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For Immediate Release:

Uzbekistan: Jailed Opposition Leader's Health at Risk *Uzbek Authorities Must Ensure Immediate Medical Care*

(Tashkent, November 1, 2005) — The Uzbek government should ensure immediate medical attention for jailed opposition leader Sanjar Umarov, including an independent psychiatric examination, Human Rights Watch said today. Today marks a week since Umarov's attorney found him naked and incoherent in his cell.

The latest incident in the Uzbek government's ruthless crackdown on dissent, Umarov's arrest and detention appear to be politically motivated.

"Sanjar Umarov needs to receive immediate medical care," said Holly Cartner, Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. "We are deeply concerned for his safety and well-being."

The leader of the opposition political movement "Sunshine Coalition," Umarov was arrested on the night of October 22. When his attorney went to see him three days later in the detention facility of the Tashkent City Police Department, he found Umarov naked in his basement cell, covering his face with his hands and rocking back and forth. He did not react when the attorney called his name. Since this visit, his attorney has not been able to talk to his client or to the investigator on his case. The authorities have failed to act on his attorney's requests for an urgent independent psychiatric evaluation.

Authorities have charged Umarov, a permanent resident of the United States, with embezzlement related to an oil company in which he formerly had an ownership interest. He apparently has no current business involvement in Uzbekistan. According to Uzbek law, since a formal arrest warrant had already been issued, Umarov should have been transferred to pre-trial detention rather than being held in the temporary detention cells of the police station, where detainees are most at risk of torture.

"Umarov's arrest appears to be politically motivated," said Cartner. "The authorities should release him pending an independent review of the charges against him."

Established earlier this year, the "Sunshine Coalition" is made up of businessmen and academics. It has close ties with the Ozod Dekhon ("Free Peasants") opposition party. The coalition openly criticizes what it terms "corrupt government bureaucracies" in Uzbekistan on its website. Its Economic

Advisory Council promotes a “Road Map for Prosperity,” an action plan to implement liberal, free-market economic reforms. Umarov only recently returned to Uzbekistan from a visit to the United States and Russia, where he publicly discussed the coalition’s ideas for economic reform. On October 17, Umarov wrote an open letter to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in which he called for economic reforms in Uzbekistan and closer economic cooperation with Russia.

The Uzbek government has a longstanding record of suppressing any kind of independent opposition. The crackdown on political opponents, human rights defenders and journalists has reached crisis proportions in the aftermath of the massacre in Andijan on May 13, in which government forces killed hundreds of unarmed civilians.

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