

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 61/006/2007 (Public)  
News Service No: 021  
8 February 2007

**Embargo Date: 8 February 2007 00:01 GMT**

### **Turkmenistan: 13 recommendations to new President to address abysmal human rights record**

Ahead of elections on 11 February, Amnesty International issued today a list of recommendations calling on the next President of Turkmenistan to put an end to stifling freedom of expression, arbitrary detention and torture, and unfair trials, as well as violations of social and economic rights.

"Turning into reality the pre-election promise to provide internet access for all would be a welcome move. However, a lot more needs to be done -- all media remains state-controlled, internet access is closely monitored by the Ministry of National Security, and human rights activists are detained or at risk of reprisals. Freedom of expression and association is a crucial prerequisite for the active engagement of civil society," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The new President and his government should promptly initiate reforms to bring Turkmenistan's laws and practices in line with the country's obligations under international human rights law."

The regime of the late President Saparmurad Niyazov ruthlessly repressed any form of peaceful dissent. Dissidents were tortured and imprisoned after unfair trials or forced into exile. People were dismissed from their jobs and barred from travelling abroad simply because they were related to a dissident while the authorities targeted human rights defenders, portraying their activities as "treason" and "espionage". The subordination of executive, legislative and judicial powers to the President was key to the failure to address impunity or counter the widespread abuse of human rights.

As a first step, Amnesty International calls on the new authorities in Turkmenistan to release immediately all prisoners of conscience and to appropriately address all other cases included in a compilation published by Amnesty International. The cases draw attention to people put behind bars solely for peacefully expressing their rights; to those who have been imprisoned for many years following unfair trials, and to those who have been tortured or ill-treated.

Ogulsapar Muradova, a human rights activists, was detained in June 2006, sentenced to six years' imprisonment in an unfair trial in August and died in suspicious circumstances shortly afterwards. Despite worldwide international pressure the authorities have not conducted a thorough and impartial investigation into her death and her two co-defendants remain in prison. Amnesty International believes that the three were targeted to punish them for their peaceful work as human rights defenders.

Further steps should include the retrial in fair proceedings of the dozens of people convicted in connection with the November 2002 alleged assassination attempt on President Niyazov; the lifting of travel restrictions imposed on dissidents and their relatives; and effective investigations into allegations of torture and other ill-treatment in detention and punishing the perpetrators.

Amnesty International calls on the new authorities in Turkmenistan to comply with their international obligations and implement the recommendations issued by international human rights bodies.

"We urge Turkmenistan to open its doors to the special procedures of the United Nations and other international human rights monitors", said Nicola Duckworth.

**Background information:**

According to official reports, President Niyazov died early on 21 December 2006 of cardiac arrest. The same day the State Security Council and the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Health and Medical Industries Kurbanguly Berdymukhammedov as acting President. President Niyazov's constitutionally designated successor, the chairman of the *Mejlis* (Parliament), was dismissed the same day and criminal charges were reportedly brought against him.

On 26 December the *Halk Maslahaty* (People's Council) approved the nomination of the acting President and another five candidates for Presidential elections due to take place on 11 February 2007. All are members of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, the only registered party in the country. The interim government ignored calls by exiled opposition groups to allow opposition leaders to run in the Presidential elections.

As a party to a number of United Nations (UN) human rights treaties, Turkmenistan is obligated to uphold key human rights principles. As a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Turkmenistan is bound to uphold its commitments with regard to the "human dimension", which include the prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention, the right to a fair trial, freedom of thought, conscience, religious or belief, freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

In recent years the UN Commission for Human Rights and the UN General Assembly have adopted resolutions deploring the human rights situation in Turkmenistan. In October 2006 the UN Secretary General, reporting to the UN General Assembly, concluded that "gross and systematic violations of human rights continued in [Turkmenistan]".

**See:**

*Amnesty International's recommendations to the new government of Turkmenistan*, AI Index: EUR 61/005/2007, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur610052007>

*Turkmenistan: Victims Need Justice now - a Compilation of Cases*, AI Index: EUR61/004/2007, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engeur610042007>

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