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16 Day Challenge: A Helping Hand for Trafficking Victims in Uzbekistan

Posted by [Michelle Blau](#), Senior Development Outreach and Communications Officer, [Central Asia](#) on Friday, December 7th 2012

Today is Day 13 of our [16 Days Against Gender Activism](#).

[Uzbekistan](#) is at the heart of the ancient Silk Road. For centuries, people traveled across the country to exchange goods and share news. In today's world, Uzbekistan's strategic location has made its women prime targets for human trafficking to the Middle East and Russia.

I wanted to see firsthand how USAID is supporting [services for female victims of trafficking](#) on the modern Silk Road, so I visited the NGO *Istikbolli Avlod* ("Future Generation"), which is part of a small USAID-supported network of NGOs that work around the clock to help trafficked women return to Uzbekistan, get new passports, recover from their experiences and start their lives again.

Istikbolli Avlod has established connections in 10 cities across the country and operates a resource hotline for victims of human trafficking or domestic violence. In Uzbekistan's capital, Tashkent, this hotline receives more than 100 calls a month.

The national impact of this work is evident in the stories of more than 800 human trafficking victims who have been helped by *Istikbolli Avlod*.

I had the opportunity to meet some of these women during my recent visit to the NGO. Lina (full name withheld), a young brunette with a quiet disposition, had already lived through a great amount of personal tragedy before her 21st birthday. At age 18, Lina was trafficked by her teacher and made to work in the United Arab Emirates. She tried unsuccessfully to escape. When she finally made it back to Uzbekistan, she had little hope for her future. *Istikbolli Avlod* changed that. She learned life skills, such as baking, sewing and money management. She received the emotional help she needed and was able to start her life over. Now, Lina volunteers her time to help other women who face similar situations.

The leaders of *Istikbolli Avlod* noted that the government's attitudes about trafficking have undergone a sea change. Five years ago, when this network of NGO leaders started working together, the Uzbekistan government didn't take combating human trafficking seriously. However, "Now," they said, "police will call us and ask us for help,



Istikbolli Avlod NGO leaders conduct a trafficking awareness training for school teachers in Djizak, Uzbekistan. Photo Credit: IOM

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and will refer women in trouble to us. We are working much more closely with the government to change laws and assist citizens in returning to a normal life here."

Going forward, one key to tackling the challenge of human trafficking in Uzbekistan will be coordination among the many and growing number of NGOs working on this issue. To address this, a network of 43 women's rights NGOs throughout the country is being established to share experiences and advice on how to strengthen their organizations and meet community needs. They are training each other in best practices for running an NGO and are making joint plans to avoid a redundancy of services. This is a truly impressive group of women who have woven together a strong and sustainable network to help women like Lina, who have nowhere else to turn.

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