

UA 149/99

Fear forUZBEKISTAN Mikhail Ardzinov, human rights defender

Amnesty International fears for the safety of human rights defender Mikhail Ardzinov, who was seriously injured during a search of his apartment by officers from the Tashkent City Department of Internal Affairs (GUVVD) on 25 June 1999. He was reportedly ordered to present himself at the GUVVD two days later for further questioning. His injuries included two broken ribs, concussion and contused kidneys, as well as cuts and bruises.

These injuries are detailed in a medical certificate issued by the medical officer of the United States Embassy in Tashkent, who examined Mikhail Ardzinov on 26 June at the request of the Embassy and a representative of the non-governmental organisation Human Rights Watch. The certificate was delivered to the GUVVD investigator in charge of the case at 2.30 the same day. At 6pm a GUVVD officer reportedly came to the door of Mikhail Ardzinov's apartment, demanding that he present himself at the GUVVD for questioning the next day at 10am. Mikhail Ardzinov refused to open the door to receive the official order. He has reportedly gone on hunger strike and is refusing to leave his apartment.

According to unofficial reports, Mikhail Ardzinov sustained these injuries after plainclothes officers from the GUVVD detained him in the street on 25 June at 9.30am, reportedly beating him as they forced him into a car and took him to his apartment. There a uniformed investigator was waiting with a search warrant relating to a criminal case against Mikhail Ardzinov for "hooliganism". This was apparently the first Mikhail Ardzinov had heard of the case. Officers searched his apartment, confiscating computer and other equipment, and both personal and other documents, including the archives of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (NOPCHU), an unregistered human rights organization of which he is the chairman, and his passport.

After the search Mikhail Ardzinov was taken by car to the GUVVD. On arrival he was beaten again, in the lift and corridors. He was questioned until 11pm, when he was driven back to his apartment. Throughout his detention and interrogation he was denied access to a lawyer, medical assistance and telephone contact.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mikhail Ardzinov is a former prisoner of conscience. A fellow member of NOPCHU, Akhmadkhon Turakhanov, recently died in custody (see follow-up to EXTRA 34/99, EUR 62/11/99, 25 June 1999). These events have taken place against the background of a number of violent incidents, including a series of explosions in the capital, Tashkent, in February 1999. These have led to a clampdown in Uzbekistan on individuals and groups perceived as a threat to the stability and authority of the government. Heavy sentences have been handed down after sweeping arrests and trials whose conduct gives serious cause for concern. Amnesty International believes that Mikhail Ardzinov's arrest and subsequent ill-treatment may be related to his recent outspoken criticism **of the authorities**, in particular **their conduct of** a trial of 22 men, which ended on 28 June, in which six death sentences were handed down following proceedings which were described by a Human Rights Watch trial observer as biased and shoddy. Further trials are expected or are already in progress.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/e-mails/express/airmail letters in Russian or your own language:

- protesting at the reported ill-treatment of Mikhail Ardzinov by GUVD officers;
- demanding that he be protected from further ill-treatment and that he be spared further questioning until his health permits it;
- expressing concern that he was reportedly denied access to a lawyer during questioning, and demanding that he be given the means to conduct a defence;
- demanding a thorough and impartial investigation into the allegations that he was ill-treated and denied access to a lawyer and medical assistance.

APPEALS TO:

President of Uzbekistan, Islam Abduganievich KARIMOV
700000 g. Tashkent, pr. Uzbekistansky, Rezidentsiya Prezidenta, Prezidentu Karimovu I.A., UZBEKISTAN

Telegrams: Prezidentu Karimovu, 700000 Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Faxes: + 998 71 139 5315

E-mail: uzinfo@uzinfo.gov.uz

Salutation: Dear President Karimov

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

700008 g. Tashkent, pl. Mustakillik, 2, Oliy Majlis Respubliki Uzbekistan
Upolnomochenoy po pravam cheloveka pri Oliy Majlis Rashidovoy S., UZBEKISTAN

Faxes: +998 71 139 8555

E-mail: mtillaboev@oliymajlis.gov.uz

Salutation: Dear Ms Rashidova

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Zakirzhan Almatovich ALMATOV

700029 g. Tashkent, ul. Novruz, 1, Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del, Ministru vnutrennikh del Almatovu Z.A., UZBEKISTAN

Faxes: +998 71 133 89 34

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES to:

General Procurator of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Buritosh MUSTAFOYEV
700000 g. Tashkent, ul. Gogolya, 66, Prokuratura Respubliki Uzbekistan,
Generalnomu prokuroru MUSTAFOYEVU B.

Salutation: Dear Minister

and to diplomatic representatives of Uzbekistan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 9 August 1999.