

## Uzbek Refugees to Be Airlifted to New Havens

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By C.J. CHIVERS; Ethan Wilensky-Lanford contributed reporting from Bishkek for this article. Also contributing was Eric Schmitt, who was on the flight with Defense Secretary Rumsfeld.

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The United Nations on Wednesday began relocating hundreds of Uzbek refugees who had sought sanctuary in Kyrgyzstan, moving them from a camp near the Uzbek border to the Kyrgyz capital, from which they are expected to be airlifted out of the country soon.

"We are hoping to take all of the refugees out of the country on the humanitarian flight scheduled for 2 a.m. Friday," said Carlos Zaccagnini, the chief of the United Nations high commissioner for refugees' mission in Kyrgyzstan.

The refugees, survivors of the lethal crackdown on May 13 in the Uzbek city of Andijon, have been a source of diplomatic tension for months as **Uzbekistan**, a country that practices torture, put pressure on Kyrgyzstan for their return.

Their ultimate destination is not clear. Speaking by telephone from the United Nations offices in Geneva, Astrid van Genderen Stort, the spokeswoman for the high commissioner, said the refugees would be flown to a third country, where they would be processed for resettlement elsewhere.

She declined to say what nations might take them in, explaining that the governments that were involved in negotiations had asked that they not be publicly identified until the discussions were completed.

A Kyrgyz customs official at Manas International Airport, outside the capital, Bishkek, said the Boeing 747 scheduled to fly the refugees from the country on Friday was bound for Romania.

A spokeswoman for the Romanian Interior Ministry, reached by telephone in Bucharest, said Romania was among the nations considering accepting the refugees, at least for processing, but added that no decision had been made.

Signs of the tension with Uzbekistan re-emerged Wednesday as Uzbeks in two vehicles crossed the Kyrgyz border, proceeded to a detention center in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh and demanded the return of at least 12 refugees who Uzbekistan contends are fugitives.

They were among 29 who have been held in the center pending investigation and processing of their refugee applications. Uzbekistan has insisted that they were involved in crimes in the brief and violently suppressed uprising in Andijon in May.

Ms. Van Genderen Stort said that the Kyrgyz government had assured the United Nations that none of the refugees would be turned over to the Uzbek government, but that concerns remained. "We have raised this with the highest levels of the Kyrgyz authorities," she said. "At this point

we can only be confident that they will do what they told us."

In June the Kyrgyz government handed over four refugees to the Uzbeks, prompting international outcry that the government had violated the 1951 Refugee Convention. The fate of the four men is unclear.

The number of refugees who will leave the region is also uncertain. Mr. Zaccagnini said he expected 451 to depart, while Ms. Van Genderen Stort put the number at 455. The fate of three refugees whom the Uzbeks have accused of killing a prosecutor during the uprising in Andijon, and of a man accused of drug crimes, appears to be the issue involved.

More than 300 refugees were moved from the border region to Manas on Wednesday, Mr. Zaccagnini said. They clustered at a building on the airfield in the evening and said they were cheered to be heading to a safer place, even if they did not know their ultimate destination.

"It hasn't been said yet," said one of them, Anvar Mavlanov, 35. "They will tell us just before we get on the plane, they said. It is for our safety too."

On Monday, during a visit by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, the Kyrgyz government announced that the Pentagon could continue using the Manas Air Base, adjacent to the international airport, to support its operations in Afghanistan. That represented a shift in tone from a statement issued on July 5 by Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which sought to have the United States set a timetable to withdraw its military presence from Central Asia.

Mr. Rumsfeld said the question of the Uzbek refugees had come up during his visit there, but he gave no indication that he had nudged along any resolution. "We had a good discussion about it," he said Wednesday in a brief interview aboard his airplane en route home from Iraq. But he said the planning for the airlift had already been in the works between the United States ambassador in Kyrgyzstan, the State Department and the United Nations.