

# URGENT ACTION

## DEFENDER SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE

**Uzbekistani human rights defender Elena Urlaeva was detained by police officers on 31 May and subjected to torture, sexual violence and humiliation to force her to surrender her camera's memory card. The memory card contained photographic evidence of human rights violations documented by Elena Urlaeva.**

**Elena Urlaeva**, a human rights defender and the head of the independent NGO Human Rights Defenders' Alliance of Uzbekistan, was detained by police officers on 31 May. That day she had been monitoring the use of forced labour in cotton fields. She was kept for several hours in a local police station in the city of Chinaz, Tashkent region, northeast Uzbekistan and police confiscated her notebook and her digital camera.

According to Elena Urlaeva, one of the police officers beat her on the head and demanded to know where she had hidden her camera's memory card. Other police officers (all male) were shouting and swearing at her, calling her an "agent of the USA" and a traitor and accusing her of selling Uzbekistani government secrets to foreign countries. Elena Urlaeva explained that police officers called paramedics to the police station and that she was given three injections that made her feel weak. She was stripped naked and subjected to two vaginal examinations. At first she was forced to lie on a bed while a female doctor gave her an internal vaginal examination, supposedly to find the memory card. When she did not find it, police officers forced Elena Urlaeva onto a chair. Police officers and a male paramedic held her by the arms and legs while a female doctor inserted a speculum into her vagina to conduct a second examination. This procedure caused bleeding. She was also given an anal examination. Police officers then took her to a local hospital for a chest and abdominal X-ray. After the X-ray she asked to use the toilet but the police officers forced her to urinate on the grass in front of the hospital. The officers filmed and photographed her and threatened to post the pictures on the internet if she complained about her treatment.

Elena Urlaeva protested in front of the building of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) in Tashkent on 1 June, holding up a poster demanding that those guilty of her torture and other ill-treatment be brought to justice. Security officials then arrived and took her into an MIA office where she wrote a complaint.

### **Please write immediately in Uzbek, Russian, English or your own language:**

- Urging the authorities to order a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into Elena Urlaeva's allegations of torture, sexual violence and humiliation, and bring those responsible to justice;
- Calling on them to respect their obligations under international human rights law to ensure that nobody is subjected to torture or other ill-treatment;
- Urging them to ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their legitimate activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions, including harassment, intimidation and attacks.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 16 JULY 2015 TO:**

#### Prosecutor General

Ihtior Abdullaev  
Prosecutor General's Office of  
Uzbekistan  
ul. Gulyamova 66  
Tashkent 700047  
Uzbekistan  
Fax: +998 71 133 39 17  
Email: info@prokuratura.uz

**Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General**

#### Minister of Internal Affairs

Adham Ahmedbaev  
Ministry of Internal Affairs  
ul. Junus Rajabiy 1  
Tashkent 100029  
Uzbekistan  
Fax: + 998 71 233 89 34  
Email: info@mvd.uz

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

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

#### Ombudsperson (Human Rights Commissioner)

Sayora Rashidova  
Uzbekistan Avenue 16a  
Tashkent 100027  
Uzbekistan  
Fax: + 998 71 239 81 36 (Please say  
"fax")

Email: info@ombudsman.uz

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Elena Urlaeva is one of a handful of human rights defenders who remain and work in Uzbekistan. She investigates and writes articles for the international community covering human rights issues and has actively worked with human rights defenders inside and outside Uzbekistan. She has reported on the working conditions in the cotton fields. Uzbekistan has been criticized by human rights defenders for the use of forced labour during cotton-harvesting. The authorities are anxious that no such evidence is discovered and brought to the attention of the international community. The authorities claim that the allegations of forced labour and inhuman and degrading living conditions for people drafted in for the cotton harvest are factually wrong and disseminated by rival cotton-producing countries in order to manipulate the global cotton market. The Uzbekistani authorities, in 2013, agreed to independent monitors from the International Labour Organization (ILO) carrying out inspections of the cotton harvest throughout Uzbekistan. However, the ILO monitors were accompanied by government officials and human rights defenders have reported that the authorities issued instructions to those participating in the cotton harvest on how to respond to ILO monitors.

Uzbekistan is one of the most authoritarian states in the world. The authorities are responsible for grave, systemic and widespread human rights violations, including severe restrictions on the rights to freedom of assembly, association and expression, and torture and other ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners by the security forces is endemic. Prominent human rights defenders, government critics and independent journalists have been forced to leave Uzbekistan to escape arrest or sustained harassment and intimidation by the security forces and local authorities, and many continue to face harassment abroad by the Uzbekistani authorities.

Torture and other ill-treatment are defining features of the Uzbekistani criminal justice system. It is central to how the Uzbekistani authorities deal with dissent, combat actual or perceived security threats and maintain their grip on power.

Sexual humiliation has featured prominently in the vast majority of cases of torture or other ill-treatment that have come to Amnesty International's attention. This includes being stripped naked and made to stand in front of a group of security forces officers and other detainees who shout obscenities or sexual taunts.

See Amnesty International's report *Secrets and lies: Forced confessions under torture in Uzbekistan*  
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur62/1086/2015/en/>

Name: Elena Urlaeva  
Gender m/f: f

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