

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JOINT STATEMENT

17 March 2011

AI Index: EUR 60/002/2011



Tajikistan: Detained, then dead. Authorities must promptly conduct an effective investigation into Safarali Sangov's death

Amnesty International and the Bureau of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Tajikistan are concerned by allegations regarding the death of 37-year-old Safarali Sangov in custody on 5 March, four days after his arrest on 1 March in Dushanbe. The organizations urge the Tajikistani government to conduct an effective investigation into allegations of torture without delay.

According to Safarali Sangov's wife, at around noon on 1 March, several men in plain clothes burst into the yard of the family's home and started to beat Safarali Sangov. Reportedly, without presenting a search or arrest warrant, the men searched Safarali Sangov's body. His wife reported that despite nothing being found on him, Safarali Sangov was handcuffed, forced into a car and taken away. No reason was given for his detention. Other family members, who had witnessed the violence, were also reportedly beaten, including children and a woman who was four months' pregnant. Some neighbours and merchants, who work in a shop near their house, reportedly saw the beatings.

The family was later told by police sources that the men arresting Safarali Sangov were officers of Sino district police station (OVD), and that he was first taken to Sino district police station and later to the National Medical Centre "Karabolo" hospital in Dushanbe.

When Safarali Sangov's relatives went to the hospital that afternoon they found out that he was in a coma in the intensive care ward. They overheard a conversation of medical personnel about his many fractures, including to his spine, hip and nose. One doctor reportedly mentioned a drug overdose; however, a subsequent analysis of his blood reportedly found no drugs.

Safarali Sangov's wife also reported that - while at the hospital on 1 March - she and a relative overheard a conversation between police officers whom they recognized as some of those involved in the beating during the arrest. The officers reportedly talked about the blows they had dealt Safarali Sangov. When his wife approached the police officers, stating "he is lying there and you are joking about it", a policeman reportedly replied: "Don't shout because we can beat you".

On 5 March, when Safarali Sangov's family arrived at the hospital, they were informed by medical personnel that he had died that morning. The family wanted to see his body but police officers, who were present, reportedly closed the entrance to the intensive care ward and used another exit to remove Safarali Sangov's body and transport it to the morgue.

Later the same day, Safarali Sangov's body was handed over to his family, who buried him at the Ispechak cemetery in Dushanbe.

On 11 March, Safarali Sangov's wife received a form, issued by the Centre of Forensic Medical Examinations of the Ministry of Health the same day, registering the cause of death as brain damage. This result was based on a forensic medical examination conducted at the morgue. To date the family has not seen the full report of the forensic medical examination.

The Prosecutor General reportedly told Safarali Sangov's wife on 12 March that a criminal case had been opened to investigate the death of her husband. However, according to her, to date none of the witnesses present during his arrest on 1 March have been summoned.

Mahmadullo Asadulloev, head of the press service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, was reported by the Tajik Service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (*Radio Ozodi*) on 6 March as saying that "during the search [Safarali Sangov] wanted to commit suicide, that's what led to the multiple wounds on the body of the deceased." In an interview with the news agency Asia Plus on 7 March he specified that Safarali Sangov allegedly jumped off the second floor of the police station.

According to Ahmadullo Asadulloev, Safarali Sangov was detained for drug-related crime, but the accusations remain unclear. On 5 March, the Tajik news agency, Asia Plus, reported Ahmadullo Asadulloev as saying that Safarali Sangov was detained in possession of 500g of hashish whereas on 6 March *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Tajik Service* reported that police had confiscated 41 kg of hashish from him, also citing Ahmadullo Asadulloev.

Amnesty International and the Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law are concerned about allegations that Safarali Sangov died as a result of torture and ill-treatment by Sino district police and that witnesses present during his arrest on 1 March were beaten.

The organizations urge the authorities to conduct an immediate, thorough, impartial and independent investigation into these allegations, to ensure that the results are made public and that those suspected of being responsible are brought to justice, in line with Tajikistan's obligations as a party to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Pending these investigations, officials suspected of having committed torture or ill-treatment should be suspended from active duty in line with Tajikistan's human rights obligations.

The organizations also call on the authorities to act in line with their obligations under Article 14 of the Convention, which stipulates that "[i]n the event of the death of the victim as a result of an act of torture, his dependants shall be entitled to compensation."

In addition, the organizations urge the authorities to act in line with their obligation under Article 9(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that "[a]nyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons of his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him."

In Tajikistan impunity persists for perpetrators of torture or other ill-treatment. There are reports that lawyers, human rights activists and journalists risk reprisals when raising torture allegations, and that victims are usually reluctant to issue complaints about abuse by law enforcement officers as this would make them more vulnerable to further abuse, including trumped up charges against them in criminal cases.

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