

URGENT ACTION

ASKAROV MAY FACE LIFE IMPRISONMENT

Prisoner of conscience Azimzhan Askarov has been charged with crimes for which he could be sentenced to life imprisonment. He is held solely for his peaceful human rights activities.

Following two months of investigations, the prosecutor of Jalal-Abad region has brought charges against Azimzhan Askarov ranging from “storage of ammunition” to being an “accomplice to premeditated murder” and an “accomplice in the killing of a law enforcement officer.” His trial is scheduled to take place on 2 September, in Bazar Korgan district court. He is being held at Jalal-Abad regional police station in the south of the country.

Amnesty International is convinced that the charges brought against Azimzhan Askarov are unfounded, and he is being targeted as part of a pattern of obstruction and harassment by the authorities of human rights defenders and prominent members of Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbek community following the violence in June in the south of the country.

Azimzhan Askarov’s lawyer and relatives have been harassed and attacked several times by groups of people, including on the premises of the Bazar Korgan police detention centre, where Azimzhan Askarov was detained at the time. On these occasions, the group included relatives of the police officer whom Azimzhan Askarov has been accused of killing. Azimzhan Askarov’s lawyer has asked for the trial to take place elsewhere in the country, where his and his client’s life will not be put at risk.

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

- Stating that Azimzhan Askarov is a prisoner of conscience who has been imprisoned as a result of his legitimate activities as a human rights defender, and calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally with all charges dropped;
- Urging the authorities that, if, however, he is not released immediately and unconditionally and the trial is to go ahead, that Azimzhan Askarov’s trial should be moved to another part of the country in order to **guarantee a fair trial and to ensure the safety of Azimzhan Askarov, his relatives and his lawyer who have been attacked and threatened by relatives of the police officer who was killed;**
- Urging them to ensure that the proceedings against him meet international fair trial standards, and that international and independent monitors are given access to the trial;
- Urging them to ensure that while he remains in detention he is not tortured or otherwise ill-treated, and has access to all the food, and medical attention he requires;
- Reiterating that Azimzhan Askarov should not be in detention or facing trial but is a prisoner of conscience and should be immediately and unconditionally released

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 8 OCTOBER 2010 TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs
Kubatbek Baibolov
Frunze Street, 469
Bishkek 720040, KYRGYZSTAN
Fax: +996 312 68 20 44
Email: pressa@mail.mvd.kg
Salutation: Dear Minister

General Prosecutor
Baitemir Ibraev
72, Orozbekova Street
Bishkek 720040, KYRGYZSTAN
Fax: +996 312 66 54 11
Email: genproc@bishkek.gov.kg
Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

And copies to:
President
Roza Otunbaeva
Dom Pravitelstva
Bishkek 720003, KYRGYZSTAN
Fax: +996 312 62 50 12
Email: admin@kyrgyz-el.kg
Salutation: Dear President Otunbaeva

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 third update of UA 135/10. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/011/2010/en

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International believes that Azimzhan Askarov has been targeted for his legitimate activities as a human rights defender. He is the director of the human rights organization *Vozdukh* (Air) and he has been documenting police ill-treatment of detainees in the district of Bazar Korgan and other parts of the Jalal-Abad region for years.

In June 2010, during the violence in south of Kyrgyzstan, Azimzhan Askarov filmed and photographed killings and arson attacks on mostly Uzbek homes and other buildings in Bazar Korgan, allegedly by groups of armed men and men in military uniforms claiming to be Kyrgyz.

He was detained on 15 June 2010 in Bazar Korgan on suspicion of “organizing mass disorder” and “inciting ethnic hatred” in connection with the death of one police officer during the violence that month. On 13 August he was charged with “attempting to participate in hostage taking,” “storage of ammunition,” “storage of extremist literature,” “inciting ethnic hatred,” “mass riots,” “being an accomplice to premeditated murder” and “being an accomplice in the killing of a law enforcement officer.”

According to local human rights defenders, Azimzhan Askarov was subjected to prolonged beatings on the premises of the police station in Bazar Korgan to force him to hand over his film footage and confess to the murder of the police officer. Despite the fact that photographs taken by his lawyer showing large bruises on Azimzhan Askarov’s body had appeared in the media, the authorities maintained that the injuries had been inflicted by his cellmate. On 26 July, the Jalal-Abad city court upheld the decision of the Jalal-Abad regional Prosecutor’s Office not to investigate the allegations of torture.

His sister-in-law and lawyer have been attacked and threatened several times on the premises of the police station of Bazar Korgan by men and women claiming to be relatives of the dead police officer. On 21 July, a group of women threw stones at Azimzhan Askarov’s sister-in-law inside the police detention centre when she tried to deliver a food parcel to him. On 2 August, his lawyer was also attacked on the premises of the police detention centre. He said that a group of men and women surrounded him and threatened to punish him if continued to defend an Uzbek. It is still unclear how the group gained access to the premises of the police detention centre and why the police officers who were present did not intervene.

At the beginning of August Azimzhan Askarov was transferred to Jalal-Abad region’s police station. However, there is a serious risk that Azimzhan Askarov, his lawyer and his relatives may be subjected to further violence as the trial is scheduled to take place in Bazar Korgan district court.

Further Information on UA: 135/10 Index: EUR 58/013/2010 Issue Date: 27 August 2010

