

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER BEATEN IN CUSTODY

Detained human rights defender Azimzhan Askarov may be at risk of further beatings in police custody in Kyrgyzstan. Amnesty International has seen photographs taken by his lawyer, showing large bruises on Azimzhan Askarov's body. His lawyer, Nurbek Toktagunov has been threatened with violence if he continues to represent him.

On 22 June, Azimzhan Askarov's lawyer, Nurbek Toktagunov, was able to visit his client in pre-charge detention in Bazar-Korgan, southern Kyrgyzstan. However, the lawyer was not able to meet Azimzhan Askarov in private. He reported that the deputy district prosecutor and several police officers were present throughout the meeting.

Nurbek Toktagunov told Amnesty International that Azimzhan Askarov barely spoke to him, as he appeared to be frightened. Nurbek Toktagunov was allowed to inspect the human rights defender's body for signs of torture or other ill-treatment and took photographs of several large bruises on Azimzhan Askarov's side and lower back. A request by the lawyer to allow an independent doctor to examine Azimzhan Askarov and assess the treatment required was turned down by the deputy district prosecutor who referred to an earlier official medical examination that had not found any signs of torture or other ill-treatment. To the best of Amnesty International's knowledge, Azimzhan Askarov has not received any treatment for his injuries. Azimzhan Askarov could be subjected to further beatings or other torture or ill-treatment to "punish" him for his lawyer's actions.

On 23 June, a group of people approached Nurbek Toktagunov as he was handing in an official complaint to the prosecutor's office. They said that they were relatives of a police officer who had been killed during disturbances the previous week in Bazar-Korgan, and threatened the lawyer with violence should he continue to defend Azimzhan Askarov. Officials from the prosecutor's office witnessing this incident reportedly did not intervene on behalf of Nurbek Toktagunov.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian, Kyrgyz, English or your own language:

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Azimzhan Askarov;
- Urging for him to have immediate access to all necessary medical care while in detention;
- Urging the authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation, including an independent medical examination, into allegations that Azimzhan Askarov has been tortured in detention;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that Nurbek Toktagunov is able to carry out his work as a lawyer without intimidation or hindrance, in line with the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 06 AUGUST 2010 TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs of the
Interim Government

Bolotbek Sherniazov
Frunze Street, 469
Bishkek 720040
KYRGYZSTAN

Fax: +996 312 68 20 44

Email: pressa@mail.mvd.kg

Salutation: Dear Acting Minister

Deputy Head of Interim Government

Azimbek Beknazarov
Dom Pravitelstva
Bishkek 720003
KYRGYZSTAN

Fax: +996 312 21 86 27

Email: admin@kyrgyz-el.kg

Salutation: Dear Deputy Head of
Interim Government

And copies to:

President of the Interim Government

Roza Otunbaeva
Dom Pravitelstva
Bishkek 720003
KYRGYZSTAN

Fax: +996 312 21 86 27

Email: admin@kyrgyz-el.kg

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 135/10 (EUR 58/003/2010). Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/003/2010/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nurbek Toktagunov is an independent lawyer retained by the human rights organization *Spravedlivost* ("Justice" in Russian) to defend their detained colleague Azimzhan Askarov.

Azimzhan Askarov was detained by police officers on 15 June in Bazar Korgan in the Jalal-Abad region in southern Kyrgyzstan. He is being held on the charge of "organizing mass disorder" during the recent violence in the south of the country. Azimzhan Askarov has filmed and photographed some of the violence, killings and arson attacks on mostly Uzbek homes and other buildings in Bazar Korgan, allegedly by groups of armed men claiming to be Kyrgyz. On 15 June, an unknown group of armed men in masks, who claimed to be from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Jalal-Abad region, arrived at Azimzhan Askarov's house and asked his wife to open the gate and hand over to them her husband's video and camera equipment. When his wife refused, the men reportedly started to fire their guns in the air and then broke the gate. Amnesty International believes that Azimzhan Askarov was targeted for his legitimate activities as a human rights defender and is calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally.

The deadly violence which has devastated large parts of the south of Kyrgyzstan is said to have started on 10 June with clashes between rival gangs of mostly Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths which rapidly escalated into large-scale arson, looting and violent attacks, including killings, on mainly Uzbek-populated districts in Osh. Subsequently, the violence spread to the city of Jalal-Abad and surrounding towns and villages.

The south of Kyrgyzstan is home to a large ethnic Uzbek community and was the power base of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was overthrown in April after a violent confrontation between government and opposition supporters.

While the cause of the clashes is unclear, the interim government has blamed the violence on supporters of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev and on organized criminal groups with the intent on destabilizing the situation in the country ahead of a referendum on a new constitution on 27 June.

On 15 June, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that the violence appeared to be "orchestrated, targeted and well-planned" and that it was set off by five simultaneous attacks by armed masked men in the city of Osh.

On 17 June, the UN estimated that the number of displaced people, both Uzbek and Kyrgyz, has reached 400,000. Unconfirmed figures suggest that over 2,500 have been killed since 10 June.

Further information on UA: 135/10 Index: EUR 58/005/2010 Issue Date: 25 June 2010

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