

Joint Letter to the Security Council Regarding the Ongoing Crisis in Kyrgyzstan 17 June 2010

To: Security Council Ambassadors

Your Excellency,

We urge the United Nations Security Council to take immediate steps to address the ongoing crisis in Kyrgyzstan. With a death toll likely to reach far higher than the official count of 200 and an estimated 400,000 displaced in Kyrgyzstan and across the border in Uzbekistan, the situation poses a significant threat to international peace and security. The Kyrgyz authorities have primary responsibility for halting the violence and resolving this crisis, but reports from the ground provide ample evidence that the government is unable to protect those in need, and Kyrgyz authorities have already acknowledged that they need substantial assistance.

In the past week, violence along ethnic lines has engulfed Osh and Jalal-Abad, resulting in killings, rapes, beatings, and widespread burning and looting of homes and other properties. There are a growing number of reports that Kyrgyz military and other security personnel not only failed to stop the violence, but in some cases may have been active participants.

In the last two days there have been fewer reports of violent attacks but some continue. Claims that the situation is stable are belied by the extremely tense standoff that remains. Ethnic Uzbeks who remain in Osh are in some cases trapped in isolated neighborhoods, living in fear behind barricades. The government itself recognizes that new violence could flare at any moment.

The humanitarian situation is grave and increasingly urgent because Kyrgyz forces cannot be relied upon to provide the secure environment needed for humanitarian assistance to reach the population. Humanitarian organizations are having great difficulty accessing those needing assistance, and report incidents of theft and looting of aid.

Some 100,000 ethnic Uzbeks have sought refuge in Uzbekistan; the border is now closed. As many as 40,000 who fled the violence are without shelter, and given the destruction of hundreds of houses, many of the displaced have no homes to return to even should they feel safe to do

so. Repatriation of the displaced will require much greater security and confidence within the displaced community.

International security assistance is urgently needed. An international stabilization mission of limited size could make a significant difference by securing the area for humanitarian relief, providing security for some of the displaced to return home, and creating space for reconciliation, confidence-building, and mediation programs to succeed. This mission would have a policing mandate and could be bolstered by military forces, particularly constabulary forces or gendarmes, if necessary.

Security Council Members should work without delay with regional organizations to ensure that such a mission is fielded as quickly as possible, with the endorsement of the Security Council and with specific terms of reference, clear rules of engagement, and a limited duration. Countries with capacity to engage quickly, in particular Russia, should be encouraged to contribute to the rapid deployment of such a mission.

A short-term security presence is crucial to establishing the humanitarian corridor requested by the United Nations and should lead the way for multilateral efforts to create a secure political environment for the eventual, but delayed, holding of a constitutional referendum and elections, and a longer-term effort to strengthen the rule of law and the protection of minorities, as well as to assist the government in security-sector reform.

Accountability for the recent violence, including on the part of state authorities, will be essential to securing long-term stability and reconciliation. The government should be encouraged to investigate crimes, ensure the protection of witnesses, and hold accountable those responsible for the violence. Given the extent and character of the violence, however, government efforts toward accountability should have an international component to be credible and effective. As an immediate step, the government should cooperate with OHCHR to begin investigations.

The instability in southern Kyrgyzstan cannot be wished away, and without a decisive international response there is considerable risk that widespread violence will reignite. It is possible that ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks may seek violent revenge for the past week of mayhem. Prolonged insecurity could provide an opening, for example, for political opponents who may seek to further weaken or overthrow the provisional government through violence against its perceived supporters. In the absence of an international mission to restore law and order, further such violence is likely to continue and could spill over to neighboring countries. Should

conditions persist, widespread violence could cause a complete collapse of the state, with the attendant human rights, political, and security consequences for the region, including the risk of unilateral intervention by outside actors.

The threat to regional peace and security posed by the crisis in Kyrgyzstan is real and, despite the reduction in daily violence, still growing. The Security Council has an obligation to respond to these risks and should act immediately to work with the government, regional organizations and others to prevent further escalation of violence, including by authorizing international law enforcement and security assistance.

Best regards,

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Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch