

25 June 1999

Further information on Extra 34/99 (EUR 62/04/99, 8 March 1999) - Medical concern/unfair trial/possible prisoner of conscience

UZBEKISTAN Death in custody of Akhmadkhon Turakhanov, age 51

Akhmadkhon Turakhanov died in the medical wing of Tashkent prison on 19 (or possibly 16) June 1999, and was buried on 20 June in his home town of Namangan. He had been in detention since 29 December 1998.

The cause of death is given by various unofficial sources as tuberculosis (TB), diabetes or heart failure. He had suffered from diabetes for many years but is believed to have contracted TB while in prison. TB is rife in Uzbek prisons, where conditions are said to be appalling.

According to unofficial sources, Akhmadkhon Turakhanov was transferred on or around 9 May from a prison in Namangan to one near Tashkent, and from there to the medical wing of Tashkent prison, where he died. A letter written by the Ombudsman of Uzbekistan on 17 May, but only received by Amnesty International in June, stated that Akhmadkhon Turakhanov was suffering from diabetes and "infiltrative" TB, and that arrangements were then being considered for a transfer "to ensure qualified medical assistance". This confirms Amnesty International's suspicions that such assistance was not previously available to him. It also suggests that the transfer was prompted by appeals from the Urgent Action network on Akhmadkhon Turakhanov's behalf.

Although Amnesty International believes that Akhmadkhon Turakhanov's family was able to get insulin to him in prison on several occasions, the organization is concerned that Akhmadkhon Turakhanov may not have received the consistent treatment he required. It is concerned that conditions in Uzbek prisons are apparently such that a prison sentence, particularly when passed on an already sick man, can amount to a death sentence.

Amnesty International is also concerned that the trial proceedings which led to Akhmadkhon Turakhanov's imprisonment may have been unfair and motivated by his critical attitude towards the local and central authorities, his chairmanship of the Namangan city branch of the democratic opposition movement *Birlik* and membership of the Independent Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan.

(Please note that Akhmadkhon Turakhanov was not an Islamic cleric, as previously stated, but a former teacher of Uzbek language and literature; and that was aged 51, not 59.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Akhmadkhon Turakhanov was sentenced on 4 March 1999 to six years' imprisonment (after mitigation) in a strict regime prison. According to a copy of the verdict in Amnesty International's possession, his original sentence was eight years: five years for "hooliganism... committed at a mass gathering" and three years for "attempting to overthrow the state". According to witness statements cited in the verdict, he interrupted a meeting of 75 people in a school hall on 5 December 1998 and loudly criticised the local authorities in his district for failure to deal with problems affecting gas and water supplies. Again according to witness statements cited in the verdict, he publicly stated his discontent with the prevailing government; called for an Islamic state; and propagandised "Wahhabism" [a strict form of Islam] in local mosques. Two witnesses who had

previously testified that Akhmadkhon Turakhanov called for the establishment of an Islamic state "if necessary via *Jihad* [Holy War]" withdrew their statements in court. The verdict states that Akhmadkhon Turakhanov admitted having spoken loudly and critically at the December meeting, at which he said only around 30 people were present, but denied having ever called for the overthrow of the state or supported Wahhabism.

No further action is required by the Urgent Action network. Many thanks to all who sent appeals on behalf of Akhmadkhon Turakhanov. Participants may wish to write one last time as follows, in Russian, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the death in custody of Akhmadkhon Turakhanov and inquiring as to the results of an official autopsy;
- asking for details of the medical care Akhmadkhon Turakhanov was receiving prior to his death, including whether he had regular access to his medication and whether he was provided with an adequate diet;
- expressing concern that prison conditions in Uzbekistan appear to favour the spread of communicable diseases such as TB;
- urging the government to provide sick prisoners with adequate medical care, including timely transfer to a suitably equipped hospital if necessary.

APPEALS TO:

President of Uzbekistan, Islam Abduganievich KARIMOV
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Salutation: Dear President Karimov

The Oliy Majlis (Parliamentary) Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Sayora Rashidova

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Salutation: Dear Ms Rashidova

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Uzbekistan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.