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UZBEKISTAN: Several human rights defenders detained in serious danger

FIDH > Les Droits de l'Homme pour Tous / Human Rights for All

Paris - Geneva, August 28, 2009. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), expresses its deepest concerns regarding the deteriorating health conditions suffered by human rights defenders detained in Uzbekistan.

Several human rights defenders currently detained in Uzbekistan to punish them for their human rights activities are suffering severe health problems as a result of poor conditions and ill-treatment in Uzbekistan's notoriously abusive prison system. The following is a non-exhaustive list of imprisoned human rights defenders in Uzbekistan whose health condition would require early release to allow for adequate medical treatment:

- Mr. Salijon Abdurahmanov, a human rights activist and journalist, detained since June 7, 2008 is in a very dire situation. His health has severely deteriorated since his arrest and conviction last year. As reported by family members who visited him, he looks sick, emaciated and has grown weaker and older. He started suffering from allergy all over his body because of the low-quality of water and has not received adequate treatment in prison: his body is covered with red rash leaving deep scars. Despite the commitment of the prison authorities to send him to Sangorod (the prison hospital in the Tashkent area), no measure has been taken so far;
- Mr. Yusuf Juma, poet, writer and head of the human rights organisation "Sakhroi sherlar", detained since December 17, 2007, is suffering from inhumane conditions of detention in the notorious Zhasyk prison. The prison administration has regularly prevented his daughter from meeting him. According to his daughter and relatives of Mr. Juma's fellow prisoners, prison guards are continuously beating and humiliating him, who can hardly walk and is given an insufficient amount of food;
- Mr. Alisher Karamatov, Head of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) branch in Mirzaabad district, arrested on April 29, 2006, was transferred from the prison Uya 64/49 to Uya 64/18, the sanitary prison in the Tashkent area on October 12, 2008 because of his health condition. Mr. Karamatov contracted tuberculosis while in detention. The chief doctor of Uya 64/18 in his medical report dated December 2008 wrote that both lungs were infected with tuberculosis and that the current state of the patient was moderate to bad. His lawyer sought to secure his release on the basis of his health condition, but his attempts have not been successful so far;
- Mr. Norboy Kholjigitov, a 60-year-old member of the HRSU Ishtikhan region branch, has been detained since June 4, 2005. He is suffering from diabetes and is not provided the required medical care. First signs of incipient gangrene have appeared on his left leg and hand, as well as on his face;
- Mr. Khabibulla Okpulatov, member of the HRSU Ishtikhan district branch, arrested on June 4, 2005, is in a dire health condition. According to his relatives, he can not use his right leg and has serious sight problems, which required urgent medical care;
- Mr. Agzam Turgunov, Executive Director and founder of "Mazlum" human rights centre, in Tashkent, and advocate for the rights of prisoners of conscience and against torture, detained since July 11, 2008, was tortured during his interrogation: boiling water was poured down his neck in the Nukus police station. According to his son who visited him, Mr. Turgunov's health conditions are worsening and he would weigh today only 40 Kgs. The prison administration has repeatedly ignored his complaints about his health and denied him medical care.

"The serious deterioration of the detainees' health conditions is one of the main characteristic of detention in Uzbekistan and is systematically used as a way to break up all forms of dissent", deplores Ms. Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President.

"The Uzbek authorities keep denying the numerous and consistent allegations on the routine use of torture and other cruel treatment in places of detention. However, we know that detainees are subject to various forms of intense physical and psychological pressure, and are often denied access to medical care. No wonder we receive reports on the tragic deterioration of their mental and physical health, given the harsh conditions of detention", said Mr. Eric Sottas, OMCT Secretary General.

The Observatory urges the authorities to provide all detained human rights activists immediate and adequate medical care in specialised medical facilities. The Observatory recalls that under Uzbek law all prisoners with ongoing medical conditions should be released from prison to be properly treated. The Observatory wishes to welcome the resumption of the visits in Uzbek prisons by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as of September 7, 2009. However, the Observatory deplors the absence of a tuberculosis programme in Uzbekistan run by the ICRC since the authorities should normally assume it with the help of the prison hospital in Tashkent.

The Observatory insists on the utmost importance to provide human rights defenders threatened with effective protection, so that their physical and psychological integrity be guaranteed in all circumstances, in conformity with the 1998 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and with the 2007 Resolution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions.

Finally, the Observatory urges on the Uzbek authorities to release all human rights defenders immediately and unconditionally since their detention is arbitrary as it only aims at sanctioning their human rights activities and, more generally, to ensure that an end be put against all acts of harassment against human rights defenders in the country.

For further information, please contact:

* FIDH: Gaël Grilhot / Karine Appy, + 33 1 43 55 25 18 * OMCT: Delphine Reculeau, + 41 22 809 49 39