

12 September 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this session.

My name is Kate Watters, and I am executive director of Crude Accountability, an environmental and human rights nonprofit working in the Caspian and Black Sea regions and a member of Civic Solidarity Platform. Crude is also a founding member of the Prove They Are Alive! campaign. My remarks this morning are focused on the absence of fair trials in Turkmenistan, which has contributed to the horrific and illegal practice of enforced disappearance. Over one hundred individuals have disappeared in Turkmenistan's prison system since 2002. These individuals, to a person, were tried in unfair trials, without access to adequate legal counsel and on trumped up charges.

Since their trials, they have not seen their family members or had access to legal counsel, medical care, or been able to receive packages.

Of these individuals, 60 were charged in relation to the alleged coup attempt on then President Niyazov in November 2002. Convicted in Stalinesque show trials, they have been serving sentences in complete isolation. At least nine of these individuals are known to have died in custody.

Also denied fair trials are 30 individuals—also disappeared—accused of Islamic extremism. Four of them have died in prison.

Twenty-six individuals on our list of the disappeared were accused of economic crimes and abuse of power. They were the victims of a Stalin-style purge—they found themselves out of the good graces of the President—and were sentenced to long prison terms. Of these individuals, 13 are confirmed dead.

The Prove list also includes three members of civil society, who were wrongfully accused, tried, and sentenced unfairly by the Turkmen regime. Journalist Ogulsapar Muradova was arrested, tried, and imprisoned. She died in prison in 2006. In April of this year, the UN Human Rights Committee found the Turkmen government responsible for violation of her rights, including the rights to life, freedom from torture, personal integrity, a fair trial and freedom of expression, and called upon the government to conduct an impartial investigation into Muradova's case and provide full redress to her family members, such as adequate compensation and other measures, including rehabilitation of her name.

Gulgeldy Annaniyazov has been in prison since 2008. Since September 2015, the authorities have publicly stated that he is being held in a regular colony and allowed visits from relatives, but no one has been able to see him yet.

Omruzak Omarkuliev who established a Turkmen student association in Turkey was lured into Turkmenistan in February 2018 when the authorities invited him to participate in a preparatory event for the upcoming parliamentary elections and then prevented him from exiting the country; soon after he appealed to foreign media, he was arrested and sentenced in a closed door trial to 20 years on trumped up charges.

The absence of an independent judiciary and the failure to hold fair trials has contributed to the inhumane and illegal practice of enforced disappearance in Turkmenistan and must be stopped immediately. We call on the Government of Turkmenistan to immediately halt this abhorrent practice and on international governments and members of the OSCE to hold Turkmenistan to account for its flagrant violations of its international human rights commitments.