

# URGENT ACTION

## PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE ON BRINK OF DEATH

**Prisoner of conscience Azimzhan Askarov is critically ill and was transferred to a prison hospital just outside Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on 12 November. His family and colleagues are concerned that he may die without proper medical treatment, which may not be available in the prison hospital.**

Azimzhan Askarov was transported from Jalal-Abad to a prison just outside the capital Bishkek. He was transferred to Prison Colony Number 47, which has better medical facilities than are available in southern Kyrgyzstan. According to official sources, doctors who examined him said that Azimzhan Askarov's life is no longer in danger, but Amnesty International is concerned he is being transferred because his health has deteriorated further.

Azimzhan Askarov's lawyer has asked for a second opinion and is trying to ensure that he is given all the necessary tests and treatment. However, there is a danger that Azimzhan Askarov will not be able to receive the necessary tests and treatment in a prison hospital.

Azimzhan Askarov was given a life sentence on 15 September having been accused of participating in "mass violence and murder" in June 2010. He appealed the sentence but on 10 November it was upheld.

His lawyer and family members reported on the final day of his appeal hearing that Azimzhan Askarov was not able to eat for over 15 days because of undiagnosed problems with his digestive tract. Azimzhan Askarov's colleagues described him as looking very gaunt with yellowish skin. His lawyer and family members also stated an ambulance had to be called earlier in the day to the detention centre in Bazar-Korgan where Azimzhan Askarov was being held because his condition was deteriorating rapidly. His family and lawyer were told that the emergency doctor who attended Azimzhan Askarov was unable to give him the necessary medical assistance and recommended that he be seen urgently by a specialist surgeon as he might need to have emergency surgery.

Amnesty International believes that Azimzhan Askarov has been targeted for his legitimate activities as a human rights defender, as he has documented police ill-treatment for several years.

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

- Expressing alarm that Azimzhan Askarov is critically ill and urging the authorities to ensure that he receives appropriate and necessary emergency care immediately,
- Urging the authorities to transfer Azimzhan Askarov to a hospital outside the prison system if the necessary treatment cannot be provided within it;
- Reiterating that Azimzhan Askarov should not be in detention but is a prisoner of conscience and should be immediately released.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 DECEMBER 2010 TO:**

#### Minister of Justice

Salyanova Aida Zhenishbekovna  
32 M.Gandi street,  
Bishkek, 720010  
Kyrgyzstan  
Fax: +312 656592  
Email: minjust@minjust.gov.kg  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

#### General Prosecutor

Kubatbek Baibolov  
Kubatbek Baibolov  
Orozbekova Street, 72  
Bishkek 720040  
Kyrgyzstan  
Fax: +996 312 665411  
**Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor**

#### **And copies to:**

President  
Roza Otunbaeva  
Dom pravitelstva  
Bishkek 720003  
Kyrgyzstan  
Fax: +996 312 625012  
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 seventh update of UA 135/10. Further information: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/020/2010/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.

He was sentenced to life imprisonment and the confiscation of his property by the Nookan district court on 15 September after a blatantly unfair trial. Local and international human rights monitors said 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.

The appeal court hearings started on 25 October in Tash-Kumir some 20 km from Bazar-Korgan in order to guarantee the safety of the defendants, their lawyers and the judges. Armed police officers were guarding the court room. Relatives of the murdered police officer were reportedly less disruptive during the sessions, nevertheless they shouted abuse and threats at the defendants and their lawyers, held up posters asking for the death penalty to be given to the defendants, threw water at Azimzhan Askarov’s lawyer and made death threats against the lawyer of one of the other defendants. No witnesses for the defence were called during the first appeal court sessions. On 3 November the court hearings transferred to Nookan where the trial of first instance had taken place.

On 4 November eyewitnesses reported seeing several defendants with visible signs of beatings leaving the court building in Nookan at the end of the day’s hearing. Observers had been asked to leave the court room before the defendants were removed and so it was not clear who had beaten the defendants. At least one defendant was kicked and beaten by police officers outside the court building as he was escorted to the vehicle taking the defendants back to the Bazar-Korgan detention centre. Defence lawyers asked for forensic medical examinations to be conducted immediately but prosecutors in Bazar-Korgan refused to order any. Human Rights Defenders said that instead the prosecutor’s office held a press conference and denied that any beatings had taken place.

Further information on UA: 135/10 Index: EUR 58/021/2010 Issue Date: 12 November 2010

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