

# URGENT ACTION

## PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE AT RISK IN KYRGYZSTAN

**The authorities in Kyrgyzstan have refused to open an investigation into allegations that prisoner of conscience Azimzhan Askarov has been tortured. He should be released immediately.**

Azimzhan Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek, remains in police detention in the city of Bazar Korgan, in the Jalal-Abad region of southern Kyrgyzstan. He has been charged with 'organizing mass disorder' and 'inciting ethnic hatred' in connection with the death of a police officer during violence in the south of the country in June. He is held at the police detention centre where the officer who was killed used to work. This makes him particularly vulnerable.

On 26 July, the Jalal-Abad city court upheld the decision of the Jalal-Abad prosecutor's office not to investigate allegations that Azimzhan Askarov was tortured following his detention on 15 June. The authorities are maintaining that large bruises on Azimzhan Askarov's body, which were photographed by his lawyer, were inflicted by his cellmate. According to the General Prosecutor's office, Azimzhan Askarov has confirmed that he has not been ill-treated by any officers and has also declined to call for a criminal investigation to be brought against his cellmate. Azimzhan Askarov's lawyer, Nurbek Toktakunov, believes that Azimzhan Askarov is unlikely to speak about his treatment while he remains in this police detention centre. In addition, Azimzhan Askarov is not permitted to meet Nurbek Toktakunov in private, as is his right under international law. Requests for Azimzhan Askarov to be transferred to a remand prison in another city have been ignored.

On 21 July, a group of women threw stones at Azimzhan Askarov's sister-in-law inside the police detention centre when she tried to deliver a food parcel to him. On 2 August, Nurbek Toktakunov was also attacked by a group of men and women on the premises of the police detention centre. He reported that he was surrounded by a group of men and women who took his briefcase and threatened to punish him unless he stopped defending an Uzbek. In both incidents, it is not clear how the group gained access to the detention centre, and police officers who were present failed to intervene. Amnesty International has learned that on both occasions, the groups included relatives of the police officer who was killed. Nurbek Toktakunov has reported the incidents to the authorities.

### PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Russian, Kyrgyz, English or your own language:

- Calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Azimzhan Askarov;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure that Azimzhan Askarov is allowed to meet with his lawyer in private;
- Urging the authorities to conduct a prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into allegations that Azimzhan Askarov has been tortured, including an independent medical examination;
- Urging the authorities to guarantee the safety of Azimzhan Askarov in detention, and that of those visiting him;
- Calling on the authorities to open an investigation into the allegations that Azimzhan Askarov's sister-in-law and lawyer have both been attacked on the premises of the police detention centre.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 16 SEPTEMBER 2010 TO:

Minister of Internal Affairs  
Kubatbek Baibolov  
Frunze Street, 469  
Bishkek 720040, KYRGYZSTAN  
Fax: +996 312 68 20 44  
Email: [pressa@mail.mvd.kg](mailto:pressa@mail.mvd.kg)  
Salutation: Dear Minister

General Prosecutor  
Baitemir Ibraev  
72, Orozbekova Street  
Bishkek 720040, KYRGYZSTAN  
Fax: +996 312 66 54 11  
Email: [genproc@bishkek.gov.kg](mailto:genproc@bishkek.gov.kg)  
Salutation: Dear General Prosecutor

**And copies to:**  
President  
Roza Otunbaeva  
Dom Pravitelstva  
Bishkek 720003, KYRGYZSTAN  
Fax: +996 312 62 50 12  
Email: [admin@kyrgyz-el.kg](mailto:admin@kyrgyz-el.kg)  
Salutation: Dear President

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 135/10 (EUR 58/003/2010). Further information: [www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/003/2010/en](http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR58/003/2010/en)

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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Amnesty International believes that Azimzhan Askarov has been targeted for his legitimate activities as a human rights defender. His detention and reported ill-treatment, and the harassment experienced by his sister-in-law and lawyer, are consistent with widespread reports that members of the Uzbek community are currently being disproportionately targeted by the local authorities, investigating the June violence.

Azimzhan Askarov was detained by police officers on 15 June in Bazar Korgan. According to the General Prosecutor's office, he was charged on 17 June with 'organizing mass disorder' and 'inciting ethnic hatred'. The General Prosecutor's office is investigating his involvement with the death of an ethnic Kyrgyz police officer on 13 June in Bazar Korgan during the recent violence in the south of the country.

Azimzhan Askarov is the director of the human rights organization *Vozdukh (Air)* which forms part of a regional human rights network in southern Kyrgyzstan. He has been documenting police ill-treatment in detention in the village of Bazar Korgan and other parts of the Jalal-Abad region for years.

Kyrgyzstan's human rights ombudsman has publicly stated that the current charges brought against Azimzhan Askarov are unfounded and described him as a 'well-known local human rights defender.' Both Uzbek and Kyrgyz local human rights defenders also claim that the charges are groundless.

Azimzhan Askarov had filmed and photographed some of the violence, killings and arson attacks on mostly Uzbek homes and other buildings in Bazar Korgan, allegedly by groups of armed men claiming to be Kyrgyz. On 15 June, a group of armed men in masks, who claimed to be from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Jalal-Abad region, arrived at Azimzhan Askarov's house and asked his wife to hand over her husband's video and camera equipment. When his wife refused, the men reportedly started to fire their guns in the air and then broke the gate.

Further information on UA: 135/10 Index: EUR 58/011/2010 Issue Date: 05 August 2010

