

EXTERNAL

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EXTRA 32/97

Fear of refoulement /
Possible prisoner of conscience

11 March 1997

RUSSIA/TAJIKISTAN

Akhmadzhon Makhmudzhanovich SAIDOV
(????????? ?????????????????? ?????? in Russian)

Akhmadzhon Saidov, a retired army officer and former deputy speaker of the parliament of Tajikistan, is reported to be at serious risk of *refoulement* to Tajikistan where he is wanted on a possibly politically motivated charge. Amnesty International fears that if deported to Tajikistan Akhmadzhon Saidov may become a prisoner of conscience.

Akhmadzhon Saidov was Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Soviet (parliament) of Tajikistan from 1991 to 1992. He claims that his resignation in late 1992 was in protest at abuse of efforts to organize a national reconciliation government at the height of the civil war in Tajikistan, and the appointment of a former convicted criminal as Interior Minister. He alleges that his subsequent complaints, as a member of parliament, about misuse of state property by the Interior Ministry led to harassment of himself and his family by law enforcement officials. Consequently he left Tajikistan in 1994 and settled with his family in Moscow.

In August 1996 a warrant for Akhmadzhon Saidov's arrest was issued in Tajikistan on charges of "abuse of authority" and "embezzlement". There are strong suspicions that the charges are fabricated, and that the true motive for bringing them is to punish Akhmadzhon Saidov for his perceived connection to a group of former senior Tajik government members who announced the formation of a new political grouping, the National Revival Bloc, at a press conference in Moscow days before the warrant was issued. Notably, the charges reportedly relate to the period when Akhmadzhon Saidov was deputy parliamentary chairman, and there had apparently been no previous attempt to bring charges against him in the almost four years since he resigned that position. On the basis of the warrant, Akhmadzhon Saidov was arrested in Moscow on 7 February 1997. He is currently detained in Moscow and is fighting extradition with the assistance of a lawyer and with the support of human rights activists in Russia. However, sources in Moscow have indicated that a decision on his extradition may be taken very soon by the responsible Russian authorities, and as much international pressure as possible is needed to try to prevent this.

Akhmadzhon Saidov was born in Uzbekistan and is ethnically Uzbek. He served in the Soviet army in Russia before being posted to Tajikistan, where he ran for election to the Supreme Soviet in 1990. Having left Tajikistan in 1994, the matter of his current citizenship is unresolved. He is laying claim to Russian citizenship, which, if confirmed, might significantly increase his chances of resisting extradition.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peace talks on ending the civil war and opposition insurgency in Tajikistan have made significant progress since December 1996, with a number of accords having been reached in principle on achieving national reconciliation. The National Revival Bloc, having declared itself a "third force" in Tajik politics following its foundation in July 1996 and having demanded to be party to the peace negotiations, has remained marginalized and has been kept out of

the negotiations between the Government of Tajikistan and the United Tajik Opposition.

Akhmadzhon Saidov is the fourth person from Tajikistan within the past year to have been arrested in Moscow on the basis of warrants issued in Tajikistan allegedly because the wanted person is perceived to be a government opponent. In the three previous cases the detained person was eventually released by the Russians (their periods in custody ranged from one day to one month), one because of considerable international pressure and the others reportedly because the Tajik side did not satisfy the provisions of the convention regulating extraditions between Russia and Tajikistan.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in Russian, English or your own language:

To the office of the Procurator General

- urging the Russian authorities not to extradite Akhmadzhon Saidov to Tajikistan, on the grounds that the criminal charge on which he is sought by Tajik authorities may be a politically motivated fabrication, and if returned to Tajikistan he may become a prisoner of conscience.

To the Presidential Commission on Citizenship

- urging that urgent consideration be given to the claim by Akhmadzhon Saidov to Russian citizenship.

APPEALS TO:

1. The head of the extradition department at the Office of the Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Leonid Yermolayev

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya

103793 g. Moskva K-31

ul. Dimitrovka, d.15a

Prokuratura Rossiyskoy Federatsii

Mezhdunarodnoe pravovoe upravlenie, otdel ekstraditsii

Nachalniku YERMOLAYEVU L.V.

Telegrams: Yermolayevu L.V. otdel ekstraditsii, Prokuratura RF, 103760 Moskva, Rossiya

Faxes: +7 095 292 8562

Salutation: Dear Mr Yermolayev

2. The Chair of the Commission on Citizenship under the President of the Russian Federation (name unknown)

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya

g. Moskva

Kreml

Apparat Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii

Komissiya po voprosam grazhdanstva pri Prezidente

Telegrams: Predsedatelyu, komissiya po grazhdanstva, Kreml, Moskva, Rossiya

Faxes: +7 095 206 51 73

Salutation: Dear Chairman

COPIES TO:

The Procurator General of the Russian Federation, Yury Skuratov

Rossiyskaya Federatsiya

103793 g. Moskva K-31

ul. Dimitrovka, d.15a

Prokuratura Rossiyskoy Federatsii

Generalnomu prokuroru Skuratovu Yu.

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The Procurator General of the Republic of Tajikistan, Salomiddin SHAROPOV

Respublika Tajikistan

734022 g. Dushanbe

prospekt A. Sino, 126

Prokuratura Respubliki Tajikistan

Generalnomu prokuroru

SHAROPOVU S.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, Talbak NAZAROV

Respublika Tajikistan

734051 g. Dushanbe

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Ministru NAZAROVU T.

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and to diplomatic representatives of RUSSIA and TAJIKISTAN accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 April 1997.