

**PUBLIC**

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**24 June 2004**

**UA 208/04**

**Fear for safety/incommunicado detention/medical concern**

**TURKMENISTAN**

**Khalmurat GYLYCHDURDYEV (m), aged 64**

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Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev was reportedly detained by officers of the Ministry of National Security (MNS) on 23 June. He is now being held incommunicado, and Amnesty International is concerned that he is at risk of torture and ill-treatment. Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev may have been detained to punish him for giving interviews to the US Radio Liberty that frequently broadcasts programmes critical of Turkmenistan's government policies.

Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev's family saw him for the last time early in the morning of 23 June when he went to the eye hospital in the capital, Ashgabat, for a check-up following an eye operation the previous day. Hospital staff later told his daughter that when he left the hospital he was taken away by three men in a car.

According to his family, MNS officers had come to Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev's house on 22 June when he was recovering from the eye surgery. The men said they needed "to take him with us and talk to him". However, his family managed to persuade them to leave him at home to rest after the surgery. "When he went to the hospital the next day for the check-up he knew he was in danger of being picked up by them. He insisted on going to the hospital on his own so as not to bring us into any danger," his daughter told Amnesty International on 24 June.

His relatives went to the MNS building on 23 June to search for him. However, although they waited until late at night they were not given any information. When they called the officer on duty that evening, they were told: "He is talking to the boss."

Since Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev started to give interviews to Radio Liberty several months ago he has been summoned to the MNS several times. An MNS official reportedly urged him to praise President Niyazov in his interviews and he was told to stop being in contact with the radio station if he wanted to avoid "repercussions".

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The authorities in this virtually closed country have retained tight control of the media. Radio Liberty correspondents and their interview partners have frequently become targets of persecution. The regime is extremely intolerant of dissent, and it has severely limited civil and political liberties. No independent political parties or human rights groups can operate openly in the country, while opponents of the government and civil society activists have been forced into exile or faced imprisonment and persecution. Freedom of religion and of movement have been severely restricted and ethnic minorities have been targets of harassment and discrimination.

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan has been appalling for years. It has become even worse since an alleged attempt to assassinate President Niyazov, on 25 November 2002, which triggered a new wave of repression across Turkmenistan. Key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuses of human rights is President Niyazov's domination of all aspects of life in the country, and the personality cult which he has fostered.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Russian, Turkmen or your own language:**

- expressing concern at reports that Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev was detained by officers of the Ministry of National Security in Ashgabat on 23 June and has since been kept incommunicado;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev is not subjected to any form of violence, that he is treated humanely, and that he receives appropriate medical treatment;
- asking to be told where Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev is being held;
- urging the authorities to inform you of any charges brought against him and explain that if Khalmurat Gylychdurdyev was detained to punish him for exercising his right to freedom of expression Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience.

**APPEALS TO: (Please note that it can be difficult getting through to fax numbers in Turkmenistan. If a voice answers, repeat 'fax' until you hear the signal. Fax machines may be switched off outside office hours – five hours ahead of GMT)**

President Saparmurad NIYAZOV

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Apparat Prezidenta,  
Prezidentu Turkmenistana NIYAZOVU S.A.,  
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**Fax: +993 12 35 51 12 (if you can't fax it, please send your letter by post)**

**Salutation: Dear President**

**COPIES TO:**

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Rashit MEREDOV

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**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Minister of National Security (MNS), Annageldy GUMMANOV

Turkmenistan  
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**Salutation: Dear Minister**

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 5 August 2004.