

TURKMENISTAN Shagildy ATAKOV (_____), aged 38

Baptist Christian Shagildy Atakov is believed to have been treated so harshly in prison is in imminent danger of dying. There are reports that he was imprisoned solely because of his religious beliefs, in which case Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience.

Father-of-five Shagildy Atakov has served nearly two years in labour camps. He is now held in a camp in the town of Seydi, in the northeast of Turkmenistan. He was arrested in December 1998: according to the authorities he was accused of fraud connected with his car business, but there are reports that the real reason was his religious affiliation. In March 1999 he was sentenced to two years in a labour camp and fined the equivalent of US\$12,000. His sentence was increased to four years after the prosecution appealed.

Conditions at the camp are very harsh. He has reportedly been beaten repeatedly by prison guards. At another detention place in mid-1999 he was reportedly beaten so severely that he temporarily lost his sight. The German-based Baptist organization *Missionswerk Friedensstimme* (Voice of Peace Mission) said, citing Baptist sources in Turkmenistan: "They decided to finish him off. They want to break him either mentally or physically."

His wife Artygul Atakova visited him in the labour camp on 3 and 4 February. He was reportedly hardly able to walk, he was bruised and battered, he had abdominal pains, he frequently lost consciousness and he was suffering from jaundice. According to *Friedenstimme*, "Shagildy Atakov does not expect to live. He said farewell." In December 2000 he had been moved to the camp sickbay with symptoms that suggested he was going to have a heart attack.

According to unofficial sources, Shagildy Atakov was to have been included in the latest presidential amnesty, issued on 23 December 2000 to mark the Islamic holy night of Kadir and the end of Ramadan. However, he reportedly refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the President on religious grounds, and so was not released.

State officials are reported to have harassed Shagildy Atakov's family because of their religious beliefs. They have placed his wife and children under "village arrest" in the village of Kaakhka, near the Turkmen-Iranian border, given one of his brothers a term of administrative detention and forced other relatives out of their jobs.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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

Religious groups other than Russian Orthodox Christians and Sunni Muslims face harassment and imprisonment, as well as external and internal exile. Police officers are said to have physically and verbally abused members of religious minority groups to punish them for their religious affiliation.

Two other possible prisoners of conscience, Charymyrat Gurov and Khoshali Garayev, who were said to have been political opponents of the Turkmen President, died in custody in January 1998 and September 1999 respectively. It is said that Charymyrat Gurov died as a result of beatings. According to the prison authorities Khoshali Garayev hanged himself in his cell, but unofficial sources reject this, and say that he too died as a result of severe beatings.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English, Russian, Turkmen or your own language:

- expressing concern at reports that Shagildy Atakov is in imminent danger of dying as a result of harsh prison conditions and repeated beatings;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Shagildy Atakov receives appropriate medical treatment;
- expressing concern at allegations that Shagildy Atakov was prosecuted solely for his peaceful religious activity, in violation of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Turkmenistan became a party in 1997;
- urging the authorities to carry out an impartial and comprehensive investigation into reports that Shagildy Atakov was repeatedly ill-treated in custody with the findings made public and those found responsible brought to justice.

APPEALS TO (Please note that fax numbers can be difficult to obtain. If a voice answers, repeat 'fax' until connected):

President

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; Apparat Prezidenta; Prezidentu NIYAZOVU S.A.; TURKMENISTAN

Faxes: + 993 12 - 35 51 12 / 35 66 88 (it can be difficult to get a connection)

Telegrams: Prezidentu Niyazovu, 744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear President Niyazov

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Turkmenistan; 744000 g. Ashgabat; pr. Magtymguly, 83; Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Turkmenistana; Ministru BERDIYEV B.; TURKMENISTAN

Faxes: + 993 12 - 51 14 30 / 35 49 18

Telegrams: Ministru Berdiyevu, 744000 Ashgabat, pr. Magtymguly 83, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear Minister

Procurator General

Turkmenistan; g. Ashgabat; ul. Seidi, 4; Prokuratura Turkmenistana; Generalnomu prokuroru ATAYANOVY G.; TURKMENISTAN

Faxes: + 993 12 35 44 82

Telegrams: Prokuroru Atayanovoy, Prokuratura, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

Salutation: Dear Procurator General

COPIES TO:

Chairman of the Supreme Court

Turkmenistan; 744000 Ashgabat; prospekt Saparmurad Turkmenbashi, 18; Verkhovny Sud Turkmenistana; Predsedatelyu RAKHMANOVU Y.; TURKMENISTAN

Procurator of Lebapsky region

Turkmenistan; 746100 g. Turkmenobad; ul Nekrasova 128; Prokuratura Lebapskogo veloyata; Prokuroru Atayevu, A.M.; TURKMENISTAN

Director of the corrective labour camp in the town of Seydi
Turkmenistan; Lebapsky veloyat; 746222 g. Seydi; uchr. LV-K/12; Nachalniku
kolonii; TURKMENISTAN

and 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 19 March 2001.