

Turkmenistan: Ogulsapar Muradova (f), journalist

Concern: Death in Custody

Early on 14 September, officers from the Ministry of National Security of Turkmenistan informed the relatives of Ogulsapar Muradova, a former Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (THF) member and a correspondent for the US-funded Radio Liberty that she had died in custody.

She had been detained at her apartment on 18 June at around 5pm, by two Ashgabat city police officers who did not show an arrest warrant. A senior officer told her family that they were taking her "for a conversation".

That night, Ogulsapar Muradova's daughters, Sana and Maral, were allowed to speak to her by telephone after they refused to bring their mother's computer and fax to the Interior Ministry. THF director Tadzhiagul Begmedova told Amnesty International from exile in Bulgaria on 19 June: "She seemed to have difficulty speaking. What she said was totally incoherent. We think they gave her psychotropic drugs." Her daughters refused to cooperate. On 19 June law enforcement officers detained Sana and Maral and their brother Berdy. They were released on 1 July.

On 14 September, officers from the Ministry of National Security came to Ogulsapar Muradova's flat and informed Berdy, Maral and Sona of her death, before taking them to the morgue in the capital, Ashgabat, where police officers were reportedly also present. The Ministry of National Security officers reportedly refused to disclose any information about the circumstances of her death, including the date when she died.

The Ministry of National Security officers and police officers reportedly urged them to sign her death certificate. They refused and demanded to see her body before signing the paper. Tadzhiagul Begmedova told Amnesty International: "The officers shouted at them and said, 'If you don't sign this you will never see her body.'"

When they returned to the morgue accompanied by a foreign diplomat, they were allowed to see Ogulsapar Muradova's body. Tadzhiagul Begmedova told Amnesty International: "They saw a huge wound on her forehead and marks on her neck."

There are credible allegations that Ogulsapar Muradova had been harassed for over a year to punish her for her human rights work and her affiliation with Radio Liberty. The authorities reportedly threatened her to harm her children and to evict her from her apartment if she continued her work as a journalist. Ogulsapar Muradova was sentenced along with Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiiev to terms of imprisonment in an unfair trial on 25 August 2006. There are strong indications that the charges brought against them were fabricated to punish them for their human rights activities.

Please write to the authorities:

- expressing deep concern about the death in custody of Ogulsapar Muradova
- calling for the authorities to conduct a thorough, prompt, and independent investigation into the cause of her death; to keep Ogulsapar Muradova's relatives informed of all steps of the investigation and to make the results public
- stating that Amnesty International adopted Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiiev as prisoners of conscience, detained for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression in defence of human rights, and has called for their prompt and unconditional release

Please send appeals to:

President
President Saparmurad Niyazov
Presidential Palace, 744000 Ashgabat, Turkmenistan