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Turkmenistan: 13 recommendations to new President to address abysmal human rights record

Ahead of elections on 11 February, Amnesty International issued today a list of recommendations calling on the next President of Turkmenistan to put an end to stifling freedom of expression, arbitrary detention and torture, and unfair trials, as well as violations of social and economic rights.

"Turning into reality the pre-election promise to provide internet access for all would be a welcome move. However, a lot more needs to be done -- all media remains state-controlled, internet access is closely monitored by the Ministry of National Security, and human rights activists are detained or at risk of reprisals. Freedom of expression and association is a crucial prerequisite for the active engagement of civil society," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The new President and his government should promptly initiate reforms to bring Turkmenistan's laws and practices in line with the country's obligations under international human rights law."

The regime of the late President Saparmurad Niyazov ruthlessly repressed any form of peaceful dissent. Dissidents were tortured and imprisoned after unfair trials or forced into exile. People were dismissed from their jobs and barred from travelling abroad simply because they were related to a dissident while the authorities targeted human rights defenders, portraying their activities as "treason" and "espionage". The subordination of executive, legislative and judicial powers to the President was key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuse of human rights.

As a first step, Amnesty International calls on the new authorities in Turkmenistan to release immediately all prisoners of conscience and to appropriately address all other cases included in a compilation published by Amnesty International. The cases draw attention to people put behind bars solely for peacefully expressing their rights; to those who have been imprisoned for many years following unfair trials, and to those who have been tortured or ill-treated.

Ogulsapar Muradova, a human rights activists, was detained in June 2006, sentenced to six years' imprisonment in an unfair trial in August and died in suspicious circumstances shortly afterwards. Despite worldwide international pressure the authorities have not conducted a thorough and impartial investigation into her death and her two co-defendants remain in prison. Amnesty International believes that the three were targeted to punish them for their peaceful work as human rights defenders.