

Russia extradites, Uzbekistan abuses

Date: 03/08/2007

Index: EUR 46/032/2007

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, co-operation between former members, Russia and Uzbekistan, has been increasingly influenced by concerns about regional security and the "war on terror".

Amnesty International (AI) has documented numerous cases of people who have been forcibly returned to Uzbekistan from Russia as alleged members of banned Islamic groups. These people have then been held in incommunicado detention, tortured and otherwise ill-treated, convicted after unfair trials and sometimes sentenced to lengthy prison terms or death.

The Uzbekistani authorities continue to make extradition requests for those they suspect of involvement in the Andizhan events in May 2005. Hundreds of people were killed when security forces fired on mainly peaceful demonstrators. Such extraditions demonstrate that the Russian government is disregarding its obligations under international law not to return anyone to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations.

Rustam Muminov, an Uzbekistani who lived in the Russian Federation since 2000, was forcibly deported from the country in October 2006. He was deported despite the fact that he had applied for refugee status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and that the General Prosecutor of the Russian Federation had in September 2006 decided he could not be extradited to Uzbekistan.

The case received wide media coverage and was the focus of campaigning by AI and others. It is perhaps due to this attention that criminal charges were brought against the head of the Moscow detention centre for foreigners, where Rustam Muminov was kept prior to being deported. In May 2007, he was found guilty of exceeding official powers when he allowed the deportation to go ahead. However, by that time, Rustam Muminov had already been sentenced to five-and-a-half years of imprisonment in Uzbekistan.

AI has recently learned about further cases of possible forcible return to Uzbekistan. Dilshod Kurbanov and Mukhamadsolikh Matiakubovich Abutov are both held in detention in Russia awaiting decisions on their status.

Dilshod Kurbanov has lived in the Russian Federation since 2003. He was detained on 30 May in the Tula Region of the Russian Federation and was taken to the Police Department for organized crimes. He is now being held in a pre-trial detention centre in the city of Novomoskovskoe 2. He had recently applied for recognition as a refugee to the UNHCR, which has not yet reached a decision.

Dilshod Kurbanov says he was persecuted in Uzbekistan because of his devout religious beliefs. He was questioned by police on several occasions about members of the banned Islamic party Hizb-ut-Tahrir. He says that, in 2002, he learned that his name was on a police list of alleged terrorists. When he was told that police had gone to his parents' house, to take him away for questioning, he decided to leave the country for Russia.

Mukhamadsolikh Matiakubovich Abutov's house in Uzbekistan was searched in January 2007 and the police took away religious literature in order to check it for "extremist content". Mukhamadsolikh Abutov had been imprisoned in Uzbekistan in the 1990s on what he says were fabricated charges. Fearing he would again be denied a fair trial and imprisoned, he left Uzbekistan for Russia in February.

Before he could approach the authorities to seek protection as a refugee, he was detained by what seem to have been members of the Uzbekistani Security Service on 13 June outside his apartment in Krasnogorsk, Moscow Region, and handed over to the local police department. He applied for refugee status with the UNHCR, but the police refused to hand over his application.

On 26 June, the city court in Krasnogorsk ordered his detention to continue, so that he could be deported to Uzbekistan. He was transferred to a pre-trial detention centre in the town of Mozhaisk, in the Moscow Region, the following day from where he was able to apply for asylum in the Russian Federation. No decision on his status has yet been taken.

AI is concerned that, despite overwhelming evidence that torture is systematic in Uzbekistan, the Russian authorities have claimed on several occasions that civil rights are protected in Uzbekistan. AI strongly condemns any state action that seeks to undermine the basic principles of international refugee protection.