

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Turkmenistan: President Niazov Should Keep Promise, Release Imprisoned Ecologist**

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL  
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH  
INTERNATIONAL HELSINKI FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
MEMORIAL HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE

A coalition of human rights organizations today condemned the three-year sentence handed down to Turkmen environmental activist Farid Tukhbatullin.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the International League for Human Rights, and the Memorial Human Rights Centre called for the Turkmen authorities immediately and unconditionally to release Farid Tukhbatullin. They also called on the international community to urge the Turkmen government to ensure his release.

"Farid Tukhbatullin is an innocent man, wrongly convicted in judicial proceedings that did not meet international standards for fair trial," the coalition said. "We believe the charges against him were brought solely to punish him for exercising his internationally recognized right to freedom of expression and for his peaceful work as a civil society activist."

In a meeting on Monday in Ashgabat with Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the chair-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Turkmen President Saparmurad Niazov promised that Tukhbatullin "will be released soon."

The human rights organizations have approached the UN Deputy High Commissioner on Human Rights, who will be going to Ashgabat on 10 March, and are urging him to raise the case with the Turkmen authorities and to hold Niazov to his promise.

### **Background**

Tukhbatullin, 41, is co-chair of the Ecological Club in his home town Dashoguz, in Northern Turkmenistan. He was convicted on charges of illegally crossing the border from Uzbekistan into Turkmenistan (Article 214 of the Turkmen Criminal Code) and of concealing a serious criminal act (Article 210).

The Azadlyk District Court of Ashgabat, Turkmenistan's capital, handed down the sentence after

a four-hour trial at which no witnesses testified. During the hearing, the court apparently declined defense counsel's requests for exculpatory evidence to be reviewed.

The authorities denied access to the trial for a group of local and international monitors, and for several relatives. The only individuals admitted to the court were Farid Tukhbatullin's attorney and three family members.

The defense counsel plans to appeal the verdict.

The first charge against Farid Tukhbatullin relates to an incident when Turkmen border guards for unknown reasons failed to stamp his passport upon his return from Uzbekistan. The latter charge concerns Farid Tukhbatullin's attendance of an international conference organized by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and Memorial Human Rights Centre, which was devoted to rights issues ranging from freedom of expression to the rights of the child. Farid Tukhbatullin was accused of refusing to disclose information about plans of exiled opposition groups to carry out an armed coup which, according to the authorities, were discussed at the conference.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, the International League for Human Rights, and the Memorial Human Rights Centre-whose delegates attended the conference-state that discussions at the conference forum did not include the violent overthrow of the government.

**Press contact:**

**At Amnesty International: Judit Arenas, + 44 20 7413 5810 or +44 7778 472 188 (mobile)**

**At Human Rights Watch: Rachel Denber, +1-212-216-2166 or +1-917-916-1266 (mobile)**

**At the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights: Aaron Rhodes, + 43 676635.6612**

**At the International League for Human Rights: Peter Zalmayev, +1-212-661-0480 x100**

**At Memorial Human Rights Center: Vitaly Ponomarev, + 7 910 424 5806.**

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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