

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Public Statement

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### **Turkmenistan: government must seek justice not revenge**

Amnesty International believes that any action the government of Turkmenistan takes to bring to justice those involved in yesterday's assassination attempt on President Saparmurad Niyazov must strictly abide by international human rights law.

"Precisely at times of heightened tensions governments must ensure that all measures taken are in accordance with international human rights law. We are particularly concerned that the government's response to the assassination attempt may lead to a new wave of clampdown on dissent in Turkmenistan", Amnesty International said.

Amnesty International received worrying reports that many people have been detained following yesterday's events. According to official figures issued today, 16 people were detained. Unofficial sources reportedly claimed that more than one hundred people have been detained.

"We urge the Turkmen authorities to ensure that those detained have access to legal counsel promptly and throughout the investigation and that they are not subjected to torture or ill-treatment, as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that Turkmenistan is a party to. The detainees should be either charged with a recognizable offence or released," the organization said.

The organization is concerned that many of those detained may have been targeted because of their family relations with exiled opposition figures, who were named as suspects by the President. At least 18 relatives of Saparmurad Yklymov, the former Deputy Minister of Agriculture, who Saparmurad Niyazov yesterday labelled as "the immediate organizer of the terrorist act", have reportedly been detained and the whereabouts of at least one more person is currently unknown.

The President publicly implicated exiled opposition figures Saparmurad Yklymov, the former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov, former head of Turkmenistan's central bank Khudayberdy Orazov, and Nurmukhamed Khanamov, ex-ambassador to Turkey in the assassination attempt.

### **Background**

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 intolerant of dissent, restricting political and civil liberties and retaining tight control of the media.

Protest against the regime has grown more vocal throughout recent years. Several senior officials defected this and last year, including Boris Shikmuradov, Khudayberdy Orazov and Nurmukhamed Khanomov.

Numerous senior officials were demoted, dismissed or imprisoned in Turkmenistan this year in what appeared to be a politically motivated purge. In many cases, civil society activists, supporters and alleged supporters of the opposition, and their relatives faced harassment and threats by the security service.

Numerous members and supporters of opposition groups are reportedly barred from leaving or entering the country. Clandestine mass dissemination of anti-government leaflets was reported from Ashgabat and the Northern city of Dashoguz in August and October respectively.

Public Document

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