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Human Rights Defenders in Eurasia

In five countries, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Turkey, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan, AI has ongoing concerns about the harassment, detention and imprisonment of human rights (HR) defenders and civil society activists.

Human rights defenders' peaceful actions to protect and promote human rights are a vital safeguard against human rights abuses; abuses which are too often committed with impunity in societies in transition. Often local HR defenders are crucial sources of information in countries where access for international observers is restricted.

By exposing the actions and policies of their governments, or their failure to protect from abuses by non-state actors, HR defenders face a high risk of becoming victims of human rights abuses themselves.

Take action to defend the defenders in Belarus, Turkmenistan, Turkey, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan.

Belarus

Belarusian authorities have become intolerant of any public criticism and dissent. They increasingly employ harassment, intimidation, excessive force, mass detentions and long-term imprisonment as methods to quash the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Most human rights non-governmental organizations have now been closed down.

The Belarusian Helsinki Committee (BHC)

BHC is the last remaining registered national human rights organization in Belarus. Since January 2004 the organization has sustained continuous harassment: being charged with tax evasion and libel (charges which have now either been dropped or cleared in court), violation of regulations and that it was without a legal address. If BHC receives another warning before January 2006, the organization might be closed down.

Take action

Urge the President of Belarus to:

- stop the deliberate pattern of obstruction, harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders, by closures and threats thereof, of NGOs directly and indirectly engaged in the promotion and defence of human rights in Belarus
- adhere to the principles of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders

President of the Republic of Belarus, Alyaksandr G. LUKASHENKA, Karl Marx Str. 38, 220016 g. Minsk, Belarus, Fax +375 (172) 26 06 10 or +375 (172) 22 38 72, E-mail: pres@president.gov.by

or send a letter directly through his web-site: www.president.gov.by/eng/president/mail.shtml

Turkmenistan

There has been a clampdown on dissent and religious freedom, creating related issues of concern including unfair trials, torture, ill-treatment and incommunicado detention of dozens of political prisoners. Family members have been targeted with actions including house evictions, confiscation of property and job losses. Most international human rights monitors and foreign journalists have been refused access to the country.

Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev

On 3 January 2004 Gurbandurdy Durdykulyev sent a letter urging the government to authorize a peaceful two-day demonstration. On 13 February 2004 he was taken from his house to a psychiatric hospital where he was forcibly confined. His wife was reportedly told that if she informed the foreign media about her husband's case she would not be allowed to visit him; she has frequently been denied access to see him.

Take action

Write to President Saparmurad Niyazov requesting Gurbandurdy Durdykulyev's immediate and unconditional release.

President Saparmurad Niyazov:

744000 g. Ashgabat, Apparat Prezidenta, Prezidentu Turkmenistana, NIYAZOVU S.A. ,
TURKMENISTAN, Faxes: + 993 12 35 51 12

Salutation: 'Dear President'

Turkey

Despite recent legal and constitutional reforms in Turkey, human rights defenders continue to be targeted for harassment and intimidation by state officials, and their activities are still restricted through a huge number of laws and regulations. Demonstrations are often dispersed with excessive use of force by police.

Rıdvan Kızgın

Rıdvan Kızgın, chairman of the Human Rights Association's (İnsan Hakları Derneği – İHD) branch in Bingöl, a city in Eastern Turkey, has been subjected to harassment and threats intended to hinder him in his work as a human rights defender. Since 2001 over 47 court cases have been launched against him, most recently charges of "insulting the state", and for sending a letter to government officials featuring the word *Cewlik*, which is the Kurdish name for Bingöl.

Take action

Urge the President of Turkey to:

- take steps to extend protection in law to all human rights defenders and allow them to pursue unhindered the monitoring and reporting of human rights issues in Turkey
- work with HR defenders and NGOs to implement the UN Declaration on HR Defenders, so that HR defenders, NGOs and other civil society activists can carry out their activities without fear for their safety

Mr Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Office of the Prime Minister, Başbakanlık, 06573 Ankara, Turkey

Fax: + 90 312 417 0476, **Email:** tayyiperdogan@rterdogan.com

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Russia

The Russian authorities have attempted to restrict the gathering and dissemination of information about the human rights situation in the North Caucasus. Human rights defenders and activists have themselves increasingly become victims of serious human rights violations.

Take action

The Russian-Chechen Friendship Society

Experiencing a campaign of harassment and prosecution.

Uzbekistan

Freedom of expression is under threat in Uzbekistan following the events on 13 May 2005 in Andizhan. Scores of independent civil society activists have been targeted and harassed by the authorities. They have been subjected to physical assaults, beatings, threats, arbitrary

arrests, being forcibly confined to their houses, with phone lines being cut off, being charged with criminal activities and sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

Five activists from Andizhan

Between 28 May and 2 June 2005 five human rights activists from Andizhan were detained for being in possession of a statement on the Andizhan events, published by the secular opposition party, Birlik (Unity). Dilmurod Muhiddinov, Musozhon Bobozhonov, Muhammadkodir Otakhonov, Nurmukhammad Azizov and Akbar Oripov were charged with “infringement of the constitutional order”, “forming a criminal group” and “preparation and distribution of materials containing a threat to public order and security”. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate release.

Take action

Write to the President of Uzbekistan urging him to release Dilmurod Muhiddinov, Musozhon Bobozhonov, Muhammadkodir Otakhonov, Nurmukhammad Azizov and Akbar Oripov immediately.

President (Kyrgyzstan)

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Salutation: Dear President