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PUBLIC STATEMENT

TURKMENISTAN

More Political Prisoners released

Amnesty International welcomed the news that the political prisoners known as the "Ashgabat Eight" have been released from detention. The release was announced yesterday by President Niyazov at a press conference in the White House, United States.

The "Ashgabat Eight" have been serving long prison sentences after being convicted of criminal offences, some involving violence, arising from their participation in an unprecedented organized anti-government protest in Ashgabat on 12 June 1995. In January 1998 one of the men died in prison reportedly as a consequence of sustained beatings. On 20 April it was announced that two of the "Ashgabat Eight" had been released from detention.

Amnesty International remains concerned among other things at reports that one of the "Ashgabat Eight", Gulgeldy Annanyazov, is still in detention. The organization is also seeking clarification as to the fate of possible prisoners of conscience, Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Khoshali Garayev, who were convicted of serious anti-state crimes following allegedly fabricated charges to punish them solely for their association with exiled opponents of the Government of Turkmenistan.

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