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Kyrgyzstan: Refugees at risk as authorities refuse to release them for "humanitarian airlift"

Reports say that the authorities in Kyrgyzstan are refusing to release 29 refugees and asylum-seekers into the care of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in order for them to be transferred together with 426 other Uzbekistani refugees in a "humanitarian airlift" leaving tonight for a third country. The 26 refugees and three asylum-seekers are still being held in detention in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of extradition warrants issued by the Uzbekistani authorities. They continue to be in danger of being forcibly returned to Uzbekistan where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations, including torture and other ill-treatment.

Twelve of the 29 are believed to be former detainees of Andizhan Prison and have been accused of "Islamic extremism". Some of them were among 23 local entrepreneurs whose trial in Andizhan is thought to have triggered mass demonstrations on 13 May, during which hundreds of people -- men, women and children -- were killed by government troops.

The President of Kyrgyzstan was quoted on 23 July as saying that at least 12 refugees could be returned to Uzbekistan if it was determined that they had committed the crimes they are being accused of by the Uzbekistani authorities.

However, 26 of those 29 still held by the Kyrgyzstan authorities were among the 452 people who, according to the UNHCR, qualify as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. The other three are considered as asylum-seekers who remain of concern to UNHCR. All 29 currently in detention are deemed to be in need of international protection. Furthermore, 11 of them have already been accepted for resettlement to third countries.

Amnesty International calls on the Kyrgyzstan authorities not to forcibly return any of the refugees or asylum-seekers back to Uzbekistan, in accordance with their obligations under international human rights law, and to immediately transfer them into the care of UNHCR.

Public Document

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