

19 March 2002

Further information on EXTRA 11/02 (EUR 62/004/2002, 29 January 2002) - Fear of imminent execution / Torture, ill-treatment**UZBEKISTAN Aleksander Kornetov (m)**

Aleksander Kornetov's death sentence has been commuted. He was moved from death row on 1 March.

His family learnt of the commutation on 14 March, when they received a letter from the prison in the town of Andijan, informing them that he had been transferred there.

Today Aleksander Kornetov's mother received the first letter from her son in Andijan prison. He wrote: "I still can't believe that this is happening. I am still afraid they might come and say it was a mistake and take me back to the death row cell... When the guards led me into the cell in Andijan prison, I couldn't believe my eyes. Nikolay Ganiyev [see below] is in the same cell. When he saw me, he said: 'is it really true that we are alive?' ... The prison cell is like a sanatorium in comparison with the basement where the death row cell was. Yesterday I was allowed to walk in the prison yard. It was so wonderful to see the sun...."

Since the beginning of this year, four prisoners have had their death sentences commuted after Amnesty International campaigned on their behalf. Death penalty activist Tamara Chikunova told Amnesty International: "The support we get from members of your organization is absolutely crucial. The fact that this is already the fourth commutation in only two and a half months shows that our joint work has a real impact. In January and February we were very anxious that Aleksander Kornetov would be executed any minute. But the urgent intervention from your side and the United Nations saved him."

There were allegations that Aleksander Kornetov was ill-treated in pre-trial detention in order to force him to confess to the murder of a young woman. When his mother went to see him at the police station in January 2001, she reportedly saw the investigator slapping her son in the face and hitting his head. When the investigator saw her, he reportedly told her that if she wanted to see her son alive she should go away.

On 17 January, members of Aleksander Kornetov's family were reportedly summoned to the police station for questioning. His mother again witnessed her son being ill-treated: "I saw how three law enforcement officers were beating my son like animals. They were kicking him in the office of the investigator. My son was crouching, and when he tried to protect his head with his hands, they shouted at him 'put your hands down, you bastard'." During the investigation Aleksander Kornetov reportedly tried to commit suicide and told his mother: "I'd rather die than go through that beating again."

The other three men whose death sentences have been commuted this year are Vazgen Arutyunyants and Armen Garushyants (see EXTRA 91/00, AI Index: EUR 62/24/00, 13 December 2000, and follow-ups); and Nikolay Ganiyev (see EXTRA 41/01, AI Index: EUR 62/007/2001, 5 July 2001, and follow-ups).

Thank you for writing appeals. No further action is required by the UA network.