

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

KYRGYZSTAN: Confirmation of the sentencing of Mr. Azimjan Askarov to life imprisonment

Geneva-Paris, December 22, 2011. *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), condemns the confirmation of the sentencing of human rights defender Azimjan Askarov to life imprisonment.*

On December 20, 2011, the Kyrgyz Supreme Court upheld the sentence to life imprisonment of Mr. **Azimjan Askarov**, a well-known ethnic Uzbek defender and Director of the human rights organisation "Vozdukh" (Air), which has been documenting police ill-treatment of detainees and monitoring the human rights situation in the province of Jalal-Abad, in particular the violent events in Bazar Korgon in June 2010. Mr. Askarov was found guilty of killing a policeman during violent clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south of Kyrgyzstan, following an unfair and politically motivated trial.

On December 21, 2011, Mr. Askarov, who remains arbitrarily detained in prison colony 47 in Bishkek, announced in a letter to the international community and international NGOs that he would start a hunger strike if a new investigation was not opened before January 9, 2012.

The Observatory recalls that on September 15, 2010, Mr. Azimjan Askarov was sentenced to life imprisonment after he was found guilty of killing a policeman. Other ethnic Uzbeks were also sentenced to long-term imprisonment. On November 10, 2010, the court of appeal upheld Mr. Askarov's life sentence following a trial marked by irregularities.

The Observatory considers that the whole judicial case against Mr. Azimjan Askarov merely aims at sanctioning his human rights activities, and remains deeply concerned with the continuing arbitrary detention of Mr. Azimjan Askarov as well as with alleged acts of torture and ill-treatments he was subjected to while in custody.

Accordingly, the Observatory calls upon the authorities of Kyrgyzstan to guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Azimjan Askarov and to ensure his immediate and unconditional release since his detention is arbitrary as it only aims at sanctioning his human rights activities.

More generally, the Observatory reiterates its call for the full respect of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in accordance with the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and urges the Kyrgyz authorities to conform with the provisions of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, and to ensure in all circumstances respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with international human rights standards and international instruments ratified by Kyrgyzstan.

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