

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety / Fear of imminent
refoulement

27 February 1998

TURKEY Mohammed Salih Begler, leader of the Freedom Democratic Party in
Uzbekistan and an Uzbekistan national

Information has become available to Amnesty International that indicates that Mohammed Salih Begler, a recognized refugee, has been detained by the Turkish authorities and that they intend to forcibly return him to Uzbekistan on or around Saturday 28 February 1998. There is grave concern for his safety if returned to Uzbekistan where he may be at risk of serious human rights violations, such as imprisonment, for the non violent expression of his political beliefs.

Muhammed Salih Begler is the leader of the banned Freedom Democratic Party, (ERK), the leading opposition party in Uzbekistan. He was imprisoned in Uzbekistan on 6 April 1993 as a result of his political activities but released on 9 April due to international pressure. He fled the country in mid April 1993 after a criminal investigation was initiated against him in connection with the formation of a non-violent social organisation called Milli Mejlis (National Council). This organisation aimed to represent various political and social organisations in Uzbekistan.

Muhammed Salih Begler was recognised as a refugee by the Ankara office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on 20 February 1998.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

ERK was founded in April 1990 by Mohammed Salih Begler and officially registered as Uzbekistan's first opposition political party. Since October 1993 both the party and its newspaper, also known as ERK, have effectively been banned.

At the beginning of 1994 a group of ERK activists began to publish the newspaper in Moscow and distribute it clandestinely within Uzbekistan. Like other opposition parties and movements in Uzbekistan many ERK members, especially senior party figures, have been targeted for arrest by the Uzbek authorities on account of their peaceful political activities.

Though Turkey is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it operates a geographical limitation, and therefore affords protection under that Convention only to refugees from within Europe. Amnesty International knows of numerous instances where, despite interventions by the UNHCR and by Amnesty International, the Turkish government has forcibly returned recognised refugees to their countries; a grave violation of the internationally recognised principle of *non refoulement*.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- asking the Turkish authorities to abide by the principle of *non refoulement* and to refrain from forcibly returning Muhammed Salih Begler to Uzbekistan where he may be at risk of serious human rights violations, such as imprisonment, for the non violent expression of his political beliefs;
- urging the Turkish authorities to respect the mandate of the UNHCR and to afford Muhammad Salih Begler, a refugee recognised by that office, effective and durable protection against *refoulement*, at least pending resettlement;
- urging the Turkish authorities to remove their geographical limitation on the application of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and

to afford protection under that Convention to refugees from outside Europe.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs:

Mr Ismail Cem Ipekçi

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

D_i_leri Bakanl____

06100 Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Foreign Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 287 1581

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of the Interior:

Mr Murat Ba_eskio_lu

Içisleri Bakanl____

Ankara, Turkey

Telegrams: Interior Minister, Ankara, Turkey

Faxes: + 90 312 428 4346 / 418 1795 / 417 2390

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

State Minister with responsibility for Human Rights

Mr Hikmet Sami Türk

Office of the Prime Minister

Ba_bakanl_k, 06573 Ankara, Turkey

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and to diplomatic representatives of Turkey accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.