

## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **TURKMENISTAN**

#### **Concern at arrest of government critic**

Amnesty International expressed concern today over the arrest of a former presidential press officer in Turkmenistan on 1 September. The arrest was allegedly made on fabricated criminal charges after he criticized the policies of President Niyazov in the international media.

Durdymukhammed Gurbanov was reportedly detained at his home in Ashgabat by officers of the National Security Committee (KNB), taken to the KNB investigation-isolation prison and charged with embezzlement. He is accused of having misused state property and mismanaged state funds during his time as President Niyazov's press secretary from 1992 to 1994.

His supporters, however, claim that the charge has been brought to punish him for an interview he gave to Radio Liberty in April criticizing the policies of President Niyazov and accusing the Turkmen government of mismanagement.

Durdymukhammed Gurbanov, who worked as a journalist before joining the presidential administration, has not had any of his work published in Turkmenistan since 1994. He has been affiliated to the democratic opposition in Turkmenistan and according to supporters has been labelled by the Turkmen government as a "dissident".

In November 1997 a former government minister of Turkmenistan was charged with corruption allegedly for criticizing President Niyazov's policies in an interview with Radio Liberty. Nazar Soyunov, however, was not repatriated to Turkmenistan from Moscow, where he had lived since 1995, reportedly because of insufficient evidence against him.

Amnesty International is currently seeking further information on the background to the charge brought against Durdymukhammed Gurbanov.

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