooperate fully and effectively with independent human rights monitoring bodies, including UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures mandate holders.

I thank you!