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Nurturing Rule of Law in Young Uzbekistan

Posted by [Judge John R. Tunheim, U.S. District Court of Minnesota](#) on Thursday, January 31st 2013

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Judge John R. Tunheim (U.S. District Court of Minnesota) has traveled to Uzbekistan nine times in the span of 10 years to share his experience in the areas of rule of law and human rights. He returned to Uzbekistan in October and November 2012 to conduct training with Uzbek prosecutors and to participate in a conference marking the 20th anniversary of the Uzbek constitution. His visits were sponsored by a USAID program to improve the technical knowledge and practical skills of justice system stakeholders in Uzbekistan. Judge Tunheim looks back on his experience in working with the Uzbek justice system over the past decade in the following blog.

When I first visited [Uzbekistan](#) more than 10 years ago, the purpose was to engage the Uzbeks —government officials, journalists, judges and advocates—in a dialogue about human rights and international standards.

In Tashkent and the lovely regional cities, usually over green tea, we talked. Independent judges, arrest warrants, treatment of prisoners, open courtrooms, criminal defense, free media—these were our topics.

The Uzbeks I have met have always been friendly and welcoming, with frank and open discussions. It takes time and patience to build trust and familiarity. Our wonderful discussions ended in 2005 when doors were closed. But the doors were not locked, and when I returned to Tashkent in 2008, Uzbekistan had made significant changes. The death penalty was abolished and judges must approve arrests. I was impressed!

I recently returned to Uzbekistan for my eighth and ninth visits. It's exciting; the door for conversation is opening and my old friends are talking once again. Working with USAID and its NGO partner, [Regional Dialogue](#), we discussed human rights and the evolving legal system. The Uzbeks have plans for more positive changes.



Judge John R. Tunheim (second from right) and fellow trainer, former prosecutor David Hackney, relax with Uzbek prosecutors as they learn about the American judicial system. Photo credit: USAID

The Republic of Uzbekistan is barely 20 years old, celebrating now the anniversary of its constitution. Progress may feel slow in a world accustomed to a faster pace, but Uzbekistan is young. It is my hope that we can nurture the rule of law with both patience and persistence. Judges, in particular, need and want human rights training.

I once heard an American diplomat say that we work with our principles and their practicalities. In Uzbekistan, I would modify that wise rule: world principles and Uzbek practicalities. When we understand each other and build trust, we make progress. And

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I am convinced that progress is ahead in Uzbekistan.

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[Donald Walubengo](#) says: February 4, 2013 at 5:29 am

Much Endavors Must Be Done To Shape The World To Follow
The Rule Of Law.

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