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## **Chinese crackdown on Uighur writers continues as web editor jailed**

An ethnic Uighur website manager who was sentenced to seven years in jail in China after a secret trial is the latest in a series of Uighur writers imprisoned for peaceful expression of cultural or political views, Amnesty International said today.

Tursunjan Hezim, a 38-year-old former history teacher, was reportedly detained shortly after the 5 July, 2009 protests in Urumqi in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), which turned violent after police cracked down on initially peaceful protesters.

His family was never informed of the charges against him and his whereabouts remain unknown. The government has not publicly stated the grounds for his detention.

"This trial is typical of the way the Chinese government has worked in secrecy to persecute Uighurs in China for peaceful expression of their views," said Catherine Baber, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific deputy director.

"If Hezim faces recognizably criminal charges, the Chinese government should put him on trial with due process. Otherwise, he should be released immediately."

Tursunjan Hezim ran a popular Uighur-language website, Orkhun, until it was shut down shortly after the July 2009 protests.

The Orkhun website mainly featured scholarly articles on Uighur history and culture and was an important resource for Uighur intellectuals and students.

Hezim's family learned of his sentence, handed down by the Aksu district court, last July, but it has only recently become widely known.

"These secret trials are creating an atmosphere of terror for Uighur intellectuals and writers living in China, where the government has detained people after secret trials for speaking or posting articles online about Uighur culture or history, or publicizing peaceful political activity," said Catherine Baber.

A series of Uighur intellectuals and scholars have been targeted in the wake of the July 2009 unrest.

**Hairat Niyaz**, a Uighur journalist and website editor, is serving a 15-year prison sentence in an unknown location on charges of "endangering state security" for essays he had written prior to the July protests in Urumqi and for interviews he gave to Hong Kong journalists. This included one interview in which he reportedly criticized the government's "bilingual education" policy.

**Dilshat Paerhat**, the former editor of a Uighur website called Diyarim, was sentenced to five years

imprisonment last July for “endangering state security”.

Two other men who run Uighur-language websites were tried and convicted on the same day, also for the crime of “endangering state security”.

**Nureli**, an administrator on the Salkin site, was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment and **Nijat Azat**, who ran a website called Shabnam, was given an eight-year prison sentence.

The lack of information provided to families of detained individuals and the intimidation against detainees’ families and lawyers means there is little information on the legal process and detention of these individuals.