



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TURKMENISTAN: APPEAL CASES

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Mukhametkuli Aymuradov transferred back to extremely harsh prison conditions

Amnesty International (AI) is concerned that the longstanding possible prisoner of conscience Mukhametkuli Aymuradov has been transferred back to the maximum-security prison in Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk). The prison is known for its particularly harsh conditions and Mukhametkuli Aymuradov is reportedly not allowed any walks in fresh air. The reason reportedly given by the authorities for his transfer was an alleged violation of prison rules at his previous place of detention, but AI believes this charge may have been fabricated, and is calling for his immediate and unconditional release.

Mukhametkuli Aymuradov, now 59 and married with two children and two grandchildren, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in 1995 after a reportedly unfair trial on unsubstantiated charges of conspiracy against the State. He received an additional prison term of 18 years in 1998, allegedly for having broken prison rules. The death in custody of his co-defendant Khoshali Garayev in unexplained circumstances in September 1999 has heightened Amnesty International's concern for Mukhametkuli Aymuradov's safety.

Photo: Mukhametkuli AYMURADOV
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Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Khoshali Garayev were originally arrested while in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in October 1994, and forcibly removed to Turkmenistan by members of the Turkmen Committee for National Security, the local equivalent of the KGB. On 21 June 1995 the two men were convicted of anti-state crimes including "attempted terrorism" in a closed session of the Judicial Collegium for Criminal Cases at the Supreme Court of Turkmenistan. There was no substantiated evidence that either of the men was guilty of the charges brought against them, or had used or advocated violence, and AI believes that there is compelling circumstantial evidence to support allegations that the two had been punished solely because of their association with exiled opponents of the government of Turkmenistan.

On 10 December 1998 both men were sentenced to an additional 18 years' imprisonment, five years to be spent in a maximum security prison. The charges included "disrupting the normal working of a penal institution" under Article 213 of the Turkmen Criminal Code. The new sentences related to an alleged prison escape attempt in October 1998. There have been credible and persistent allegations that the 'escape attempt' was orchestrated by the authorities to avoid the possibility of the two being transferred, under the terms of their original sentence, from the maximum security regime in Turkmenbashi to a less restrictive one. During the investigation a lawyer assigned to Mukhametkuli Aymuradov was allowed only very limited access to him.

Late in 2003, after he had served several years in the maximum-security prison in Turkmenbashi, he was moved to a detention centre in the town of Tedzhen, more than 200km to the east of Ashgabat, where the regime was classified as less harsh. However, in May or June 2004 he was transferred back to the prison in Turkmenbashi, reportedly as a punishment for having "violated prison rules", for three years. His wife was not told of the move, and only

¹ Please use this Appeal Case Sheet as the basis for your letter-writing and outreach until further notice.

learned of it through unofficial channels. Mukhametkuli Aymuradov is now in very poor health and his condition is reportedly getting worse. He is known to have had a gastric ulcer, cholecystitis, a heart attack and recurring inflammations of the kidneys and the bladder.

His wife last saw him in April 2004 when he was still at the Tedzhen location. Since then, she has been twice - on 25 June and 3 July - to the prison in Turkmenbashi but was not allowed to see her husband, nor to pass a food parcel to him. Even to reach the prison she has to travel more than 500km west from her home in Ashgabat. Prison officials told her that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov was "in quarantine" for two months, and no request for a visit could be heard until that period was over. Only on 13 August 2004 did she learn that she would be allowed to visit her husband. Meanwhile Mukhametkuli Aymuradov is confined indoors, with no walks or exercise outdoors.

AI is calling for the release of possible prisoner of conscience Mukhametkuli Aymuradov on the grounds that repeated calls for a fair trial have gone unheeded, and that there does not appear to be a prospect of his being given a fair trial. In addition the organisation is concerned about reports that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov's state of health is very poor and that he is denied appropriate medical treatment.

Political background:

Since Turkmenistan became independent after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, it has been dominated by President Saparmurad Niyazov. In addition to exercising total control of the country's political life he has created a bizarre personality cult around himself, styling himself *Turkmenbashi* ('father of all Turkmens'), with his portrait omnipresent in the country, and insisting on students and public servants knowing a large part of his own writings by heart.

Political dissent, religious minorities and civil society activists have been the targets of repeated waves of repression since independence. Persons regarded as critical of the regime have in many cases been subject to arbitrary arrest, to imprisonment following patently unfair trials, and to torture and ill-treatment. When prisoners have been released, they have in many cases been required to make statements acknowledging their 'guilt', begging forgiveness, and promising not to engage in further political activity.

International bodies have repeatedly expressed deep concern about the human rights situation in Turkmenistan. For example, on 16 April 2003 the United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted a resolution that urged Turkmenistan to grant access to international bodies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, to those arrested after the alleged assassination attempt on President Niyazov on 25 November 2002, and 'immediately and unconditionally [to] release all prisoners of conscience'. To date the government of Turkmenistan has failed to appropriately address the recommendations made by the international community.

Recommended actions:

Please send courteous letters in English, Russian, Turkmen or your own language (if you write in Russian it would be good to apologise for not writing in Turkmen, explaining that you do not know the language). If a voice answers on a fax number during office hours, repeat 'fax' until connected; fax machines are often switched off outside office hours - five hours ahead of GMT. If the fax does not work, please send your letter by post.

You should write:

- Expressing your concern that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov was transferred back to the particularly harsh conditions of the maximum-security prison in Turkmenbashi in May or June 2002 despite his extremely poor state of health;
- expressing your concern at allegations that the charge of having violated prison rules in Tedzhen was fabricated and served as a pretext for his transfer back to Turkmenbashi;
- expressing your concern that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov is in a poor state of health, and urge the authorities to ensure that he receives appropriate medical treatment;
- expressing your concern at reports that criminal charges against Mukhametkuli Aymuradov have been used solely as a pretext to punish him for his non-violent association with exiled opponents of the government of Turkmenistan. Such practice would be in violation of Articles 19 ('freedom of expression') and 22 ('freedom of association') of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Turkmenistan is a party;
- expressing your concern at allegations that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov was imprisoned following an unfair trial and that repeated calls by human rights organisations for a fair retrial have gone unheeded;
- expressing your concern that his wife and family members have been prevented from visiting him or sending him food and medication;
- stating that Amnesty International regards Mukhametkuli Aymuradov as a prisoner of conscience, and urges his immediate and unconditional release.

Please address your appeals to:

President **Saparmurad Niyazov:**

Respublika Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
Apparat Prezidenta
Prezidentu Turkmenistana
NIYAZOVU S.A.
TURKMENISTAN

Республика Туркменистан
744000 г Ашгабат
Аппарат Президента
Президенту Туркменистана
НИЯЗОВУ С.А.
ТУРКМЕНИСТАН

Faxes: + 993 12 35 51 12
Salutation: 'Dear President'

Foreign Minister **Rashit Ovezgeldiyevich Meredov:**

Respublika Turkmenistan
744000 g. Ashgabat
pr. Magtymguly, 83

Республика Туркменистан
744000 г. Ашгабат
пр. Магтымгулы, 83

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ministru Meredovu R O
TURKMENISTAN
Fax: +993 12 35 42 41, +993 12 39 28 50
E-mail: mfatm@online.tm
Salutation: 'Dear Minister'

Министерство иностранных дел
Министру Мередову Р.О.
ТУРКМЕНИСТАН

You may send copies to diplomatic representatives of Turkmenistan accredited to your country.

Optional:

You may also write (in Russian or Turkmen) to the **Director of the Prison** where Mukhametkuli Aymuradov is now held:

Respublika Turkmenistan
745000 Turkmenbashi
Uchrezhdeniye BL-T5
Director of the Prison
TURKMENISTAN

Республика Туркменистан
745000 г. Туркменбаши
Учреждение БЛ-Т5
Начальнику тюрьмы
ТУРКМЕНИСТАН

You can also send a letter to **Mukhametkuli Aymuradov** to give him moral support. Important: You may mention Amnesty International in your letters to him, but please be aware that correspondence from abroad will be subject to very strict control by the authorities, so do not raise any political issues. Write to:

Respublika Turkmenistan
745000 g. Turkmenbashi
Uchrezhdeniye 25/2
Zaklyuchennomu Aymuradovu,
Mukhametkuli
TURKMENISTAN

Республика Туркменистан
745000 г. Туркменбаши
Учреждение 25/2
Заключенному Аймурадову,
Мухаметкули
ТУРКМЕНИСТАН

Thank you for your support!

PLEASE SEND ANY REPLIES FROM THE TURKMEN AUTHORITIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (South Caucasus and Central Asia Research and Campaign Team, Amnesty International, 1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, United Kingdom)