

6 March 2006

TACTICAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST TORTURE

End torture and incarceration of prisoners of conscience in Uzbekistan

Summary

Human rights activist Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov has been reportedly sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in Uzbekistan after a secret trial held in early January 2006. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and continues to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Feature

Human rights activist Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov has been reportedly sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in Uzbekistan after a secret trial held in early January 2006. He was convicted of several charges, including "slander" and "spreading information with the aim of causing panic". His current whereabouts are unknown and his family are distraught and fear for his safety. Amnesty International considers Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov a prisoner of conscience and continues to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov is the chairperson of the human rights group Apelliatsia (Appeal). He was monitoring events in the eastern city of Andizhan, including a trial and public protests. The protests escalated on 12-13 May 2005, resulting in security forces allegedly opening fire indiscriminately into a crowd of mainly unarmed civilians, killing hundreds and wounding many others. Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov's account of the events was cited by the international media and contrasted starkly with the official version.

He has been held incommunicado for most of the time since he was arbitrarily detained on 21 May 2005. Neither his relatives nor his lawyer were present during his trial. The court verdict and sentence were not officially disclosed until February 2006.

Uzbekistan has a long history of subjecting people to torture and other ill-treatment, including in the name of national security. Common techniques used include beatings, suffocation with a plastic bag, sticking needles under fingernails and toenails, burning hands and feet, and administering electric shocks.

Since September 2001, torture and other ill-treatment have also been carried out in the name of the "war on terror". The United Nations Human Rights Committee has stressed that the highest authorities in Uzbekistan must denounce the use of torture and ill-treatment, but to date, President Islam Karimov has failed to honour his promise to do so.

Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov and other human rights defenders and journalists who AI believes to have detained or imprisoned solely for reporting human rights violations should be released immediately. President Karimov must stop the widespread human rights violations being carried out in the name of the "war on terror" and once and for all denounce torture and ill-treatment.

Uzbekistan: Release human rights activist sentenced to seven years in jail

Since the killing of hundreds of people during protests in Andizhan, Uzbekistan, in May 2005 the government has cracked down heavily on civil society. The safety of human rights defenders who have tried, at great personal risk, to speak out against human rights violations in the country, is of particular concern.

Human rights activist Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov has been reportedly sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in Uzbekistan after a secret trial held in early January 2006. He was convicted of several charges, including "slander" and "spreading information with the aim of causing panic". His current whereabouts are unknown and his family are distraught and fear for his safety. Uzbekistan has a long history of subjecting individuals to torture and other ill-treatment, including in the name of national security, and, since September 2001, in the name of the "war on terror".

Amnesty International considers Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov a prisoner of conscience and continues to call for his immediate and unconditional release.

The sentencing of Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov confirms fears that the Uzbekistani authorities are continuing to prevent human rights defenders and journalists from carrying out their legitimate and peaceful work, in particular, those who have tried to publicize the apparent indiscriminate and excessive use of force by security forces in Andizhan.

Take action!

Write to President Islam Karimov of the Republic of Uzbekistan:

- Urging that Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov and other human rights defenders and journalists, who AI believes to have been imprisoned solely for reporting human rights violations, be released immediately.
- Calling on the government to stop human rights violations being carried out in the name of the "war on terror".
- Urging President Islam Karimov to publicly condemn torture and ill-treatment.

Find out more about the [killings in Andizhan](#)

Letter

Dear President Karimov,

I am deeply concerned by reports that Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov was sentenced on 5 January 2006 to seven years' imprisonment after a secret trial at which neither his family nor his lawyer were present. Additionally, the judgement rendered in his case was not made public. This constitutes a grave violation of Uzbekistan's international obligations to ensure fair trials, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov was arbitrarily detained on 21 May 2005 and has been held incommunicado for most of the time since then and there are grave concerns for his safety.

I wish to remind you that human rights defenders have a right to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Amnesty International considers Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for carrying out his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. I appeal to you to ensure his immediate release.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture has described the use of torture and ill-treatment in Uzbekistan as "systematic" and called upon the highest authorities to take action. Your immediate and public condemnation of torture and other ill-treatment in your country would be a significant first step and I ask you to do this.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,
