

**TURKMENISTANDmitry Melnichenko ( \_\_\_\_\_ ), aged 18**

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Baptist Christian Dmitry Melnichenko has been detained and tortured after refusing to carry arms and swear an oath of military allegiance on grounds of conscience. He is thought to be at risk of further torture or ill-treatment.

Dmitry Melnichenko, who belongs to an Evangelical Baptist Church in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, was reportedly called up for military service on 10 May. He apparently objected on conscientious grounds, and was taken to a military unit in the town of Serdar in the Kizyl-Arvat district, some 200 kilometres northwest of the capital, Ashgabat. On 15 May he was reportedly brought to the local offices of the National Security Committee (KNB) and tortured.

According to a German-based Baptist organization, *Missionswerk Friedensstimme*, Voice of Peace mission, Dmitry Melnichenko was "beaten on the knees, on the buttocks and on the head with a truncheon. He was insulted and humiliated in an attempt to force him to swear an oath [of allegiance]. When he continued to refuse to swear the oath they took a dynamo from a field telephone and forced him to hold the ends of the wires. Next they fastened the wires to his ears and sent the current through his head. His face was distorted and the saliva in his mouth became frothy and acrid. Then they put a hood over his head... and beat him about the face and neck. At about 8.00 pm they took him to the guardroom, where he was kept overnight..."

On 16 May Dmitry Melnichenko was apparently transferred back to the military unit in Serdar. It is thought that he may be further punished for his refusal to swear military allegiance, and that criminal charges may be brought against him to punish him for his conscientious objection.

Dmitry Melnichenko has reportedly been harassed and ill-treated for his religious beliefs previously: During a December 1999 crackdown on Protestant churches, he was apparently beaten severely and threatened with false criminal charges. KNB agents allegedly told him that when he reached 18, the age at which Turkmenistani men are called up for compulsory military service, he would be "repaid for his faith in Jesus" (See entry on Turkmenistan in *Concerns in Europe, July to December 1999*; AI Index: EUR 01/01/00).

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Central Asian state of Turkmenistan became independent following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then it has been dominated by President Saparmurad Niyazov, who has exercised a monopoly on power as both head of state and head of government. The government is extremely intolerant of dissent, restricting political and civil liberties and retaining tight control of the media.

There is no civilian alternative for young men who object to compulsory military service on grounds of conscience. Those who refuse conscription face imprisonment under criminal law. Amnesty International knows of at least six Jehovah's Witnesses who are currently in prison in Turkmenistan for their conscientious objection to military service.

Religious groups other than Russian Orthodox Christians and Sunni Muslims face harassment and imprisonment, as well as external and internal exile. Police officers are said to have physically and verbally abused members of religious minority groups to punish them for their religious affiliation.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian, English, Turkmen or your own language:**

- urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Dmitry Melnichenko;
- calling for him to be given any necessary medical treatment;
- urging the authorities to open a prompt and impartial investigation into allegations that Dmitry Melnichenko was tortured by KNB officers in Serdar on 15 May;
- stating that Amnesty International believes that everyone has the right to refuse to carry arms on conscientious grounds.

**APPEALS TO (Please note that fax numbers can be difficult to obtain. Contact an international operator to put you through. If a voice answers, repeat 'fax' until connected):**

President

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; Apparat Prezidenta; Prezidentu NIYAZOVU S.A.; TURKMENISTAN

**Faxes: + 993 12 35 51 12 / 35 66 88**

**Telegrams: Prezidentu Niyazovu, 744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan**

**Salutation: Dear President Niyazov**

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; pr. Magtymguly, 83; Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Turkmenistana; Ministru BERDIYEV B.; TURKMENISTAN

**Faxes: + 993 12 51 14 30 / 35 49 18**

**Telegrams: Ministru Berdiyevu, 744000 Ashgabat, pr. Magtymguly 83, Turkmenistan**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Head of Dmitry Melnicheko's military division

Turkmenistan; Balkan Veloyat; 745150 g. Serdar; v/ch 01123; Colonel KHUSAINOVU M.; TURKMENISTAN

**Telegrams: Polkovniku Khusainovu, 745150 Serdar, v/ch 01123, Turkmenistan**

**Salutation: Dear Colonel Khusainov,**

**COPIES TO:**

Chairman of the Turkmen Committee for National Security (KNB)

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; pr. Magtymguly, 91; KNB (Byv. KGB)

Turkmenistana;

Predsedatelyu NAZAROVU M.N.

Director of the Turkmen National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; ul. Karla Liebnechta, 47; Turkmensky natsionalny institut demokratii i prav cheloveka; Direktoru KEPBANOVU E.

**Faxes: + 993 12 35 06 76**

**e-mail: nidhr@online.tm**

and to diplomatic representatives of TURKMENISTAN accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 29 June 2001.