

EXTERNAL

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Possible prisoner of conscience/
Fear for safety

4 November 1997

TURKMENISTANYovshan ANNAKURBANOV, independent journalist
(_____ in Russian)

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of independent journalist Yovshan Annakurbanov, arrested by officers of the Turkmen Committee of National Security (KNB) at the international airport on 30 October 1997. Yovshan Annakurbanov was due to attend a training seminar with *Radio Liberty* in Prague.

He is currently detained in the investigation prison of the Turkmen Committee of National Security (KNB). No charges have reportedly been brought against him and he is not believed to have been given access to a defence lawyer.

Law enforcement officials at the airport claimed to have found a computer diskette, containing material by the political opposition in Turkmenistan, in the luggage of Yovshan Annakurbanov. At the time of the search, however, they reportedly failed to find anything.

Yovshan Annakurbanov worked as a freelance journalist for *Radio Liberty* until 26 June 1997 when death threats from officers of the KNB forced him to stop.

Two officers reportedly visited his home to warn him that "*Something could happen*" to him or his children if he did not stop contributing to the radio station's "provocation's". He was reportedly told "*It would be a shame if something should happen to you*".

Yovshan Annakurbanov has previous convictions for political offences (see below) though he maintains his work for *Radio Liberty* has not been of a political nature.

In 1991, Yovshan Annakurbanov lost his post at the presidential press centre due to his involvement in a group opposed to the August 1991 coup d'etat in Moscow against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. The Turkmenistan President, Saparamurad Niyazov, was believed to have supported the coup. Since 1993, Yovshan Annakurbanov has been prevented from publishing his writings in the country. On 25 July 1995, Yovshan Annakurbanov was arrested for participating in a peaceful demonstration in protest at economic hardships and convicted of "malicious hooliganism". He was released on 11 January 1996.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since becoming independent in 1991, Turkmenistan has developed a political climate which stifles fundamental human rights. The government makes no secret of its disrespect for international human rights norms, arguing that certain individual rights and freedoms are expendable because they threaten the implementation of policies intended to resolve the country's social and economic problems within the first decade of independence.

Amnesty International continues to monitor a pattern of human rights violations by the Turkmenistan government. These include the sentencing of government opponents to long prison terms following conviction of apparently fabricated criminal offences; the arrest and ill-treatment of people involved in organized or spontaneous anti-government protests; apparently unwarranted incarceration of opposition activists in psychiatric hospitals; ill-treatment by police in prisons; and extensive use of the death penalty.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian, English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrest of Yovshan Annakurbanov on 30 October 1997;
- urging that he be protected from any form of ill-treatment and that he be allowed immediate access to his family and legal representatives;
- requesting clarification of the criminal charges being brought against Yovshan Annakurbanov;
- noting that the Turkmenistan government has been known to fabricate criminal charges against people in order, it appears, to punish their non-violent opposition to the government and who may, therefore, be prisoners of conscience;
- stating that should he be detained solely for exercising his fundamental right to freedom of opinion and expression that he should be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

1. President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Atayevich Niyazov
Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
Apparat Prezidenta
Prezidentu Turkmenistana
NIYAZOVU S.A.

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, Prezidentu Niyazovu

Faxes: + 993 1 or 7 3632 followed by 35 51 12 or 35 45 34 (it can be difficult to get a connection)

Salutation: Dear President Niyazov

2. Procurator General of Turkmenistan, Gurbanbibi Atajanova (Ms)
Turkmenistan

g. Ashgabat
ul. Seidi, 4
Prokuratura Turkmenistana
Generalnomu prokuroru
ATAJANOVY G B.

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, Gen. prokuroru

Faxes: + 993 1 or 7 3632 followed by 35 44 82

Salutation: Dear Procurator General

3. Chairman of the Supreme Court, Ysa Rakhmonov
Turkmenistan

744000 Ashgabat
prospekt Saparmurad Turkmenbashi, 18
Verkhovny Sud Turkmenistana
Predsedatelyu RAKHMANOVU Y.

Telegrams: Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, Verkhovny sud, Presedatelyu

Salutation: Dear Chairman

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Boris Shikhmyradov
Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
pr. Magtymguly, 83
MID Turkmenistana
Ministru SHIKHMYRADOVU B.

Faxes: + 993 1 or 7 3632 followed by 51 14 30 or 25 37 27 (it can be difficult to get a connection)

and to diplomatic representatives of TURKMENISTAN accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 December 1997.