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## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **UZBEKISTAN**

#### **PRESUMED GUILTY: COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION CALLED INTO QUESTION**

Amnesty International is calling on the Uzbek authorities to live up to their obligations to protect fundamental fair trial rights, including the presumption of innocence and the right not to be compelled to testify or confess guilt.

The organization is also urging the authorities to repudiate recent statements ascribed to them which criminalize members and presumed members of independent Islamic congregations, their families and political opposition figures.

On several recent occasions the Uzbek authorities -- including the President, Interior Minister and Prosecutor General -- have called on people involved in "non-traditional" Islamic groups and activities to come forward and "admit their guilt", threatening those who do not -- and their families -- with punishment.

These statements follow bombings in Tashkent on 16 February, in which at least 13 people died and more than a hundred were injured, and a shoot-out in Tashkent on 29 March which left eight dead.

The authorities have blamed the incidents on violent, foreign-trained Islamic groups operating in concert with Muhammad Salih, exiled leader of the banned democratic opposition party *Erk*. At a news conference in March President Karimov is reported to have described Muhammad Salih as "a collaborator in this terror act and sabotage" who should "come and admit his crimes".

Since the February bombings hundreds of supposed conspirators -- including relatives of both Muhammad Salih and independent Islamic leader Obidkhon Nazarov -- have been detained.

Among those believed to be currently detained are Muhammad Salih's brothers, Muhammad, Rashid and Komil Bekzhon. To Amnesty International's knowledge, all are held in incommunicado detention. Muhammad Bekzhon has not been seen since being forcibly returned to Uzbekistan by the Ukrainian authorities on 18 March.

Also believed to be held in incommunicado detention are Imam Obidkhon Nazarov's brother, uncle and brother-in-law, Umarkhon Nazarov, Akhmadali Salomov and Abdurashid Nasriddinov. Obidkhon Nazarov's wife was held in administrative detention for ten days between 21 February and 3 March, during which time she was reportedly questioned about the whereabouts of her husband.

Amnesty International is gravely concerned at the circumstances of these detentions, at the prejudicial statements ascribed to public authorities and at the apparent failure of the authorities to investigate persistent allegations of ill-treatment and other unfair trial practices surrounding previous trials of alleged Islamic extremists during 1998.

The organization fears that these concerns call into question the genuineness of Uzbekistan's commitment to uphold the rights enshrined in such international instruments as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, both of which Uzbekistan ratified in 1995.

#### **Background**

Speaking on 4 April on state television, Interior Minister Zakirdzhon Almatov called on young men studying "non-traditional" Islam abroad to return and "admit their guilt". He reportedly stated that, in accordance with an order from President Islam Karimov, people who responded to the appeal would not be punished, but any who failed to do so would be held accountable, as would their fathers.

Prosecutor General Usmon Khudoykulov is reported to have added "Everyone who admits his involvement in extremist religious groups will be pardoned. We have lists of members of such organizations. If they do not surrender, we will find them. Not only they, but also their fathers, who could not restrain their children, will be punished."

The President announced the initiative on 1 April, reportedly telling journalists "I am prepared to rip off the heads of 200 people, to sacrifice their lives, in order to save peace and calm in the republic".

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