

AI INDEX: EUR 57/05/98
8 APRIL 1998

PUBLIC STATEMENT

KAZAKSTAN

Imprisonment of opposition leader politically motivated

Yesterday's sentencing of Madel Ismailov, leader of the opposition "Workers' Movement", to one year imprisonment for "insulting the president" is politically motivated and a means of punishing him for his opposition to the Kazakstani regime, according to Amnesty International today.

The organization regards Madel Ismailov as a prisoner of conscience and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release. Amnesty International is also concerned at earlier reports that Madel Ismailov had been beaten and otherwise ill-treated in custody.

The case against Madel Ismailov has been brought in connection with public statements he allegedly made denouncing the policies and the person of the President of Kazakstan, during a peaceful opposition demonstration in Almaty, the capital, on 7 November 1997. He was detained by police on 27 February following a conference in which several opposition groups had joined forces to create the People's Front of Kazakstan and was charged under Article 318 of the Kazak Criminal Code for insulting the honour and dignity of the President of Kazakstan.

At the time Amnesty International had urged the Kazakstani authorities to protect Madel Ismailov from any form of ill-treatment while in detention. Indeed, in 1997 Madel Ismailov had spent three and a half months in pre-trial detention in relation to an opposition demonstration in front of Almaty City Council on 30 May. During his time in detention Madel Ismailov claimed he was severely beaten, ill-treated and humiliated by prison officers and officials conducting the investigation into his criminal case.

Amnesty International had expressed serious concerns that the ill-treatment he allegedly suffered might have been an attempt to punish him for his peaceful political opposition to the Kazakstani regime and to frighten him into stopping his political activities.

Amnesty International recognizes that elected officials in Kazakstan, including the President, may wish to seek legal redress for written or oral statements that they consider defamatory. The organization believes, however, that it is sufficient that they already enjoy this right under the legal provisions which protect all residents of Kazakstan from defamation.

ENDS.../