

PUBLIC

AI Index: EUR 62/003/2002

29 January 2002

Further information on EXTRA 91/00 (EUR 62/24/00, 13 December 2000) and follow-up (EUR 62/010/2001, 1 August 2001) - Death penalty/Fear of imminent execution/Torture/ill-treatment

UZBEKISTAN Vazgen Arutyunyants (m), aged 24
 Armen Garushyants (m), aged 24

After more than a year and a half on death row, Vazgen Arutyunyants and Armen Garushyants have had their death sentences commuted. According to unofficial sources, their death sentences have been replaced by 10-year prison terms.

The commutation follows pressure from local and international human rights groups, and an intervention by the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

The two men were reportedly told on 15 January that their sentences had been reversed following a decision by the board of the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan at the end of December 2001. That evening both men were taken from their death row cells in Tashkent prison to board a train for Andijan prison colony in the east of Uzbekistan.

When Vazgen Arutyunyants's mother Irina met her son at the train station in Tashkent that day, he still could not believe that he would live. She told Amnesty International: "Vazgen could have been executed any day. Whenever the guards opened the door of his cell, he was prepared to be executed. When they led him out of the cell on 15 January, he thought they were taking him to the execution. When I met him at the train station he was shivering. He still couldn't believe that he would live. From now on we are going to celebrate 15 January as his second birthday."

In a letter to Amnesty International Irina Arutyunyants wrote: "Thanks to you and your work the board of the Supreme Court passed the decision about the commutation of my son's death sentence. I thank God that you were with me and my son at such a difficult time in our lives. My gratitude for that is boundless. Let God provide you and your families with health and well being. You have saved my son's life and life is invaluable. With love and respect, Arutyunyants Irina, the mother of the saved Vazgen Arutyunyants, born in 1977."

Vazgen Arutyunyants and Armen Garushyants had been sentenced to death in May 2000, convicted of charges including premeditated, aggravated murder and robbery. Vazgen Arutyunyants maintained his innocence and stated that after he was arrested in July 1999, police in the Yakkasaraysk district of Tashkent had beaten him severely in an apparent attempt to extract a confession. When Vazgen's father came to see him shortly afterwards, he was reportedly severely bruised and unable to stand. He also suffered from headaches and kidney pain, and had blood in his urine. The investigating officer reportedly told Vazgen's father that he would be executed. To spare his wife, Vazgen's father did not tell her what he had seen and heard, and later committed suicide, apparently because he could not live with the burden of knowing what had happened to his son.

Thank you to all who wrote appeals. No further action is needed from the Urgent Action network.