

Uzbekistan: Mutabar Tadzhibaeva (f), human rights defender

Problem: Prisoner of Conscience

Mutabar Tadzhibaeva, chairwoman of the human rights organization Fiery Hearts Club, was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment in March 2006. She faced 13 charges, including "membership of an illegal organization" and "using funds from Western governments to prepare or distribute materials containing a threat to public order and security". Amnesty International considers Mutabar Tadzhibaeva to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for carrying out her human rights work.

It is believed that she was detained primarily to silence her over the events of 12-13 May 2005 in the city of Andizhan, when security forces fired on a crowd of mostly unarmed protesters, killing hundreds of people, including children.

Reportedly, the trial of Mutabar Tadzhibaeva fell short of international fair trial standards. During the investigation and the trial, Mutabar Tadzhibaeva was reportedly denied access to some of the case files and was not given sufficient time to read the materials that were available, or to consult with her lawyers.

Mutabar Tadzhibaeva made several petitions to the court, none of which were granted by the judge, Abdulaziz Yoldashev. Her request for her family to be present at her trial was allegedly refused by the judge on the grounds that they might intimidate the witnesses. Her lawyer was also forbidden to cross-examine the prosecution witnesses.

Some diplomatic representatives, journalists and human rights observers were allowed in to the trial eight days after it started. An eye-witness described how a barricade of concrete slabs was laid in the square in front of the court, topped with barbed wire. Road blocks were also allegedly set up in the approach to the small town, with passport-checks for all who sought to enter.

Mutabar Tadzhibaeva was being detained in the Women's Prison in Tashkent. According to the prison authorities she was transferred to the psychiatric wing of the prison in July for 10 days reportedly because she was suffering from severe stress following the appeal hearing. Her family and supporters, however, alleged that this transfer was to punish her for speaking out from prison. Her family and lawyers also complained of their visits being obstructed by prison officials and of their parcels not being passed on. On 10 August her family were finally granted a three-day visit after she was transferred back to the ordinary prison wing. Mutabar Tadzhibaeva reportedly told them that after she was transferred back from the psychiatric wing, scissors were placed under her mattress, as a result of which she was put in a punishment cell for 10 days for breaking prison rules. She also complained about not receiving enough drink and food while in the punishment cell. One of her lawyers said in August that she had decided not to represent Mutabar Tadzhibaeva anymore after repeated threats against herself and her family. On 24 November the deputy head of the prison reportedly refused Mutabar Tadzhibaeva's lawyer a meeting with the imprisoned activist as she was again held in the punishment cell.

Please write to the authorities:

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Mutabar Tadzhibaeva.
- expressing concern that Mutabar Tadzhibaeva was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment after a trial that fell short of international fair trial standards, in contravention of Uzbekistan's international obligations, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Please send appeals to:

Procurator General
Rashidjon KODIROV,
Prokuratura Respubliki Uzbekistan, ul. Gulyamova, 66; Tashkent; 700047; UZBEKISTAN