

EXTERNAL

AI Index: EUR 62/08/97

UA 402/97 Fear of torture/ill-treatment / Possible prisoners of conscience

19 December 1997

UZBEKISTAN More than 100 people, including:

Mukhammadzhon Yuldashev, Ilkhom Mamadaliyev, Alisher Nashmiddinov, Odilshon Obidkhonov, Abdufattakh Nazarov, Bakhodir Rakhimzhon ugly, Rashid Ogalikov, Dilshod, Tokhirzhon, Khasanboy, Olimzhon Buriyev, Abdusamad, Akhmadali, Abdullo, Kodirkhon, Valikhon, Ibrokhimzhon, Ibrokhim, Khayntboy, Mukhammadzhon

More than 100 people are reported to have been arbitrarily detained since 3 December 1997 in the town of Namangan in the far east of Uzbekistan following the brutal killing of several police officers and regional officials. All of those detained are said to have been verbally abused, threatened, beaten and ill-treated in detention. It is believed that they have not had access to lawyers or to their families, further heightening concern for their safety.

According to unofficial sources, special Interior Ministry troops were brought into Namangan following the murder on 2 December of the city traffic police chief. This was the sixth unexplained murder of police officers and regional officials in Uzbekistan since November 1997. A further three officers were killed in Namangan on 16 December. Police reportedly began arbitrarily detaining young men with beards in the streets of Namangan, calling them "Wahhabists" (members of a strict islamic sect) and threatening to cut off their beards and take their money. It has been alleged that weapons and narcotics have openly been planted on those detained by the police in order to fabricate a criminal case against them.

There is very little information available on the detainees, mainly because they were picked up in the streets or the mosques without arrest warrants and because they were not allowed to contact their relatives.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Islam is the dominant religion in Uzbekistan, and is officially regulated through the Spiritual Directorate for Muslims, a state-sponsored body, whose Chairman is also Chief Mufti of Uzbekistan. Since independence in 1991 Islamic worship has undergone a particularly strong revival in the Fergana Valley, a densely populated region of eastern Uzbekistan. Assumptions (common particularly in the Russian and Western media) that this revival is "fundamentalist" in character, however, are generally misplaced. Many of the Islamic congregations in the Fergana valley have been organized independently and prefer not to affiliate to the Spiritual Directorate for Muslims. This growth of "unregulated" Islam has provoked a backlash from the state authorities. There have been widespread reports of harassment of "independent" Muslims, including short-term arbitrary arrest, interference with worship and Islamic teaching, beatings of people who have tried to demonstrate in opposition to government policy towards "independent" Muslims, and even harassment for observing Islamic dress codes.

In some of the most serious cases, individuals have been punished with long periods of imprisonment on apparently fabricated charges. At least three Islamic leaders from the Fergana valley have "disappeared" since 1992.

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

- urging that the whereabouts of all those arrested since 3 December 1997 be immediately established and made known to their relatives, and that they be allowed access to defence lawyers, their relatives and independent medical practitioners;
- urging that they be charged promptly with recognizably criminal offences, or released;
- calling for a full and comprehensive inquiry into the allegations of beatings and ill-treatment, for the findings to be made public, and for anyone found responsible to be brought to justice in accordance with the norms of international law.

APPEALS TO:

1. Procurator General of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Buritosh MUSTAFOYEV
 Respublika Uzbekistan
 700000 g. Tashkent
 ul. Gogolya, 66
 Prokuratura Respubliki Uzbekistan
 Generalnomu prokuroru MUSTAFOYEVU B.
Telegrams: Procurator General, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Salutation: Dear Procurator General

2. Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
 Zakirzhan Almatovich ALMATOV
 Respublika Uzbekistan
 700029 g. Tashkent
 ul. Novruz, 1
 Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del
 Ministru ALMATOVU Z.A.
Faxes: +7 3712 (1) 33 89 34 (if connection fails, try without the 1 in brackets)
Telegrams: Minister Internal Affairs, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Procurator of Namangan Region, Kh. SABIROV
 Respublika Uzbekistan
 Namanganskaya oblast
 g. Namangan
 Prokuratura Namanganskoy oblasti
 Prokuroru SABIROVU Kh.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan
 Abdulaziz Khafizovich KOMILOV
 Respublika Uzbekistan
 700029 g. Tashkent
 pl. Mustakillik, 5
 Ministerstvo inostrannykh del
 Ministru KOMILOVU A.Kh.
Faxes: +7 3712 (1) 39 41 58; (1) 39 43 48; (1) 39 15 45; (1) 39 15 17 (if connection fails, try without the 1 in brackets)

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 8 February 1998.