

Under Siege and Working for Justice

Human Rights Defenders in Uzbekistan



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Human rights defenders in Uzbekistan face unprecedented government persecution. The international community must intervene forcefully on behalf of Uzbekistan's embattled civil society if it is to survive.

Key facts about civil society activists in Uzbekistan:

- At least 13 human rights defenders are currently in prison in Uzbekistan. In the past two years, they have been sentenced to lengthy prison terms on politically motivated charges. Another two were sentenced to six and seven years in prison in spring 2007 and later released on parole.
- Jamshid Karimov, an independent journalist, has been held in a closed psychiatric ward since September 2006, while Sanjar Ulmarov, an Uzbek political opposition leader, and other dissidents are in prison.
- Dozens of human rights defenders and independent journalists have had to stop their human rights work or flee the country altogether following threats to their lives and freedom and that of their loved ones.
- The Uzbek government has registered only two independent domestic human rights organizations. These are the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (registered in 2002) and Ezgulik (registered in 2003). The government's refusal to register NGOs severely restricts their operation and renders them vulnerable to harassment and abuse.
- Uzbek authorities have forced the closure of the offices of numerous international NGOs in Uzbekistan. In 2006 alone, the government closed the offices of Freedom House, Counterpart International, the American Bar Association's Central East European Law Initiative (now American Bar Association's Europe and Eurasia Division), Winrock International, and Crosslink Development International. BBC and Radio Free Europe have also been forced to leave the country following threats to their offices and staff.

What is happening in Uzbekistan right now?

The government of Uzbekistan is one of the most repressive to have emerged from the break-up of the Soviet Union. It exercises tight control over most aspects of public life and imposes restrictions on all avenues of peaceful civic participation. It has a long record of informal censorship of the media, severely restricting public demonstrations, and unofficially banning political parties that do not support government policies. Torture and other forms of ill-treatment in custody are widespread. Government reforms have not translated into real changes in practice. In the past 10 years the government has imprisoned thousands of independent Muslims—those whose peaceful religious beliefs, practices, and affiliations are outside official institutions and guidelines—on charges of religious “extremism” or “attempt to overthrow the constitutional system.” The government’s repression, combined with endemic corruption, deprives people in Uzbekistan of their social and economic rights.

The government of Uzbekistan has for many years fostered a hostile and dangerous environment for the work of human rights defenders and others in civil society. But in the nearly two years since the May 13, 2005 massacre in Andijan, the government has unleashed its fiercest crackdown on human rights defenders,

independent journalists, and NGO and political activists since independence. More than two dozen human rights defenders have had criminal charges brought against them. Many other defenders have endured periods of arbitrary detention, interrogation, house arrest, vigilante attacks, Soviet-style “hate rallies,” increased surveillance, detention of their family members, and interference with their work. Dozens of others have had to flee Uzbekistan, following unrelenting persecution. Among them is Tolib Yakubov, the founder and chair of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, the first human rights group to be founded in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, and Ulugbek Khaidarov, detained in September 2006 and released in November, shortly before the European Union was to decide on the future of its sanctions policy toward Uzbekistan.

Only one other imprisoned human rights defender, Yagdar Turlibekov, was released under the annual general amnesty in December 2006. Since Turlibekov’s release, however, authorities arrested another two human rights defenders on politically motivated charges—Umida Niazova and Gulbahor Turaeva in January 2007. Both of them were sentenced but later released on parole with suspended sentences; Niazova was released on May 8, 2007—one week before the European Union reviewed its

sanctions against Uzbekistan - and Turaeva in June 2007. Both women had to “confess” to their “crimes,” renounce work they had done as human rights defenders, and denounce their colleagues.

The Uzbek government’s numerous statements about its commitment to human rights stand in stark contrast to the grim reality on the ground. Authorities have not undertaken any meaningful measures to address the very serious human rights violations that Uzbek human rights organizations document and do not respond in good faith to concerns expressed by the international community.

Arbitrary rule in Uzbekistan is often embodied in the faceless, nameless security agents who exercise surveillance over human rights defenders, detain them at even the smallest demonstrations, and de facto determine who can be present at a trial, who can have access to a prison, and which lawyers can have access to their clients. It is with these unaccountable state agents, rather than public officials, whom Uzbek human rights defenders must deal on a daily basis.

Uzbekistan’s human rights defenders, like independent journalists and political activists also under siege by the authorities, are struggling for transparent, accountable government. The individuals profiled in this brochure are among those courageous Uzbek human rights defenders who have been

imprisoned in retribution for their work or who are continuing, in the face of persecution, to press their government to adhere to its human rights obligations. Their activism covers a wide array of human rights violations, ranging from torture and other ill-treatment in custody, violations of fair trial standards, corruption, violations of farmers’ rights, and the government’s campaign against independent Muslims. These defenders monitor trials, help ordinary people to access their government by assisting in filing complaints to the authorities about abuses, act as public defenders, and bring Uzbekistan’s human rights problems to the attention of the Uzbek public and the world.

This brochure portrays only some of the individuals involved in the struggle for human rights in Uzbekistan. Many others have taken a stand for human rights and are active members and friends of organizations and groups such as: Ezgulik (Goodness), the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, the Human Rights Initiative Center, the Human Rights Movement of Uzbekistan Veritas, the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan, Mazlum (The Oppressed), Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture, and Ozod Fukaro (Free Citizen), and others. Together these individuals and organizations are working to ensure that the spirit of human rights survives in Uzbekistan.

Defenders Released

Umida Niazova (b. 1974) was a human rights defender and independent journalist from Tashkent. She was a regular contributor to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and other new agencies. From 2005-2006, she worked as a translator for Human Rights Watch's Tashkent representative office. Previously, she had worked with such international NGOs as Freedom House and Internews.



Uzbek authorities initially detained Niazova on December 21, 2006 at the Tashkent airport, on her return from a seminar in Bishkek. She was questioned at length, and her laptop and passport were confiscated. She was released later that day, but the authorities continued to investigate her on suspicion of criminal and administrative charges. Her laptop was sent for “expert analysis” to determine whether it contained subversive material.

Niazova left Uzbekistan for neighboring Kyrgyzstan in early January 2007. Shortly thereafter she and her lawyer were informed that based on an examination of her laptop, she would not face any criminal charges and could

collect her passport and computer. On January 22, as she was traveling back to Tashkent, Niazova was arrested by the Uzbek authorities, held incommunicado for four days, and faced politically motivated charges of smuggling (article 246, part 1 of the Uzbek criminal code) and illegally crossing the border (article 223, part 1). She was sentenced to seven years in prison on May 1, 2007.

Niazova was released on parole on May 8, 2007. Her prison term was commuted to a seven-year suspended sentence.

Gulbahor Turaeva (b. 1962) is a doctor from Andijan and member of the nongovernmental organization Anima-kor, which works to protect the rights of medical doctors and their patients. Turaeva was arrested on January 14, 2007 at the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. Border guards seized from her a number of books by an exiled opposition leader, Muhammed Salih, that are unofficially prohibited.

Turaeva was convicted on charges of anti-constitutional activities (article 159) and slander (article 139) on April 27, 2007 and sentenced with a six year prison term. On May 7, 2007, Turaeva was sentenced for a second time with new slander charges and fined 648,00 soms (about U.S. \$515). On June 12, 2007, she was released on parole. An appeals court commuted her prison term to a six-year suspended sentence.



Turaeva was among the human rights defenders who questioned the government's version of the Andijan massacre on May 13, 2005. On May 27, 2005 Turaeva was detained and held in the Andijan prosecutor's office for seventeen hours, where she was denied food and access to a lawyer. A prosecutor's office official accused her of spreading lies about the Andijan killings and of “anti-constitutional activities.”

Defenders in Custody

Saidjahn Zainabidinov (b. 1957) is chair of the human rights group Appeliatsia (Appeal), which was refused registration by the Uzbek authorities on March 14, 2005. He has monitored the rights of independent Muslims charged by the government with “religious extremism,” torture, deaths in custody, and corruption in the judiciary. In 2002 he published a report entitled “The Wall around Justice,” about law enforcement practices and corruption. Zainabidinov became one of the international community’s main sources of reliable information on the events of May 13, 2005 in the city of Andijan. On that day Zainabidinov gave dozens of interviews to the press and international community about the uprising and protest in his city and about the indiscriminate shooting of unarmed protesters by Uzbek forces. He continued to speak out forcefully against this massacre in the days following it.



Uzbek authorities arrested Zainabidinov on May 21, 2005 and accused him of publishing bulletins that “were intended to sow panic

among the population” and undermine Uzbekistan’s public image. According to one official, Zainabidinov was accused of giving false statements to journalists 49 times on May 13. Following a closed trial about which even his family was not notified, Zainabidinov was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment on charges including slander, undermining the constitutional order, and membership in an illegal religious organization. In autumn 2006 he was transferred from Karshi prison to the Tashkent remand prison.

Mutabar Tojibaeva (b. 1962) is a Margilan-based rights defender and head of the unregistered Burning Hearts club. She has helped ordinary people write complaints to the authorities, monitored dozens of trials, and published reports about illegal child labor. She was a vocal critic of the Uzbek government, for example by speaking out against the massacre in Andijan. Police arrested Tojibaeva on October 7, 2005 while she was preparing to travel to Ireland for a human rights conference. She faced 17 criminal charges, including slander, extortion, and membership in an illegal organization (her unregistered organization). On March 6, 2006, following a grossly unfair trial in which she was denied the right to prepare an adequate defense and cross-examine several key state witnesses, she was sentenced to eight years in prison. The sentence was upheld on appeal.



At trial Tojibaeva remained defiant, saying “I do not regret my activities and I will continue them regardless of the verdict.”

Tojibaeva is currently being held at the Tashkent women’s prison. During the summer prison authorities put her in the prison’s psychiatric ward without informing her lawyers of the reason, and forced Tojibaeva to take pills every day. When her lawyers asked what the pills were, Tojibaeva said she did not know. Since August 2006 Tojibaeva’s family was allowed to meet with her only twice; on several occasions prison authorities denied her visits, telling family members that she was being held in a punishment cell. She has been denied access to her lawyer for more than six months.

Nosim Isakov (b. 1967) was active with the Jizzakh city branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, and in the past few years has been working on corruption and on cases involving home evictions. He was arrested on October 27, 2005, and charged with hooliganism on the basis of a written complaint stating that he exposed himself publicly to his neighbor's teenage daughter. Isakov's supporters found the accusation particularly shocking and offensive because he is a pious Muslim. At his trial, which began December 15, Isakov refused to confess and told the judge that while in pre-trial detention he had been beaten on his head with a bottle filled with water. He also gave a written complaint to his lawyer about these beatings and psychological pressure that he endured. On December 20, 2005, Isakov was sentenced to eight years in prison. He is currently being held at Karshi prison.



Norboi Kholjigitov (b. 1952) is a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan in Samarkand province who defended farmers' rights, assisting farmers fighting expropriation of their farms. After working as the director of two state-owned farms, in 2004 he established his own farm, called Free Peasants, and supported the poor. Police arrested Kholjigitov on June 4, 2005, on the basis of statements accusing him of threatening to publicly blackmail business owners if they did not buy his silence. At his trial, these statements were retracted. The judge, however, did not take account of this change in testimony, and on October 18,

2005, sentenced Kholjigitov to ten years in prison for extortion and slander. Two other members of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, **Abdusattor Irzaev** (b. 1953), the director of a school, and **Habibulla Okpulatov** (b. 1950), a teacher at the same school, were tried and sentenced to six years of imprisonment at the same trial.



Azam Formonov (b. 1978) and **Alisher Karamatov** (b. 1968) are both active members of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan in Gulistan, in Syrdaryo province. Police arrested them on April 29, 2006, and they were charged with attempting to blackmail a local businessman. They were tried at the Yangier City Court without the presence of either their attorney of choice or their non-attorney public defender, Tolib Yakubov, chair of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan who now has to live in exile. They were each sentenced to nine years in prison on June 15, 2006. A week before the sentencing, in a private conversation at the prison with Mr. Yakubov, the men described how they were tortured and pressured into signing false confessions. Formonov is currently being held at Jaslyk prison, and Karamatov, at Karshi prison.

Mamarajab Nazarov is chair of the Zardbar district branch, in Samarkand province, of the human rights organization Ezgulik and a member of the political party Birlik. In recent years he has been working mainly on farmers' rights, in particular supporting their right to protest the Jizzakh province governor's policies towards them. On May 26, 2005, immediately after police detained Nazarov and other human rights defenders to prevent them from protesting the Andijan massacre, a group of approximately 70 people, including local government officials, attempted to hold a Soviet-style "hate rally" against Nazarov at his home in Buston, in Jizzakh province. (On the same day the crowd held similar hate rallies against three other human rights defenders in Jizzakh.) The crowd accused Nazarov of seeking to destabilize Jizzakh and demanded that Nazarov leave Buston; several days later his landlord evicted him.



After Nazarov and his family resettled in Zarbdar at the end of May 2005, Nazarov filed a complaint about the illegal "privatization" of his home in Buston. On June 22, 2006 he was arrested and on July 19 was sentenced to three and a half years of imprisonment on charges of extortion. Nazarov is currently being held in prison in Samarkand.

Dilmurod Mukhiddinov (b. 1979) is an active member of the human rights organization Ezgulik and of the political party Birlik. Police arrested Mukhiddinov in his home in Markhamat district, Andijan province on May 20, 2005, and accused him—and five others involved with the party—of distributing a Birlik statement condemning the Andijan massacre. Five of the original group of six were tried by the Tashkent Province Court and received suspended sentences on January 12, 2006. Mukhiddinov was sent to prison for five years.

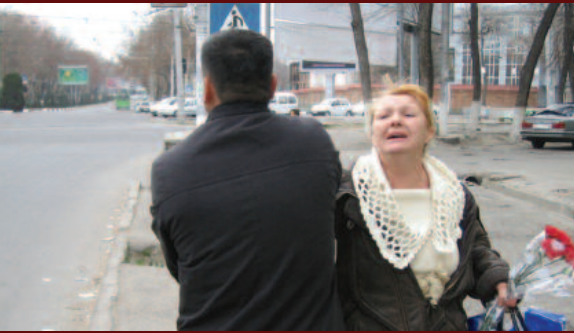
Rasul Khudainasarov (b. 1956) is the head of the Angren branch of the human rights organization Ezgulik and has focused his work on fighting corruption in the police and security forces. He was arrested on July 21, 2005. On January 12, 2006 he was sentenced to nine and a half years in prison on charges of extortion, swindling, abuse of power, and falsification of documents. Khudainasarov wrote a letter to his lawyer complaining about beatings and ill-treatment he was subjected to the day after his trial ended. According to the letter, Khudainasarov was also put in a punishment cell on January 13, one day after the verdict was issued, in retribution for not confessing during the trial.

Bobomurod Mavlanov (b. 1946), from Nurobod district, Samarkand province, is a member of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan and of the unregistered Erk Democratic Party of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He was arrested on October 6, 2005 and charged with abuse of authority and bribe-taking. Mavlanov ran a private after-school educational center in the town of Nurobod. In late June 2005, two teachers at his center wrote complaints to the prosecutor's office accusing Mavlanov of taking bribes in exchange for their jobs. Later, both teachers rescinded their statements. They wrote letters to the director of the Samarkand National Security Service, stating that the head of the Nurobod district National Security Service pressured them into accusing Mavlanov of bribe-taking. In November 2005, a court sentenced Mavlanov to five and a half years in prison.

Ulugbek Kattabekov is a human rights defender from Jizzakh province and chair of the Zamin district branch of Ezgulik. He is also a member of the political party Birlik. In spring 2005 he publicly addressed the problem of the Zamin district's water supply. According to Kattabekov's research, the local water supply problem was the result of the lack of several kilometers of water pipes that had been sold off by the local authorities. In June 2005 Kattabekov was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for extortion. His trial seemed to be politically motivated and aimed at stopping him from conducting any further work.

Also in custody is **Jamshid Karimov** (b. 1967), an independent journalist from Jizzakh who is the son of Uzbek President Islam Karimov's elder brother who died in 1991. He is a vocal critic of the government's policies and regularly publishes articles on the internet. On September 12, 2006 Karimov disappeared after visiting his mother at the Jizzakh Province hospital. He is currently held at the Samarkand Psychiatric Hospital and according to unconfirmed rumors is being subjected to forcible treatment with antipsychotic drugs.





Active Defenders

Elena Urlaeva being accosted by a security agent on her way to a protest to commemorate International Women's Day. A Human Rights Watch researcher witnessed and photographed the encounter.

Photo Andrea Berg/Human Rights Watch

Shukhrat Ganiev (b. 1959), from Bukhara, is the former head of the Humanitarian-Legal Center, which Uzbek authorities closed in May 2006. The center's lawyers and physicians worked together to monitor and report torture cases, as well as to raise awareness among schoolchildren about human rights issues and conflict prevention.



Ganiev, a lawyer, became interested in human rights and civic movements when he studied in the then-Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and in Czechoslovakia. "When I spent time abroad I was thrilled by the activities of youth movements. I dreamed of such activities here in Uzbekistan," he says. When he returned to Uzbekistan in 1992 he convinced friends and colleagues to work on human rights issues. In multi-ethnic Bukhara, Ganiev focuses on minority rights and societal conflict.

According to Ganiev, one of the foremost problems in Uzbekistan is what he views as the passivity of Uzbek society in general. His work seeks to challenge citizens into action. "Although my activities sometimes create more problems than advantages for me and my family, I will continue to work."

Vakhit Karimov (b. 1966) is a physician from Bukhara who monitors cases of torture and ill-treatment. He also focuses on the rights of health care workers. He was the head of the Medical Association of Bukhara, which Uzbek authorities closed in autumn 2006.



Karimov reports incidents of physical torture and allegations of medical malpractice in prisons, including improper administration of injections and other medications that in some cases have caused physical harm to detainees. "I cannot tolerate injustice and want to stop torture," explains Karimov on his motivation to work.

Abdusalom Ergashev (b. 1948), from Ferghana city, is the head of the Ferghana province branch of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan. He works on issues of religious freedom, corruption, border conflict, ethnic conflict, and gender.



From 1969 to 1972 Ergashev was imprisoned for spreading anti-Soviet propaganda and nationalist ideas. After serving his sentence, he finished university and became a journalist. During perestroika, Ergashev became the head of a trade union and a member of the Birlik civic movement, and later of Erk. In 1996 he joined the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan.

Ergashev fights for democratic development of Uzbek society. “My grandmother taught me to address existing problems. Thus, it became my

work to address human rights issues.”

Mamur Azimov (b. 1960) is head of the Jizzakh district branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and is currently focused on monitoring farmers’ rights, including the authorities’ arbitrary interference with farmers’ businesses, limited opportunities to develop private farming, and the need to develop farmers’ knowledge about their rights.

Azimov became a member of the opposition movement Birlik and, in 1992, one of the first members of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. An important moment in Azimov’s work came in 2004, when a tractor driver was wrongfully detained. The police had forced the man to transport state shipments of cotton with his own tractor. When he refused, the police beat and detained him. After the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan organized a picket in Jizzakh, the driver was released.

Azimov explains that he is working not for his own future but for the future of Uzbekistan. “I hope that my children will live in a free state, in a free society. Maybe we will not experience this, but hopefully our children will,” he says.



Bakhtior Khamroev (b.1955) is chair of the Jizzakh province branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. His priorities include the rights of religious and political prisoners, farmers' issues, and children's rights.

Khamroev became interested in human rights in his twenties. "In the 1970s I came across a book entitled *America* showing people protesting on the street. I wondered why they protested while living in such wealth. I decided to travel all over the Soviet Union to get to know the world," he says. Towards the end of perestroika, Khamroev became a member of the opposition movement Birluk, and a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan in 1992.

Like many other human rights defenders, Khamroev's human rights work intensified in the late 1990s, when the mass arrests of independent Muslims began. He was temporarily detained and physically attacked several times. Despite all the difficulties Khamroev continues to work. "I am not able to

be silent and sit quietly when I see injustice," he describes as his motivation to work. Khamroev's son, **Ikhtior**, was sentenced to three years in prison for alleged hooliganism in September 2006. Many, including Human Rights Watch, believe Ikhtior Khamroev's imprisonment is retribution for his father's human rights work.



Uktam Pardaev (b.1978) is head of the Jizzakh province branch of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan. He assists people in drafting and filing complaints to the authorities and also reports publicly about beatings and torture in custody. In addition, he monitors children's rights, especially child labour.

Pardaev became involved in human rights after his father, a human rights activist and colleague of Bakhtior Khamroev, died in 2004. He decided to continue his father's work. "I try to do what I can, but sometimes it is very difficult to work. The families of human rights defenders are especially at risk of harassment," he says. Pardaev was among the activists whose houses were targeted during "hate rallies" in May 2005. On May 26, 70 people arrived at Pardaev's house, hitting him in the stomach, shouting at him, and calling him a "Wahabbist" and a "terrorist," and threatening to "teach him a lesson." Several women from the crowd encouraged his neighbors to kick the family out of the neighborhood. Only when his mother came out of the house did the crowd stop beating and attacking him.

Uktam and his younger brother, **Utkir**, have monitored illegal child labour in Jizzakh. Utkir was arrested, charged with "inflicting bodily injury" and sentenced to four years in prison in June 2006 in a trial his relatives and Human Rights Watch believe was in retribution for assisting his brother's human rights work. Nevertheless Pardaev continues to work because he believes in the future. "I hope that at some point people will understand my work," he says.



Yadgar Turlibekov (b. 1938) is chair of the Kashkadaria province branch of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and an independent journalist who for years monitored human rights

conditions for farmers, market traders, and independent Muslims who practice their faith outside state-sanctioned religious institutions. In addition he has reported about corruption.

On June 16, 2006 Yadgar Turlibekov was arrested and charged with insult and slander. On October 9, 2006 he was sentenced to three and a half years in prison. He did not have a defense lawyer of his choice. Turlibekov was released under the general amnesty in December 2006.

Looking back on his detention, he says today “I have lost 20 kilograms in weight but gained 20 kilograms of experience.” Immediately after his release Turlibekov started to report about prison conditions and the ill-treatment of

prisoners in Uzbekistan. Turlibekov plans to continue his human rights work.



Akhmadjon Madmarov (b.1946), of the city of Margilan, is deputy head of the Ferghana province branch of the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan. He monitors and reports on the trials and prison conditions of independent Muslims, as well as on the situation of their families.

Madmarov became interested in human rights when his friend was tried for alleged rape in the 1970s. “When he was released from the courtroom, after a trial that took place on and off for three years, people in need started to approach me and ask for help. I did not know that I was a human rights defender; I just did my work,” he says. During perestroika Madmarov became a member of Birlik. When the number of arrests of independent Muslims increased in 1996 Abdusalom Ergashev invited Madmarov to work with the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan.

The organization Front Line awarded Madmarov the Front Line Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk in June 2006. On January 21, 2007 the police department in the city of Margilan confiscated Madmarov’s passport for several days, preventing him from participating in a human rights seminar in Istanbul.

“I live in a place where human rights are restricted. I would like to see human rights a top priority. If human rights were not violated, this society would blossom,” says Madmarov, who has three sons and two nephews in prison on religion-related charges.



Kamil Ashurov (b.1957) is director of the Samarkand-based Human Rights Initiative Center, an unregistered organization, and a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. The center was formed in 2002 to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law in Samarkand province and throughout Uzbekistan. His main focus is

on the persecution of Protestants and of independent Muslims, prison conditions, and protecting the rights of the Tajik minority in Samarkand and elsewhere in Uzbekistan.

Ashurov's main inspiration comes from Gorbachev's first public speech about perestroika and glasnost. Immediately after this event Ashurov and others established the Tajik Cultural Center in Samarkand, which was registered in 1991. In 1993, the center lost its registration status when local NGOs were forced to re-register, and its application was refused. The center has continued to operate since then without registration.

Ashurov's educational background is in history and journalism, and he contributed to the establishment of a trilingual newspaper in Samarkand. The Tajik Cultural Center and the Human Rights Initiative Center publish bulletins and information on a regular basis. In October 2003 Ashurov was charged with illegally producing and distributing media publications, for which he was fined.

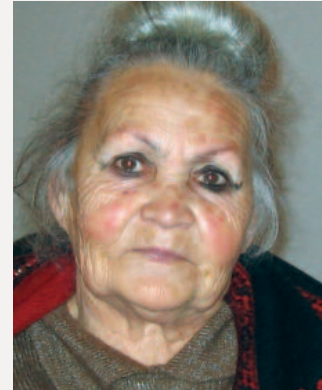
"I come from a multi-ethnic family. For this reason I wish that people in our society could live together peacefully," says Ashurov. "I hope that Uzbekistan becomes a real democracy soon."



Salima Kadyrova (b.1933) has been a lawyer for 40 years and is the deputy head of the Human Rights Initiative Center in Samarkand. She is a member of the Samarkand Bar Association and has defended the rights of the exiled Erk leader, Muhammed Salih.

Currently the authorities are threatening to revoke Kadyrova's license to practice law. At the end of August 2006, a man came to her house saying he wanted to hire her as a lawyer. Despite the fact that they never signed a contract, at the end of September 2006, Kadyrova was called to the local Department of Justice because this man had written a complaint against her. The man, who had tape recorded his conversation with Kadyrova, accused her of seeking to overcharge him for her services. The case is pending.

Addressing President Islam Karimov, Kadyrova says, "I have worked as a lawyer for many years. In December 2001, I wrote you an open letter in which I pointed out that the Uzbek judicial system is decayed and collapsing before our very eyes, and that the peoples' rights in Uzbekistan, which constitute the foundation for democracy building, are violated regularly." Kadyrova was nominated in the campaign "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005." On January 21, 2007, Kadyrova was attacked on the street. Her passport and money were stolen by unknown men. As a result, she—like Madmarov—was not able to participate at a human rights seminar in Istanbul.



Fahriddin Tilloev (b. 1971), from Boisun district, Surkhandaryo province, is head of the unregistered human rights group Free Citizen (Ozod Fukaro), and a member of Erk. Previously he was involved with the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan. Tilloev monitors trials, works as public defender at trials, and assists people to write complaints. Currently he is researching problems of labor migration from Boisun to Russia, including some cases of potentially wrongful deaths of labor migrants.



Tilloev became interested in human rights in 2000 when he was still working for the local government. That year he was among 200 protestors who voiced dissatisfaction about the fraudulent election to parliament of the province governor. He was one of six men who filed a complaint with a court, but the case was closed after three years without success. This failure did not prevent Tilloev from establishing a human rights group in Surkhandaryo. In May 2005 it was refused registration by the authorities, but continue to work.

In March 2005 Tilloev was detained for five days for allegedly insulting a police officer. In October 2006 police in his home district confiscated, without explanation, his passport and military service document and returned it only after the New Year. “I hope that ordinary citizens and human rights defenders will be able to live without pressure in Uzbekistan in the future.”

Ismail Adylov (b. 1950) is a long-time human rights activist from Tashkent. After he was arrested in 1994, he began investigating cases of illegal arrest, monitoring trials, and conducting dozens of interviews with victims of torture and their families. In 1997 he joined the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan, which was registered in 2002 shortly before President Karimov traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with President Bush.



In spring 1999, the Karimov government launched an aggressive campaign against Adylov and his colleagues, apparently aimed at silencing their revelations regarding religious repression and mass violations of human rights by state authorities. In July of that year, Tashkent police took Adylov into custody and raided his home. A court hearing that lasted only three hours and mimicked Soviet-era show trials found him guilty; Adylov was sentenced in September 1999 to six years in prison. For most of the time he was in prison, Adylov was subjected to torture and denied medical treatment. After an international campaign calling for Adylov’s release, President Karimov finally granted him freedom on July 3, 2001. Since then, Adylov has continued his human rights work.

Tamara Chikunova (b. 1948) is chair of the Tashkent-based NGO Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture. She works toward the abolition of the death penalty in Uzbekistan and around the world, and against the use of torture. She also advocates for the humane treatment of those sentenced to death and their relatives.



Chikunova became involved with human rights in 2000, after she learned of the execution of her son, Dmitry. Since then, Chikunova has been in dialogue with the Uzbek government on abolishing the death penalty. Chikunova, members of her family, and members of her organization have been attacked and detained several times. The organization's office has been burglarized and its communications tapped. Despite Chikunova's efforts to register Mothers against the Death Penalty and Torture, Uzbek authorities twice rejected the organization's registration application.

Chikunova is an active member of the World Coalition against the Death Penalty. She and her organization have won several international awards, including the 2005 Nuremberg International Human Rights Award and Golden Doves for Peace (2004).

Chikunova is firm and outspoken in her opposition to the death penalty. "I do not work for medals but to remind everybody that we are all human beings. I do not want to see mothers crying because they have lost their loved ones," she says.

Surat Ikramov (b. 1945), from Tashkent, is head of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders. He specializes in trial monitoring and reports regularly on arbitrary detention, torture, and political and religion-related arrests in Tashkent and other parts of Uzbekistan.

Ikramov's interest in human rights began with economic and social rights after his private business had problems with the authorities in 1995. "I did not understand anything," he says, looking back. "I wrote many complaints but did not achieve anything." In 1999 he started to seek help from human rights organizations and became more aware about the human rights situation in the country. The sheer number of arbitrary arrests and unfair sentences convinced him to set up his own human rights group in February 2002.

In August 2003 Ikramov was attacked and beaten by four masked men. They drove him to the outskirts of Tashkent, threw him to the ground, and tried to burn his car. He was severely injured. After this incident Ikramov was offered political asylum abroad, but chose to remain in his country. "I continued to work on principle." Ikramov does not understand why the authorities treat him as a threat, he says. "I am not dangerous. I do what everybody should do, including the state."



Vasila Inoiatova (b. 1956) is from Tashkent and is chair of Ezgulik—one of the two registered human rights organizations in Uzbekistan. Ezgulik has branches throughout Uzbekistan. The organization was registered in 2003, on the eve of the annual meeting of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which took place in Tashkent.



Inoiatova became active in the opposition movement Birlik in 1989, and is now secretary general of the Birlik political party. “Finally somebody was addressing issues everybody was interested in: independence from Russia, sovereignty, and the status of the Uzbek language,” she explains. In 1992 Inoiatova joined the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. A year later, the Supreme Court sentenced her to two years in prison for insulting the president for an article she had published about the killing of about 100 students by Uzbek governmental forces in 1992. She was released under an amnesty. In 1994 she was held for 16 days in administrative detention to prevent her from travelling to the United States. In March 2007 police prevented her from meeting with a

European Parliament delegation.

After the mass arrests of independent Muslims that followed the February 16, 1999 bombings in Tashkent, Inoiatova became involved in documenting cases of religious persecution. “In Uzbekistan it is very difficult to solve certain problems because the government itself causes these problems. Human rights violations are one of these problems,” says Inoiatova. Ezgulik reports these violations on a regular basis in letters sent directly to the Uzbek government and the international community and in other statements that it distributes widely and posts to its website.

Makhbuba Kasymova (b. 1949) is a former teacher from Tashkent who for some years was active with the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan. She later left the organization to work independently. She focuses on the issue of female prisoners in Uzbekistan.

During the perestroika era, Kasymova became a member of the Birlik opposition movement and was among the many opposition members who were harassed in the early 1990s in connection with their work. Kasymova became involved in human rights as she monitored the waves of arrests that followed the murders of several policemen in the Ferghana Valley in 1997 and the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent.

In an effort to discredit Kasymova’s human rights activities, police brought her before her local neighborhood committee in May 1999, where 200 people had come to publicly denounce her. Kasymova was reportedly pointed out to relatives of victims of the February bombings situated in the crowd as “one of the sort of people who killed your sons.” In an unfair trial in September 1999, Kasymova was found guilty on charges of misappropriation of funds and concealing or failing to report a crime. She was given a five-year prison sentence but was released in December 2000 as the result of an international campaign on her behalf. Since her release, Kasymova has continued her work.



Akzam Turgunov (b. 1952), from Tashkent, heads the unregistered organization Mazlum and is a member of Erk. His work focuses on the rights of political and religious prisoners, torture, and public education. He monitors trials and works as a public defender on a regular basis.

Turgunov started human rights work in 1994. "We met regularly in a small café near Independence Square. It was at that café that we came up with the idea to establish the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan." Turgunov's human rights activities were inspired by the work of Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov and the Polish Solidarity movement. "I was interested in human rights before I knew what human rights were," he says.

In 1998 Turgunov was sentenced to six years in prison on politically motivated charges of "abuse of office" and "official negligence," related to his work on his neighborhood committee to set up private alternatives to services that are supposed to be provided by the state. He was

released under an amnesty in May 2000. In September of the same year he founded Mazlum. Since then, he and members of his family have been intimidated and harassed many times. For instance, in 2005 he was charged with insulting a woman at a bazaar, but the case was ultimately dismissed.

Turgunov strives to improve the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. "If everybody keeps silent, the situation will worsen," he says. Recently, Turgunov was denied an exit visa by the Uzbek authorities and therefore cannot leave the country.

UNDER SIEGE AND WORKING FOR JUSTICE



Elena Urlaeva (b. 1957), from Tashkent, is involved with the Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan. She became interested in human rights issues in 1998 after her brother's custody battle for his children. "When I supported him I met many people who complained about injustice," she says. She later began working with Tolib Yakubov, chair of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, after which she was fired from her job as an electrician at a television station and has since monitored human rights in Uzbekistan.

Her main activities include reporting on police conduct, such as arbitrary detention and torture, trial monitoring, and compiling information about the state's use of enforced psychiatric treatment as a means to silence critics.

Urlaeva has been harassed and detained many times. In 2001, 2002, and 2005 Uzbek authorities subjected her to forced psychiatric treatment, including the administration of powerful antipsychotic drugs. In October 2005 a court ordered her to undergo six months of outpatient psychiatric treatment. In November 2006 the court renewed that decision without Urlaeva's knowledge or providing her with a copy of the ruling. As a result, Urlaeva is obligated to meet once a month with a doctor at a psychiatric clinic and is listed in the local police registry as mentally ill.

In March 2006 Urlaeva's husband was beaten up at a bus stop while waiting for her to return from monitoring a trial. Urlaeva herself is detained and questioned for several hours by police or secret service agents on a regular basis.

"My human rights activities give me satisfaction and I fight to stop the arbitrariness of the police and show that trials are based on fabricated accusations," she says.



What can the international community do?

As the case of released journalist Ulugbek Khaidarov demonstrates, international pressure can be effective in securing the release of imprisoned defenders. It is crucial that Uzbekistan's international partners use their influence to support human rights and make calls for the release of wrongfully detained defenders a core component of their bilateral dialogues with the Uzbek government. The EU in particular should make the release of defenders a key benchmark on which to base its upcoming sanctions review in May 2007, and its policy toward Uzbekistan overall.

The EU and other actors of the international community should make clear to the Uzbek authorities that allowing domestic and international nongovernmental organizations to operate without undue government interference is a sine qua non for any government wishing to be seen and treated as a respectable international partner. They should demand an end to the crackdown on human rights defenders, independent journalists, and members of the political opposition, and call on the Uzbek government to register NGOs, both domestic and international. The Uzbek government should be expected to demonstrate its commitment to human rights by allowing civil society to function without undue hindrance over a sustained period of time. It should further re-register those groups that have been unjustly liquidated or otherwise forced to stop working in Uzbekistan, and issue visas for staff of international NGOs.

In pursuing their dialogues with the Uzbek authorities, whether on the Andijan events in 2005 or more generally on human rights, the EU and other actors of the international community should consult with civil society activists, particularly with Uzbek human rights defenders, on a continuous basis, to ensure that policies reflect and address this community's concerns. When visiting Uzbekistan, they should ensure that they meet with Uzbek NGOs to solicit their views and show support for the courageous and important work they are doing.

For more information please visit: www.hrw.org/eca/uzbekistan

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