



# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TURKMENISTAN: APPEAL CASE

12 March 2007; AI Index: EUR 61/012/2007; public

## Religious leader Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah still in prison

Amnesty International is concerned about the continued incommunicado imprisonment of the former Mufti (Muslim cleric) Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah following an unfair trial in 2004.

On 2 March 2004 Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment on treason charges in a secret trial, accused of involvement in the alleged assassination attempt on the late President Saparmurad Niyazov in November 2002. He had been removed from his post as chief Mufti and deputy chair of the *Gengeshi* (Council) for Religious Affairs in January 2003.

There are allegations that the charges against Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah were fabricated and that he was targeted for expressing dissent. For example, he was believed to have repeatedly objected to the extensive use of President Niyazov's book *Rukhnama [Book of the Soul]* in mosques. There were also allegations that one of the reasons for targeting Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah was his Uzbek ethnicity.

In the night from 23 to 24 May 2004, officers of the Interior Ministry reportedly beat Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah in the maximum-security prison in the Caspian port town of Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk). According to the international broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*, Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah "suffered significantly". To Amnesty International's knowledge, the authorities have not investigated the allegations and none of the perpetrators has been brought to justice.

In February 2007 Amnesty International received reliable information that the family of Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah had not been permitted to see him since his arrest. According to a family member "we have never once been allowed a meeting, never once have they accepted parcels for him and we don't even know where he is being held."

### Background information

The human rights situation in Turkmenistan has been appalling for years. The regime of the late President Niyazov ruthlessly repressed any form of peaceful dissent. Dissidents were tortured and imprisoned after unfair trials or forced into exile. The subordination of executive, legislative and judicial powers to the President was key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuse of human rights.

According to official reports, President Niyazov died early on 21 December 2006 of cardiac arrest. His successor, Kurbanguly Berdimukammedov who was elected as President on 11 February 2007, indicated readiness to review some of the Niyazov policies in educational, social and economic spheres.

Ahead of presidential elections on 11 February, Amnesty International issued a list of recommendations calling on the government of Turkmenistan to put an end to stifling freedom of expression, arbitrary detention and torture, and unfair trials, as well as violations of social and economic rights. In addition, the organization urged to immediately release all prisoners of conscience and to appropriately address all other cases, including the case of Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, featured in a compilation published by Amnesty International (AI Index: EUR 61/004/2007).

As a party to a number of UN human rights treaties, Turkmenistan is obligated to uphold key human rights principles. As a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Turkmenistan is bound to uphold its commitments with regard to the "human dimension", which include the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, the right to a fair trial, freedom of thought, conscience, religious or belief, freedom of movement and

freedom of expression.

In recent years the UN Commission for Human Rights and the UN General Assembly have adopted resolutions deploring the human rights situation in Turkmenistan. In October 2006 the UN Secretary General, reporting to the UN General Assembly, concluded that "gross and systematic violations of human rights continued in [Turkmenistan]".

**Recommended actions:**

Please send courteous letters in English, Russian, Turkmen or your own language. If a voice answers on a fax number during office hours, repeat 'fax' until connected; fax machines are often switched off outside office hours - five hours ahead of GMT. If the fax does not work, please send your letter by post.

- Express concern that Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah was sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment in an unfair trial in March 2004 and urge the authorities to ensure that he is promptly retried in proceedings that meet international standards for fair trial or released.
- note that Amnesty International is aware of allegations that he may have been detained solely on the grounds of his peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression. If these allegations are confirmed, Amnesty International would consider him a prisoner of conscience and call for his immediate and unconditional release.
- express concern that his family has reportedly been denied access to him since his arrest and urge the authorities to allow him access to his family.
- urge the authorities to open a prompt and impartial investigation into allegations that officers of the Interior Ministry beat Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah in the maximum-security prison in the night from 23 to 24 May 2004; to make the results public and bring those suspected of human rights violations to justice.

**Please address your appeals to:**

President of Turkmenistan Kurbanguly Berdymukhammedov

Presidential Palace, 744000 Ashgabat, TURKMENISTAN

**Fax: + 993 12 35 51 12**

**Salutation: Dear President of Turkmenistan**

Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov:

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 83 prospekt Magtymguly, 744000 Ashgabat, TURKMENISTAN

**Fax: +993 12 35 42 41, +993 12 39 28 50, e-mail: mfatm@online.tm**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

**Diplomatic representatives of Turkmenistan accredited to your country.**

**PLEASE SEND ANY REPLIES FROM THE AUTHORITIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. (Eurasia team, Amnesty International; 1 Easton Street; London WC1X 0DW; United Kingdom)**