

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: EUR 61/003/2009
11 May 2009

A long-standing possible prisoner of conscience released in Turkmenistan

Mukhametkuli Aymuradov, considered to be a possible prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International, was released on 2 May 2009 after his term in prison had expired. He is currently with his family in the capital city of Ashgabat.

However, Amnesty International is concerned that many other people continue to be imprisoned unfairly in Turkmenistan. These include prisoners of conscience and human rights activists, Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhev, and dozens of cases of enforced disappearances, including the brothers Boris and Konstantin Shikhmuradov.

Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhev and their co-defendant Ogulsapar Muradova were sentenced to terms of imprisonment in August 2006 after being convicted on firearms charges widely believed to have been fabricated. Amnesty International adopted the three as prisoners of conscience, believing that they were targeted because of their human rights activities. Ogulsapar Muradova died in custody in September 2006 and to date there has been no prompt, independent, thorough, and impartial investigation into her death.

Brothers Boris and Konstantin Shikhmuradov and dozens of other people have been subjected to enforced disappearance in Turkmenistan after having been sentenced to long-term imprisonment for their alleged involvement in an armed attack on then President Niyazov in 2002. The authorities continue to withhold information about the whereabouts of this group of prisoners; deny them all access to families and independent bodies including the International Committee of the Red Cross and refuse to respond to allegations that at least eight of them died in custody. There were rumours that two of them, Boris Shikhmuradov and Batyr Berdyev, had died. However, in September 2007 President Berdymukhamedov reportedly said that he was positive they were alive. This is the only piece of information that gives the two men's relatives hope.

In 1995 Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and his co-defendant Khoshali Garayev were convicted of anti-state crimes and sentenced to 15 and 12 years' imprisonment respectively in an unfair trial. The two men were reportedly punished solely because of associations with exiled opponents of the government of Turkmenistan. In December 1998 the two men were sentenced to an additional 18 years' imprisonment for an alleged prison escape attempt. In September 1999 the family of Khoshali Garayev was informed of his death in prison which to date remains unexplained.

Amnesty International urges the Turkmenistani authorities to take action on all the above-mentioned cases, including by:

- Reviewing the allegations of unfair trial in the case of Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and ensuring that he receives reparation, including compensation, for the violation of his right to fair trial if allegations that his trial was not in line with the international standards of fairness would be confirmed.
- Immediately and unconditionally releasing all prisoners of conscience, including Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhev, human rights activists who were associated with the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation.

- Ensuring that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out into the death of Khoshali Garayev and Ogulsapar Muradova and making public the scope, methods and findings of the investigations, and bringing anyone suspected of involvement in human rights violations to justice.
- Immediately revealing the fate and whereabouts of dozens of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearance after having been sentenced to long-term imprisonments for their alleged involvement in an armed attack on the former President Niyazov in 2002. These people should be retried in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness and to which international trial observers have access.

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