

Public Statement

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Uzbekistan: Alarmingly high number of executions and death sentences

Death sentences and executions in Uzbekistan since the beginning of 1999 have reached an alarmingly high number, with at least 55 death sentences and 15 executions, Amnesty International said. Since information on the death penalty is regarded as a state secret, the real number of those sentenced to death and executed may be much higher.

"We have frequently received allegations that international fair trial standards were violated in the trials of people sentenced to death," Amnesty International said "In particular, victims have claimed that they were convicted on the basis of confessions made as a result of torture."

The majority of these sentences have been handed down since the February 1999 bomb explosions in Tashkent that, according to the Uzbek government, were attempts on President Islam Karimov's life. President Islam Karimov reportedly told journalists in April 1999: "I am prepared to rip off the heads of 200 people, to sacrifice their lives, in order to save peace and calm in the republic."

Oybek and Uygun Ruzmetov, who were accused of attempting to set up an Islamic state, were sentenced to death on reportedly fabricated evidence and confessions obtained under duress. Police briefly detained their mother and father on 5 February 1999 and humiliated them by forcing them to undress and taking them handcuffed and in their

underwear to see their sons. Oybek and Uygun Ruzmetov told their parents that not only they themselves had been tortured but that the police had threatened to arrest their parents and rape Uygun Ruzmetov's wife unless they confessed. One of the co-defendants of Oybek and Uygun Ruzmetov, Shikhnozor Yakubov, reportedly died of beatings in prison in October 1999. Amnesty International is not aware of any investigation instigated into these allegations.

The organization has also received a number of reports that defendants accused of non-political criminal activities have been tortured and ill-treated in detention in order to make them confess. Twenty eight-year old Dmitry Chikunov, who is believed to be in imminent danger of execution in Uzbekistan, told his mother while in pre-trial detention: "When I came to myself after they had beaten me unconscious, they tied my hands and put a gas-mask over my head. Then the interrogator squeezed tight the hose for breathing and shouted: 'Now, confess that you are a murderer!'" Reportedly, law enforcement officers in pre-trial detention kept threatening to rape his mother unless he confessed.

Despite assurances by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights in Uzbekistan, Sayora Rashidova, to Amnesty International in 1998 that Uzbekistan was following "a policy of abolishing the death penalty by stages" the country has yet to enter such a new stage.

Amnesty International was encouraged by the reversal of the death sentences on two young musicians in March 2000 and is calling on Uzbekistan to build on this experience and move towards abolition of the death penalty by commuting all death sentences so far imposed, declaring a moratorium on death sentences and executions and ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and

Political Rights -- the first international instrument aimed at abolition of the death penalty.

Uzbekistan should live up to its obligations to protect detainees from torture and to uphold international fair trial standards under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights as well as under the United Nations Convention against Torture, to both of which Uzbekistan acceded in 1995.

Background:

Nearly half the countries of the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice for all but the most exceptional crimes, such as serious crimes committed during a state of war. Among the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union, for example, Kyrgyzstan has had a moratorium on executions in place since 1998, and Turkmenistan abolished the death penalty completely in December last year.

Amnesty International believes the death penalty is inherently unjust and arbitrary, however heinous the crime for which it is provided and however scrupulous the procedure by which it is enforced. The risk of error in applying the death penalty is inescapable, yet the penalty is irrevocable. In addition, the death penalty has never been shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments, and is brutalizing to all those involved in its application.

**To arrange interviews with Dmitry Chikunov's mother please contact Amnesty International's press office.*

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