

PUBLIC

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Arbitrary detention/Fear of torture

19 June 2006

TURKMENISTAN

Ogulsapar Muradova (f), aged 58, journalist
Sana Muradova (f)]
Maral Muradova (f)] Her children, aged in their 20s/early 30s
Berdy Muradov (m)]
Elena Ovezova (f), aged 41
Annakurban Amanklychev (m), aged 35
Sapardurdy Khadzhiev (m), aged 47

The seven people named above were detained between 16 and 19 June, and are at risk of torture. They appear to have been detained solely because they are members, or relatives of members, of the non-governmental human rights organisation Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (THF), which has publicised human rights violations in the country. They are believed to be held at the Interior Ministry building in the capital, Ashgabat.

THF member Annakurban Amanklychev was detained on 16 June by officers of the Ministry of National Security. According to eyewitnesses, five secret service agents had put a package in his car, allegedly containing drugs or weapons, so as to fabricate criminal charges against him. Annakurban Amanklychev had reportedly been under surveillance for over a year in connection with his human rights work.

Former THF member Ogulsapar Muradova, a correspondent for the US-funded Radio Liberty, was detained at her apartment on 18 June at around 5pm, by two Ashgabat city police officers who did not show an arrest warrant. A senior officer told her family that they were taking her "for a conversation". Her daughters Sana and Maral went to the Interior Ministry building to try and get information about her. After midnight a secret service officer ordered them to bring their mother's electronic equipment such as her computer and fax. When they refused he gave them a phone and connected them with their mother. THF director Tadzhi gul Begmedova told Amnesty International from exile in Bulgaria on 19 June: "She seemed to have difficulty speaking. What she said was totally incoherent. We think they gave her psychotropic drugs." Her daughters repeated that they would not cooperate, and returned home. On 19 June law enforcement officers came to their house and detained Sana and Maral Muradova, and their brother Berdy. They were reportedly taken to the Interior Ministry building.

There are credible allegations that Ogulsapar Muradova had been harassed for over a year to punish her for her human rights work and her affiliation with Radio Liberty. This has included keeping a close watch on her and her house, bugging her phone and cutting off her phone service for several months. The authorities reportedly threatened her to harm her children and to evict her from her apartment if she continued her work as a journalist.

Three law enforcement officers detained THF member Elena Ovezova on 18 June, in her apartment in Ashgabat. They did not show a warrant. In the evening her parents went to the Interior Ministry building but were given no information. Her mother, who is over 80, went there again the following morning. "When she returned home she had a heart attack. We don't know what happened to her when she was at the police because she refused to talk about it," said Tadzhi gul Begmedova.

Sapardurdy Khadzhiev, a brother of Tadzhi gul Begmedova's husband, was reportedly detained in the evening of 18 June and taken to the Interior Ministry building.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Abuse of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights is widespread in Turkmenistan. The recent arrests are part of a clampdown on dissent that has been ongoing for many years. Human rights defenders, political dissidents, members of religious minority groups and their families have routinely been subjected to harassment, arbitrary detention, torture or other ill-treatment and imprisonment after unfair trials. Many have been forced into exile in recent years, while thousands are believed to be on a "blacklist" preventing them from leaving the country.

The THF was founded in 2003. It has publicized information about prison conditions and the imprisonment following unfair trials of dozens of people accused of attempting a coup in 2002. The authorities had previously attempted to silence the group. (See *Government attempts to silence the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation* AI Index: EUR 61/007/2005).

The authorities have subjected many *Radio Liberty* correspondents to harassment, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment. The station has been highly critical of the regime and its human rights record and has frequently broadcast interviews with dissidents inside the country and in exile, and with representatives of international human rights organizations.

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

- expressing serious concern at the recent detention of Ogulsapar Muradova; her daughters Sana and Maral and her son Berdy; Elena Ovezova; Annakurban Amanklychev; and Sapardurdy Khadzhiiev;
- expressing concern at credible allegations that they were detained to punish them for exercising their right to freedom of expression, or because of their family relationship with dissidents;
- expressing concern at reports that Ogulsapar Muradova was ill-treated in the Interior Ministry building in Ashgabat, and urging the authorities to investigate these reports fully and impartially and to take appropriate measures to ensure that none of the detainees is subjected to any form of ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to inform you of any charges brought against them;
- reminding the authorities of their obligation as a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to ensure that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression".

APPEALS TO:

President

President Saparmurad Niyazov

Presidential Palace

744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Fax: +993 12 35 51 12

Salutation: Dear President Niyazov

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Rashit Meredov

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Magtymguly avenue, 83

744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Fax: +993 12 35 42 41

E-mail: mfatm@online.tm

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES 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 31 August 2006.