

URGENT ACTION

LIFE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AT RISK

Human rights defender and ethnic Uzbek, Azimzhan Askarov, was detained on 15 June in southern Kyrgyzstan. It has been reported that he is being tortured, denied medical care and his life is in danger. He is a prisoner of conscience and must be released immediately.

Azimzhan Askarov was detained by police officers on 15 June in Bazar Korgan, in the Jalal-Abad region, southern Kyrgyzstan, although his detention was reportedly not officially registered until 16 June. He is being held in a detention centre in Bazar Korgan on the charge of "organizing mass disorder" during the recent violence in the south of the country. Amnesty International believes that he has been targeted for his legitimate activities as a human rights defender and is calling on the authorities to release him immediately and unconditionally.

Azimzhan Askarov is the director of the human rights organization *Vozdukh* (Air) which forms part of a regional human rights network in southern Kyrgyzstan. He has been documenting police ill-treatment of detainees in the village of Bazar Korgan and other parts of the Jalal-Abad region for several years. The ombudsman has publicly stated that the current charges brought against Azimzhan Askarov are unfounded and described him as a 'well-known local human rights defender.'

Azimzhan Askarov has filmed and photographed some of the violence, killings and arson attacks on mostly Uzbek homes and other buildings in Bazar Korgan, allegedly by groups of armed men claiming to be Kyrgyz. In one particular incident, Azimzhan Askarov reportedly filmed rioters firing on unarmed people who were approaching them to negotiate, while armed police officers did not intervene. Local human rights defenders have stated that Azimzhan Askarov has been subjected to prolonged beatings to force him to disclose the location of his film clips and video camera. His life is believed to be at risk.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian, Kyrgyz, English or your own language calling on the Interim Government to:

- immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender Azimzhan Askarov;
- ensure that Azimzhan Askarov has immediate access to medical care, a lawyer of his choice and his family;
- order a prompt, thorough and independent investigation into allegations that Azimzhan Askarov has been tortured in detention;
- return any equipment and video or photographic material or other possessions that have been seized from Azimzhan Askarov;
- allow human rights defenders, journalists and other civil society activists to carry out their work without threat of harassment or obstruction by the authorities.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 JULY 2010 TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs of the Interim Government

Bolotbek Sherniazov
Frunze Street, 469
Bishkek 720040
KYRGYZSTAN

Fax: +996 312 68 20 44

Email: pressa@mail.mvd.kg

Salutation: Dear Acting Minister

Deputy Head of Interim Government

Azimbek Beknazarov
Dom Pravitelstva
Bishkek 720003
KYRGYZSTAN

Fax: +996 312 21 86 27

Email: admin@kyrgyz-el.kg

Salutation: Dear Deputy Head of Interim Government

And copies to:

President of the Interim Government

Roza Otunbaeva
Dom Pravitelstva
Bishkek 720003
KYRGYZSTAN

Fax: +996 312 21 86 27

Email: admin@kyrgyz-el.kg

Salutation: Dear Interim President

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

LIFE OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER AT RISK

Background Information

Azimzhan Askarov's arrest was sanctioned by the regional Court of Bazar Korgan on 17 June in a closed hearing. Azimzhan Askarov was represented by a state lawyer. An independent lawyer who was assigned to represent him by another local human rights organization has been denied access to him. Furthermore, local human rights organizations claim that neither they nor his family are being permitted to visit Azimzhan Askarov and that he is being denied medical care. Azimzhan Askarov's brother, who was detained at the same time and shared a cell with him, was released on 17 June.

On 15 June, an unknown group of armed men in masks, who claimed to be from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Jalal-Abad region, arrived at Azimzhan Askarov's house and asked his wife to open the gate and hand over to them her husband's video and camera equipment. When his wife refused, the men reportedly started to fire their guns in the air and then broke the gate. Azimzhan Askarov's wife managed to flee and hide in a neighbour's house. At midday on 17 June, another unknown group of armed men reportedly conducted another search of Azimzhan Askarov's house and seized several disks and cartridges. On both occasions, the men ransacked the house.

The deadly violence which has devastated large parts of the south of Kyrgyzstan is said to have started on 10 June with clashes between rival gangs of mostly Kyrgyz and Uzbek youths which rapidly escalated into large-scale arson, looting and violent attacks, including killings, on mainly Uzbek-populated districts in Osh. Subsequently, the violence spread to the city of Jalal-Abad and surrounding towns and villages.

The south of Kyrgyzstan is home to a large ethnic Uzbek community and was the power base of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev, who was overthrown in April after a violent confrontation between government and opposition supporters.

While the cause of the clashes is unclear, the interim government has blamed the violence on supporters of former President Kurmanbek Bakiev and on organized criminal groups with the intent on destabilizing the situation in the country ahead of a referendum on a new constitution on 27 June.

On 15 June, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that the violence appeared to be "orchestrated, targeted and well-planned" and that it was set off by five simultaneous attacks by armed masked men in the city of Osh. On 17 June the UN estimated that the number of displaced people, the majority of whom are Uzbek, has reached 400,000. Unconfirmed figures suggest that over 2,500 have been killed since 10 June.

UA: 135/10 Index: EUR 58/003/2010 Issue Date: 18 June 2010

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL

