

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 99/08 (EUR 61/002/2008, 16 April 2008) Health concern/Possible prisoner of conscience

TURKMENISTAN Valeri Pal, (m), aged 60

Valeri Pal has been sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment for stealing property from his workplace at an oil-refinery in the Caspian port city of Turkmenbashi. Valeri Pal's supporters believe the case against him was fabricated to punish him for his social activism and contacts with human rights defenders abroad. Amnesty International continues to be seriously concerned about his health.

On 13 May Turkmenbashi City Court found Valeri Pal guilty of crimes including misappropriation of property (Article 229, part 4a), abuse of power (Article 181, part 2) and forgery (Article 187). Valeri Pal insists he is innocent. He lodged an appeal against the sentence with Balkan Regional Court on 21 May.

According to Valeri Pal's relatives, Valeri Pal was not presented with an indictment before the trial commenced. Under Article 79 of the Criminal-Procedure Code of Turkmenistan the authorities have to bring charges no later than 72 hours after the arrest. Valeri Pal was detained on the night of 21 February and tried some seven weeks later.

Amnesty International received allegations that Valeri Pal was several times interrogated in pre-trial detention without the presence of his lawyer. Temirkhan Misrikhanov, chairperson of the Union of Independent Lawyers of Turkmenistan, based outside the country, reported on 1 June that "the investigator ... offered Pal's wife [the chance to pay] first US\$ 10,000, then US\$ 3,000, and promised [that if she paid this money he could] walk free from the court room".

Vyacheslav Mamedov, the director in exile of the non-governmental Democratic Civil Union of Turkmenistan, informed Amnesty International on 1 June: "The case has clearly been dealt with in a biased way. The authorities put psychological pressure on the witnesses, the lawyer and on Valeri Pal himself and threatened and intimidated them."

Valeri Pal suffered a stroke in 2004. Since then, the left side of his body has been partly paralyzed and he requires regular medical treatment and exercise. He also suffers from chronic prostatitis, a prolonged inflammation of the prostate gland.

According to Vyacheslav Mamedov, guards at the prison in Turkmenbashi where Valeri Pal is held continue to insist that his relatives have to pay bribes in order to pass on medicine and food to him. Valeri Pal recently stated in a letter to relatives that he had not been allowed any exercise for over a week.

Valeri Pal and five other detainees are said to be kept in a humid basement cell that is meant for a total of three people.

Amnesty International is trying to verify allegations that Valeri Pal was targeted because of his work as a social activist and his contacts with human rights activists abroad.

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

- urging the authorities to ensure that Valeri Pal receives access to appropriate medical treatment without delay and that his relatives can send him food parcels and medicine without being required to pay bribes;
- expressing concern at allegations that the indictment was only presented to him weeks after his arrest and that the trial was not conducted in line with international fair trial standards;
- pointing out that if Valeri Pal was targeted to punish him for his peaceful work as a social activist, Amnesty International would adopt him as a prisoner of conscience, and would call for his prompt and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

If a voice answers on a fax number during office hours, repeat 'fax' until connected; fax machines are often switched off outside office hours.

President

President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov

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Salutation: Dear President Berdymukhamedov

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Rashit Meredov

Minister of Foreign Affairs

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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 15 July 2008.