

URGENT ACTION

FEARS OF IMPRISONMENT FOR MISSING KAZAKH WRITER

Kazakh writer Nagyz Muhammed was arrested in March 2018 in Xinjiang, China, after his last visit to Kazakhstan. His family learned through word of mouth that, due to a dinner he had with friends on Kazakhstan Independence Day about 10 years ago, Nagyz Muhammed was convicted in a secret trial on charges of “separatism” and sentenced to seven years in prison. No contact has been made with him for more than two years and, without official information about his whereabouts or alleged trial and conviction, there are grave concerns for Nagyz Muhammed’s wellbeing.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Director Wang Jiang

Prison Administration Bureau of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
No 380, Huanghe lu, Urumqi
830000, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
People’s Republic of China

Dear Director Wang:

I write to express my concern for **Nagyz Muhammed**, a Kazakh who worked as a writer in Altay’s State Intangible Cultural Heritage Office in Xinjiang. He is also a member of the Xinjiang Writers Association.

In early 2018, Nagyz Muhammed travelled to Almaty, Kazakhstan, to stay with relatives after undergoing heart surgery in Urumqi. In March 2018, his colleague in China asked him to get back to work urgently. Returning to Altay later that month, Nagyz Muhammed was summoned to the local police station and questioned about his last visit to Kazakhstan. No contact has been made with him since.

In December 2018 his family was told by a source that, reportedly as a result of being tortured during an interrogation, Nagyz Muhammed’s health had deteriorated so significantly that he was sent to a “transformation-through-education” centre. His family members learned from the same source in the first half of 2019 that he was sent to a detention centre once his condition improved.

It is distressing to learn that, after nearly a year of uncertainty, Nagyz Muhammed’s family only received official notification about his arrest in early 2019. No additional official information has since been provided.

His family were told by a source in April 2020 that Nagyz Muhammed had been convicted of “separatism” and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment in connection with a dinner he attended with friends on Kazakhstan Independence Day about a decade ago. I am deeply concerned about reports that the trial was conducted in secret and that Nagyz Muhammed was not allowed access to a lawyer of his choice.

Without any information about his current condition or whereabouts, I am deeply concerned about Nagyz Muhammed’s wellbeing, especially given the reports of the torture that he endured in 2018.

I call on you to:

- **Disclose Nagyz Muhammed’s whereabouts, allow him access to his family and a lawyer of his choice, and ensure he is not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment;**
- **Release Nagyz Muhammed immediately and unconditionally, unless there is sufficient, credible and admissible evidence that he committed as internationally recognized offence and is granted a fair trial in line with international standards**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Nagyz Muhammed is an ethnic Kazakh Chinese citizen who worked as a writer in Altay's State Intangible Cultural Heritage Office, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Xinjiang) in northwestern China. He is also a member of the Xinjiang Writers Association. He published two books which are collections of poetry. His family relocated to Kazakhstan in 2012 for better education opportunities. Since then, he has travelled to Kazakhstan multiple times to visit his family.

Xinjiang is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in China. More than half of the region's population of 22 million people belong to mostly Turkic and predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, including Uighurs (around 11.3 million), Kazakhs (around 1.6 million) and other populations whose languages, cultures and ways of life vary distinctly from those of the Han who are the majority in "interior" China.

Media reports have illustrated the extent of new draconian security measures implemented since Chen Quanguo came into power as Xinjiang's Party Secretary in 2016. In October 2016, there were numerous reports that authorities in the region had confiscated Uyghur passports in an attempt to further curtail their freedom of movement. In March 2017, the Xinjiang government enacted the "De-extremification Regulation" that identifies and prohibits a wide range of behaviours labelled "extremist", such as "spreading extremist thought", denigrating or refusing to watch public radio and TV programmes, wearing burkas, having an "abnormal" beard, resisting national policies, and publishing, downloading, storing, or reading articles, publications, or audio-visual materials containing "extremist content". The regulation also set up a "responsibility system" for government cadres for "anti-extremism" work and established annual reviews of their performance.

It is estimated that up to a million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other predominantly Muslim people have been held in the "transformation-through-education" centres. The Chinese authorities had denied the existence of such facilities until October 2018, when they began describing them as voluntary, free "vocational training" centres. They claim that the objective of this vocational training is to provide people with technical and vocational education to enable them to find jobs and become "useful" citizens. China's explanation, however, contradicts reports of beatings, food deprivation and solitary confinement that have been collected from former detainees.

China has rejected calls from the international community, including Amnesty, to allow independent experts unrestricted access to Xinjiang. Instead, China has made efforts to silence criticism by inviting delegations from different countries to visit Xinjiang for carefully orchestrated and closely monitored tours.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Chinese, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 8 June 2020

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [Nagyz Muhammed] (he/him)