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Fear for safety

14 July 1995

TURKMENISTAN

Anti-government demonstrators

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those involved in an unprecedented anti-government demonstration reported to have taken place in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan, on 12 July 1995. Fears that the authorities may clamp down on anyone they identify as an organizer or participant have been heightened by unconfirmed reports that leaders of the demonstration were detained immediately.

The demonstration, which was peaceful and attracted at least 200 and possibly up to 1,000 people, according to eye-witness accounts, appears to have taken the authorities by surprise, but since then security is reported to have been tightened in Ashgabat.

Amnesty International is particularly concerned because of recent allegations by unofficial sources of politically-motivated "disappearances" in Turkmenistan. For example, opposition leader Durdymurad Khodzhamukhamedov is feared to have "disappeared" since he was allegedly placed in a psychiatric hospital in December 1994: inquiries by his supporters as to his whereabouts reportedly met recently with an official denial that Durdymurad Khodzhamukhamedov was in Turkmenistan at all.

Amnesty International also notes that it has been the frequent practice of the Turkmen law-enforcement agencies to detain opposition activists for short periods to prevent them exercising their fundamental human rights to freedom of expression and association.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Turkmenistan is led by President Saparmurad Niyazov, who uses the formal title "Turkmenbashi" - "Leader of the Turkmen". A cult of personality is being openly developed around him, and a state ideology known as "leaderism" has been announced. In 1994 a popular referendum approved extending his presidential term from five to 10 years, cancelling the next presidential elections. The President is also head of the ruling Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, successor to the Communist Party. Opposition parties and movements are prevented from acquiring legal status and operating openly by a combination of bureaucratic obstruction and overt official pressure, and most leading opposition activists have gone into exile.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian, English or in your own language:

- calling on the authorities to refrain from detaining any organizers or participants in the 12 July demonstration who were solely exercising peacefully their fundamental human rights to freedom of expression, and to release immediately anyone who might already have been detained.

APPEALS TO

1. President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Atayevich Niyazov
Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
Apparat Prezidenta

Prezidentu Turkmenistana
NIYAZOVU S.A.

Faxes + 7 3632 25 51 12 (it can be difficult to get a connection)

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, 744000 Ashgabat, Prezidentu Niyazovu

Salutation: Dear President Niyazov

2. Procurator General of Turkmenistan, Turbanmukhamed Kasimov
Turkmenistan

g. Ashgabat

Prokuratura Turkmenistana

Generalnomu prokuroru KASIMOVU T.

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, Prokuratura, Gen. prokuroru Kasimovu.

Salutation: Dear Procurator General

3. Minister of Internal Affairs, Gurbanmukhamed Kasymov

Turkmenistan

g. Ashgabat

MVD Turkmenistana

Ministru KASYMOVU G.

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, MVD, Ministru Kasymovu

Salutation: Dear Minister

4. Chairman of the Committee for State Security, Saparmurad Seidov

Turkmenistan

g. Ashgabat

KGB Turkmenistana

Predsedatelyu SEIDOVU S.

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, KGB, Predsedatelyu Seidovu

Salutation: Dear Chairman

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Boris Shykhmyradov

Turkmenistan

744000 g. Ashgabat

ul. Magtymguly. 87

MID Turkmenistana

Ministru SHIKHMYRADOVU B.

Faxes + 7 3632 25 14 63

and 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 29 August 1995.