

EXTERNAL

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@Pulat AKHUNOV

Uzbekistan

Pulat Akhunov, a deputy chairman of the opposition Birlik movement in Uzbekistan and a former deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet, was arrested on 29 July 1992 in Shakhrikhan, Andizhan region (eastern Uzbekistan). He has been charged with assault. Although Amnesty International would not normally take up the case of a person charged with this offence, it is concerned about allegations that the charge is false, and has been fabricated in order to punish Pulat Akhunov for his non-violent political activity in opposition to the Government of Uzbekistan. The organization is currently seeking further information about the charge against Pulat Akhunov and the circumstances of his arrest.

Founded in May 1989, Birlik ("Unity") has branches in each of Uzbekistan's 12 regions and claims to be the largest opposition grouping in the country. It advocates a pluralist, secular democratic system for Uzbekistan, and a mixed economy. It was allowed to register as a movement in November 1991, but has encountered bureaucratic obstacles to registration as a political party, and was denied permission by the authorities to enter a candidate in Uzbekistan's presidential election in December 1991.

Unofficial sources report that Pulat Akhunov was arrested in the early hours of 29 July 1992 in connection with an alleged incident involving Zakir Akhmadaliyev, a worker at a local enterprise. It is alleged that he was arrested without a proper arrest warrant having been presented. Pulat Akhunov was initially charged with petty hooliganism, but this was later amended to a charge of assaulting Zakir Akhmadaliyev. The unofficial sources point out that at the time when Zakir Akhmadaliyev reported the alleged assault to police he should in fact have been in prison, having been sentenced recently to five years' imprisonment for rape and robbery. The sources allege that Zakir Akhmadaliyev named Pulat Akhunov as his assailant only after the name had been suggested to him by police. Pulat Akhunov is reported currently to be in detention in the investigation-isolation prison in Andizhan city.

Immediately before his arrest on the assault charge, Pulat Akhunov had served two consecutive 10-day terms of administrative arrest (which can be imposed by a single judge without right of appeal for up to 15 days). The first term was for "abuse of a police officer" and related to an incident when his car was stopped by police for an alleged traffic offence. When that term expired he was immediately given another 10-day term for "fighting with a fellow prisoner". Unofficial sources alleged that these offences were either fabricated or provoked by the authorities: they claim that the incident on which the second charge was based occurred after a violent prisoner was deliberately put in the same cell as Pulat Akhunov and assaulted him. The sources alleged that the true motive for holding Pulat Akhunov in detention was to punish him for an attempt to hold a meeting of *Birlik* leaders, senior members of the registered opposition *Erk* ("Rights") party, and representatives of Islamic groups.

In January 1992 Pulat Akhunov was the victim of the first of a series of serious assaults by unknown assailants on prominent members of the Birlik movement and independent journalists. He was attacked at the airport in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, as he arrived to board a flight to Moscow. Three unknown persons assaulted him at the entrance to the departure area of the airport, and fled in a waiting car when bystanders came to his defence. Since then Amnesty International has received information on five further incidents, the most recent of which, on 29 June, resulted in Birlik chairman Abdurakhim Pulatov needing emergency surgery for multiple skull fractures, have been beaten on the head by four men wielding metal bars. This latest incident took place outside offices of the Tashkent police, and it has been alleged that the deputy head of the Tashkent police and the deputy procurator of Tashkent stood by while the attack took place. According to Amnesty International's information no arrests have been made in connection with any of these incidents, and Amnesty International has written to the authorities in Uzbekistan expressing concern about allegations that the authorities have not made sufficient effort to identify the perpetrators of these attacks.