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Kyrgyzstan: A year after the murder of Alisher Saipov - no closer to the truth

A year ago on 24 October 2007 a young independent journalist and editor, Alisher Saipov, was killed in his home town of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan as he was walking down a street with an acquaintance. He was shot reportedly at point blank range by two unidentified assailants. The killing was reported to be linked to his professional activities, in particular his critical reporting on the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. His death had a further chilling effect on the rights to freedom of expression not only in Kyrgyzstan but in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia.

Amnesty International believes that the handling to date of the criminal investigation into his death indicates that there is little political will to bring those who ordered and those who committed the killing to justice. The authorities launched a much publicized investigation into the murder of Alisher Saipov immediately after his death, however, despite the resources allocated and the high profile given to the investigation, little progress appeared to be made and the investigation was reported to have been suspended twice before being re-opened in spring 2008. Alisher Saipov's family publicly appealed to President Kurmanbek Bakiev in June 2008 to urge him not to forget his promise to personally supervise the investigation and ensure that the suspected perpetrators are brought to justice without delay. However, five months later, on the anniversary of Alisher Saipov's death, not only do the murderers still need to be identified, but there appears to be no substantive progress in the investigation to determine who ordered the killing.

Amnesty International is urging the authorities in Kyrgyzstan to ensure that the investigation continues to be given priority and that sufficient resources are allocated to the investigation for it to be conducted effectively and in a thorough, independent and impartial way with the findings made public and the suspected perpetrators brought to justice without delay in proceedings conforming to international standards.

Furthermore, Amnesty International calls on the Kyrgyzstani authorities to protect journalists and human rights defenders by vigorously investigating all allegations of attacks on journalists and human rights defenders. Those who are found responsible for such crimes, including those who ordered or masterminded the attacks, should be brought to justice without delay.

Alisher Saipov had turned 26 in September 2007 - just weeks before his death - and was married with a two-month-old daughter. A Kyrgyzstani national of Uzbek origin he was the editor of an Uzbek-language newspaper *Siyosat* (Politics) which covered issues, including human rights, relevant to Kyrgyzstan and also neighbouring Uzbekistan. *Siyosat* which he founded in the spring of 2007 was said to have gained widespread popularity quickly, especially in Uzbekistan, where independently-published information is difficult to obtain. Alisher Saipov also worked as a correspondent for Voice of America and contributed to other independent websites covering Central Asia, such as uznews.net and Ferghana.ru. He often covered sensitive subjects such as the fallout from the May 2005 killings in Andizhan in neighbouring Uzbekistan, the treatment of Uzbek refugees from Andizhan in Kyrgyzstan, the activities of Uzbekistani security services on Kyrgyzstani territory, anti-terror cooperation between Uzbekistani and Kyrgyzstani security forces as well as the activities of banned Islamic groups and parties such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. He had reportedly received anonymous threats and in the months before his death some Uzbekistani

media had conducted a campaign denouncing his reporting as an attack on the Uzbekistani state.

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