

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER JAILED FOR LIFE

Azimzhan Askarov, director of the human rights organization *Vozdukh* (Air) in Kyrgyzstan, has been sentenced to life imprisonment after an unfair trial Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, targeted in response to his legitimate human rights activities.

According to the *Golos Svobody* (Voice of Freedom) Foundation, a human rights organization based in Kyrgyzstan who have been monitoring the trial, **Azimzhan Askarov** was sentenced to life imprisonment and the confiscation of his property by the Nookan district court in southern Kyrgyzstan on 15 September.

Azimzhan Askarov was detained by police officers on 15 June and accused of involvement in the murder of a policeman killed during the June violence in Kyrgyzstan. He was reportedly tortured in detention. Amnesty International believes that all the charges against him were fabricated in response to his legitimate activities as a human rights defender, which included filming attacks on Uzbek neighbourhoods during the June violence. The videos he filmed allegedly show collusion of security forces in attacks in Bazar-Korgan.

Local and international human rights monitors say that during the trial hearing of Azimzhan Askarov and seven co-defendants on 2 September, relatives of the dead police officer attacked and threatened Azimzhan Askarov's lawyers and family, both inside and outside the courtroom.

Azimzhan Askarov and three of the other defendants appeared at the 6 September hearing with visible bruises on their faces which had not been apparent at the 2 September hearing, suggesting they had been beaten between the two hearings while in custody.

During the 6 September trial hearing, Azimzhan Askarov's lawyer was reportedly denied a request to meet with him. Members of the public attending the trial, mainly police and relatives of the dead police officer, were allowed to randomly address questions to the defendants.

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

- Stating that Amnesty International considers Azimzhan Askarov to be a prisoner of conscience, sentenced after an unfair trial in response to his legitimate human rights activities;
- Calling for his immediate and unconditional release;
- Calling for any appeal against the verdict to be heard outside of southern Kyrgyzstan to ensure the safety of Azimzhan Askarov and his lawyers.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 27 OCTOBER 2010 TO:

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

General Prosecutor
Kubatbek Baibolov
72, Orozbekova Street
Bishkek 720040, KYRGYZSTAN
Fax: +996 312 66 54 11
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

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 fifth update of UA 135/10. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/003/2010/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.

One of Azimzhan Askarov’s lawyers, Nurbek Toktakunov, who had been harassed and attacked because of his work on the case, was not able to attend the trial hearing on 2 September because of the short notice given that the trial would be moved. Human rights activists said that Azimzhan Askarov was represented by a local lawyer.

Human rights activists monitoring the trial hearing on 2 September also reported that relatives of the accused were not given access to the courtroom, apparently because there was no room. However, relatives of the police officer who was killed as well as scores of plainclothes and uniformed police officers were allowed in. Amnesty International has been informed that relatives of the dead officer threatened and attacked the defendants’ lawyers in court hitting them with sticks and throwing a glass at them. The glass smashed against the bars of the cage holding the defendants, and splinters hit one of the lawyers. Court officials, including the judge, reportedly intervened only sporadically to stop the violence and restore order. The defendants’ lawyers were reportedly not given the opportunity to question witnesses or submit petitions. When the lawyers expressed concern that they would not be able to defend their clients under these conditions the judge reportedly threatened to have their licences to practice revoked. The dead police officer’s relatives also attacked family members of the defendants outside the courtroom. Police officers at the scene did not intervene. When the defendants’ relatives appealed to the officers to stop the violence, the officers reportedly told them to go away.

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