



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TURKMENISTAN: APPEAL CASES

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Prisoner of conscience Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev forcibly confined in psychiatric hospital

Amnesty International (AI) is concerned about the continued forced confinement of prisoner of conscience Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev, 63, in a psychiatric hospital. AI's concerns are heightened by his poor state of health.

On 3 January 2004 Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev sent a letter to President Saparmurad Niyazov and the governor of the Balkan region, urging them to authorize a two-day-long demonstration on the main square of Balkanabad on 18 and 19 February, to coincide with the President's birthday. He wrote: "We want to carry out a peaceful demonstration... to express our disagreement with the policies of the President and other senior government officials and urge them to rectify any shortcomings in due course... I ask you to refrain from using force against the participants of the meeting." Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev had earlier repeatedly criticized President Niyazov's policies in interviews he gave to the USA-funded *Radio Liberty*, and had openly spoken about the necessity to form an opposition political party.



Photo: Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev was forcibly confined in a psychiatric hospital for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression.

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On 13 February Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev was taken from his house in the village of Suvchy in western Turkmenistan by some six medical personnel and another six in plainclothes. He was forcibly confined to a psychiatric hospital in the town of Balkanabad (formerly Nebitdag), and shortly afterwards he was transferred across the country to a psychiatric hospital in Garashsyzyk district in the eastern Lebap region. Reportedly, a commission at the psychiatric hospital chaired by an official of the Ministry of Health announced Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev as mentally ill. He was officially diagnosed as suffering from "wild paranoia in an aggressive form". Reportedly, several medical staff of the hospital in Garashsyzyk district told Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev's relatives that they had not found any sign of mental illness but that the authorities had pressurized them to diagnose him as mentally ill.

The first time his wife got permission to visit him was in April. During her visit, one doctor, reportedly referring to instructions by the authorities, told her that if she passed on information about her husband's case to media outlets abroad she would not be allowed to visit him again. When she travelled to the hospital to see Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev at the end of October, she wasn't allowed to meet with him.

Gurbandurdy Durdykuliiev is believed to be in a poor state of health. He is currently believed to have a high temperature and to suffer from severe stomach ache. He continues to suffer from the aftermath of a heart attack he had before his confinement to the psychiatric hospital.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan has been appalling for years. It deteriorated even further following an alleged assassination attempt on President Niyazov on 25 November 2002, which triggered a new wave of repression across Turkmenistan.

The regime is extremely intolerant of dissent, and it has severely limited civil and political liberties. No independent political parties or human rights groups can operate openly in the country, and opponents of the government and civil society activists have been forced into exile or faced imprisonment and persecution.

Key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuses of human rights is President Niyazov's domination of all aspects of life in the country, and the personality cult with which he has surrounded himself.

The authorities have failed to implement recommendations aimed at improving Turkmenistan's human rights record made by intergovernmental bodies, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the UN General Assembly.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Russian or Turkmen or your own language:

- expressing concern that Gurbandurdy Durdykulyev has been forcibly confined in a psychiatric hospital to punish him for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression;
- stating that Amnesty International regards Gurbandurdy Durdykulyev as a prisoner of conscience, and urges his immediate and unconditional release.

APPEALS TO:

President of Turkmenistan:

Prezident Turkmenistana Saparmurad A. NIYAZOV;
Apparat Prezidenta;
744000 ASHGABAT;
TURKMENISTAN

Fax: (+993 12) 35 51 12

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of Foreign Affairs:

Ministr Rashit MEREDOV;
Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Turkmenistana;
83 pr. Magtymguly;
744000 ASHGABAT;
TURKMENISTAN

Fax: (+993 12) 35 42 41

E-mail: mfatm@online.tm

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES 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 26 February 2005.

PLEASE SEND ANY REPLIES FROM THE TURKMEN AUTHORITIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. (South Caucasus and Central Asia Research and Campaign Team; Amnesty International; 1 Easton Street; London WC1 X ODW; United Kingdom)