

Minister Rashid Meredov
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
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June 22, 2009

Dear Minister Meredov:

We are writing as a group of civil society representatives concerned with social, environmental and human rights issues in Turkmenistan.

As Turkmenistan seeks buyers for its supplies of natural gas and oil, including buyers in the United States and Europe, particularly in the context of Nabucco pipeline negotiations, it is a good time to consider steps your government can take to ensure that investment in the hydrocarbon sector has maximum benefit for the people of Turkmenistan.

It is especially timely to consider these issues as the Government of Turkmenistan engages with the United States Government on issues of joint concern such as energy agreements, and on the eve of your visit to Washington, DC.

Turkmenistan has taken some important preliminary steps to improve the lives of its people. We welcome the reinstatement of the tenth year of mandatory education; we are pleased to learn that some measures have been taken to improve Internet access; and we were happy to see the amnesty of over 1000 prisoners in May 2009.

However, we remain concerned about the absence of an independent civil society in Turkmenistan that is able to operate freely and the lack of transparency in government, budgeting and accounting mechanisms, particularly in relation to the hydrocarbon sector. In order to assure that economic and energy investments made by foreign governments and companies have maximum benefit in Turkmenistan, we encourage the Turkmen government to consider:

1. Investing in alternative sources of energy, not only petroleum based sources. Solar energy, for example would ensure long-term sustainable economic development of Turkmenistan. Other energy saving technologies such as wind and the rational use of water resources would also benefit communities throughout Turkmenistan.
2. Creating a transparent and accountable mechanism for tracking hydrocarbon revenues.
3. Enhancing civic institutions that facilitate government transparency and accountability so that Turkmenistan could meet the criteria for joining the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

(EITI) and then seeking the necessary training to enable government officials to comply with the standards of EITI. Turkmenistan's neighbors, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have achieved considerable success in implementing EITI; Turkmenistan could benefit greatly from their experience.

4. Working to bring the country into compliance with the Aarhus Convention. Specifically, we recommend the development of a legal regime in which NGOs can register with ease and operate freely, as well as provision of access to environmentally important information including contract and budget information related to the hydrocarbon sector.
5. Using revenues from the hydrocarbon sector to improve economic and social benefits for local populations so that they may have full enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights; improvements are especially needed in the health and education sectors.
6. Allowing independent local experts to carry out environmental impact assessments and engage in public consultation without intimidation and recrimination.
7. The extraction, use and sale of energy resources, as well as the environmental impact of the development of those resources, should align with the interests of future generations.

We would be very happy to discuss these issues with you in more detail and would be pleased to respond to any questions you might have.

Sincerely,



Kate Watters, Crude Accountability



Bjorn Engesland, Norwegian Helsinki Committee



Simon Taylor, Global Witness