



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL UZBEKISTAN: APPEAL CASE

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Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov – Prisoner of Conscience

Photograph of Uzbekistani human rights defender Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov in Andizhan, Uzbekistan April 2005. © 2005 Private

Amnesty International is extremely concerned for the safety of a prominent human rights defender, Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov, who was reportedly arbitrarily detained by law enforcement officers on 21 May 2005. He is being held in incommunicado detention and believed to be at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. His arrest is apparently linked to his role in monitoring demonstrations in Andizhan, which escalated on 12-13 May and resulted in government troops reportedly firing on thousands of mainly unarmed and peaceful demonstrators. He has been charged with serious offences including “terrorism”, which is punishable by death, according to the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan. Amnesty International believes him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for carrying out his peaceful and legitimate human rights work. The organization has called for his immediate and unconditional release.

Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov is the chairperson of the Andizhan independent human rights group *Apelliatsia* (Appeal). He had attended the trial of 23 local entrepreneurs charged under various articles of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan in connection with their involvement with *Akramia*, a local Islamic movement, and he had acted as a representative for one of the accused men. It appears that it was the ongoing trial of the entrepreneurs which triggered the demonstrations in Andizhan. The Uzbekistani authorities accused members and supporters of *Akramia* of attempting to organize the protests in Andizhan with a view to establishing an Islamic state in Uzbekistan. They also linked the movement to the banned *Hizb-ut-Tahrir* opposition party, which they categorize as a “terrorist” organization. The 23 men have denied being linked to any banned Islamic groups.

Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov was present in Andizhan on 13 May and gave the international media an account of the events, providing a stark contrast to the official version of events. His account was widely cited by the international media in the days following the violence. He was arbitrarily detained by law enforcement officers on 21 May and was held in police custody in the Andizhan Regional Department of Internal Affairs. However, he was reportedly transferred to Tashkent sometime in July. Neither his family nor his lawyer were able to obtain any information as to his whereabouts in Tashkent. His lawyer last saw him in police custody in Andizhan in the middle of July.

According to information received from the Central Asia Human Rights Monitoring Programme of the Moscow-based non-governmental organization, Memorial, Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov was allowed to call his family on 29 and 30 May 2005. During these telephone conversations he confirmed that he had been charged with “slander” (Article 139 of the Criminal Code), which carries a possible three-year prison sentence. The charge was reportedly related to an open letter about the trial of the 23 entrepreneurs in Andizhan which

was published on the internet in April 2005. Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov reportedly told his son over the telephone that he was being “treated correctly” and that he could be released on bail soon. At the beginning of July he was additionally charged with “terrorism” (Article 155 of the Criminal Code) and “spreading information with the aim of causing panic” (Article 244-1 Part 2 of the Criminal Code). The charge of “terrorism” carries a possible death sentence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Freedom of expression is under threat in Uzbekistan following the Andizhan events. Since 13 May, scores of human right defenders, independent civil society activists and journalists have been targeted and harassed by the authorities. Amnesty International is concerned that the Andizhan unrest has been used by the Uzbekistani authorities to justify a further clampdown on dissent and freedom of expression, association and assembly in the name of “national security” and the “war on terror”.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Russian, Uzbek or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov and calling for guarantees that he will not be tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- stating that Amnesty International considers Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov to be a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for carrying out his peaceful and legitimate human rights work, and calling for his immediate release;
- expressing concern that Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov has been held incommunicado in an unknown location since the middle of July and has also before that been given limited access to a lawyer and to his relatives;
- expressing concern for his well-being and urging the Uzbekistani authorities to ensure that Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov receives any necessary medical attention;
- reminding the authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their activities without any restrictions or fear of reprisals, as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals, Groups and Institutions to Promote and Protect Universally Recognised Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

APPEALS TO: (Please note that it can be difficult getting through to fax numbers in Uzbekistan. If a voice answers, repeat “fax” until you hear the signal; otherwise leave your fax machine on auto-redial if possible. Fax machines may be switched off outside office hours – 5 hours ahead of GMT):

President

Islam A. KARIMOV,
Rezidentsia prezidenta; ul. Uzbekistanskaia, 43; Tashkent 700163; UZBEKISTAN
Fax: + 998 71 139 53 25
Email: presidents_office@press-service.uz
Salutation: Dear President Karimov

Minister of Internal Affairs

Zakirzhan ALMATOV
Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del RU, ul. Novruz, 1; Tashkent 700029; UZBEKISTAN
Fax: + 998 71 133 89 34
Salutation: Dear Minister Almatov

General Procurator of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Rashidzhon KODIROV

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Salutation: Dear Procurator General

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Head of the National Centre for Human Rights,

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and to diplomatic representatives of Uzbekistan accredited to your country.

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)