

PUBLIC

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Fear for

TURKMENISTANBabamurat GAYEBOV (aged 27)
Umit KOSHKAROV (aged 25)
Batir NUROV (aged 23)
Shokhrat PIRIYEV (aged 27)

The four Protestant Christians named above have reportedly been detained and severely tortured because of their religious beliefs. They and their families are said to live in constant fear that the young men might again be summoned and tortured.

According to the news agency Compass Direct, they were arrested after the secret police, the National Security Committee (KNB), found Protestant videos in their car. The car had been written off in a road accident on 21 November, near the capital, Ashgabat. Three of the men were arrested when they returned to the car wreck the following morning, and the fourth was arrested at his home later that day. Only Russian Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam are officially tolerated in Turkmenistan.

Since then the four have reportedly been summoned several times to the KNB building in Anau, near the capital, where they have been severely beaten and subjected to electric shocks; at one point a bag was held over Shokhrat Pireyev's head until he blacked out.

The four men were reportedly told on 24 November that they would not have to serve prison terms. Instead they were forced to state in writing that they "voluntarily donated" everything they owned as a "gift to the President of Turkmenistan". The ownership papers for their homes and cars, and all their identity documentation, have since been confiscated. Some of the men also had to sign undertakings to leave Ashgabat and go into internal exile. It is not known whether any formal charges have been brought against them.

After they were released they were reportedly threatened with even harsher treatment. Six days later they were called to the KNB office again and reportedly subjected to similar ill-treatment. One of the men said: "We have been promised more of the same. We do not know how long we can withstand such treatment." Their only hope is that pressure from the international community will protect them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Central Asian state of Turkmenistan became independent following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then it has been dominated by President Saparmurad Niyazov, who has exercised a monopoly on power as both head of state and head of government. The government is extremely intolerant of dissent, restricting political and civil liberties and retaining tight control of the media. Foreign human rights activists, journalists and representatives of religious organizations have been barred from Turkmenistan, or deported, making independent monitoring extremely difficult.

Religious groups other than Russian Orthodox Christians and Sunni Muslims face harassment and imprisonment, as well as external and internal exile. The last remaining foreign missionaries were expelled earlier this year.

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

- expressing concern at reports that Babamurat Gayebov, Umit Khoshkarov, Batir Nurov and Shokhrat Piriyeu have been severely tortured by KNB officers in Anau since their detention on 21 November;
- urging the authorities to open a prompt and impartial investigation into these reports, with the results made public and those found responsible brought to justice, in line with Turkmenistan's commitments under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- asking the authorities to guarantee that the four men will not be tortured or ill-treated again;
- asking why they were detained and whether any formal charges have been brought against them;
- expressing concern at reports that all the men's identification and property documents have been confiscated and that some have been forced into internal exile, and stating that if they were punished solely for exercising their right to freedom of religion, the case against them should be dropped, their property returned and their freedom of movement restored.

APPEALS TO (Please note that fax numbers can be difficult to obtain. If a voice answers, repeat 'fax' until connected):

President

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; Apparat Prezidenta; Prezidentu NIYAZOVU S.A.; TURKMENISTAN

Faxes: + 993 12 25 51 12 (it can be difficult to get a connection)

Telegrams: Prezidentu Niyazovu, 744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear President Niyazov

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; pr. Magtymguly, 83; Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Turkmenistana; Ministru BERDIYEV B.; TURKMENISTAN

Faxes: + 993 12 51 14 30 / 35 49 18

Telegrams: Ministru Berdiyevu, 744000 Ashgabat, pr. Magtymguly 83, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear Minister

Chairman of the Turkmen Committee for National Security (KNB)

Turkmenistan; g. Ashgabat; pr. Magtymguly, 91; KNB (Byv. KGB) Turkmenistana; Predsedatelyu NAZAROVU M.N.; TURKMENISTAN

Telegrams: Nazarovu, Ashgabat, KNB, pr. Magtymguly 91, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear Chairman

Procurator General

Turkmenistan; g. Ashgabat; ul. Seidi, 4; Prokuratura Turkmenistana; Generalnomu prokuroru ATAYANOVY G.; TURKMENISTAN

Faxes: + 993 12 35 44 82

Telegrams: Prokuroru Atayanovoy, Prokuratura, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear Procurator General

COPIES TO:

Chairman of the Supreme Court

Turkmenistan; 744000 Ashgabat; prospekt Saparmurad Turkmenbashi, 18; Verkhovny Sud Turkmenistana; Predsedatelyu RAKHMANOVU Y.; TURKMENISTAN

Commissioner for the Council for Religious Affairs

Turkmenistan; g. Ashgabat; Sovet po delam religii i veroispovedaniya pri Majlise; Komissaru TULIYEVU A.; TURKMENISTAN

Director of the Turkmen National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights
Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; ul. Karla Liebnechta, 47; Turkmensky
natsionalny institut demokratii i prav cheloveka; Direktoru KEPBANOVU E.;
TURKMENISTAN

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 16 January 2001.