

Uzbekistan: Women human rights defenders being forcibly detained in psychiatric hospitals

Vienna, 28 March 2006. In connection with a meeting on Human Rights Defenders organized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to be held in Vienna on 29-30 March, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) wishes to call attention to the severe persecution of women human rights activists and their families in Uzbekistan, which includes *inter alia* forced psychiatric detention, beatings, and politically-motivated trials.

“Women in Uzbekistan are very active in human rights defense, and women are paying a heavy price for defending human rights there. No one can accept these persecutions, which cannot be tolerated by Uzbekistan’s international partners,” stated Aaron Rhodes, Executive Director of the IHF.

Research carried out by the IHF shows that the Uzbek authorities are now using the Soviet-era technique of forcibly detaining activists in psychiatric hospitals exclusively against women human rights defenders and political activists.

The IHF denounces the recent detention in psychiatric hospitals of women human rights defenders Shokhida Yuldasheva and Lydia Volkobrun and urges the international community to express solidarity with them by firmly condemning this practice, and conditioning relations with Uzbekistan upon changes.

As protecting women human rights defenders is a priority of the Austrian Presidency of the EU, the IHF calls upon the EU to demand the immediate release of Shokhida Yuldasheva and Lydia Volkobrun. The EU should also address the wider climate of persecution faced by women human rights defenders and their families.

Information on cases of persecution suffered by women human rights defenders and their relatives follows:

Shokhida Yuldasheva (a signatory, together with Elena Urlaeva, of a letter published on 15 March 2006 condemning repressive acts by the authorities against Muslims—see below) was arrested on 17 March and suffered beatings. She is currently held in a psychiatric hospital in the city of Karchi.

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Lydia Volkobrun, a 69-year old activist, was arrested on 17 March 2006 and is currently held in a psychiatric hospital in Tashkent. As a former staff member of the police department, she has, on several occasions, written complaints about illegal actions taken police officers. In 2004 she was forcibly detained in a psychiatric hospital on two occasions.

On 15 March the husband of **Elena Urlaeva**, a prominent activist who has been forcibly imprisoned in psychiatric institutions several times, suffered injuries as a result of an attack by strangers while he was waiting at a bus stop. Mashurov Mansur lost consciousness and had to be taken to the hospital with a broken nose. This act of aggression is very similar to those suffered by other activists and their relatives and is considered to have been carried out by professionals.

Urlaeva was detained by the police on 28 August 2005 for dissemination of leaflets of the opposition party “*Ozod Dekhonlar*” and for posting a caricature of the national symbol of Uzbekistan. She was released from hospital on 27 October 2005, but was temporarily placed under house arrest after her release. In 2002 Urlaeva had been forcibly held in a psychiatric institution on two occasions (for a total of six months) due to her human rights work. During this time Urlaeva reported that she received forcible injections of psychiatric drugs and that the hospital staff had tied her to the bed to administer the injections which caused chronic headaches, and problems with her heart and kidneys.

Mukhtarova Dilzora, a member of Ezgulik, was arrested on 26 December 2005, and has been accused of murder. In a note sent from prison, she claims to have been tortured.

Tadjibaeva Mutabar, leader of the club of “Flaming Hearts” in the Fergan province, was arrested on 7 October, the day before she planned to go to Ireland for an international conference for human rights defenders. She was charged with extortion for politically motivated reasons. On 6 March she was sentenced to eight years in prison for "anti-government activity" and receiving money from Western governments to disrupt public order. She was found guilty on 13 charges, including threatening public order, fraud, theft and blackmailing local businessmen.

Gavkhar Yuldasheva, a member of Ezgulik from Jissak province, was beaten on 3 January 2006 before a meeting with representatives of foreign embassies. She was arrested and taken to the Regional Department of the Minister of Interior (ROVD) where she was beaten; she was unable to walk after this. She was subsequently released.

On 1 March **Nadira Khidojatova**, coordinator of the opposition party “Sunshine Coalition of Uzbekistan” and sister of **Nigora Khidojatova**, a leader of the opposition party Ozod Dekhkonlar, was sentenced to 10 years on false charges of extortion, plunder, embezzlement and theft. Nigora’s husband, Arif Aidan, was recently killed by Uzbek citizens in Kazakhstan in what some consider to be an act directed against his wife.

Imamova Munozhaat, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) in Jizzak province, is under constant surveillance and receives regular threats ordering her to cease her human rights activities. On 15 August 2005 she visited the city of Jizzak to meet the chair of HRSU branch B. Khamroev. She was detained near his flat and beaten. At the time she was 3 months pregnant and as a result lost her child. As in the cases of many other human rights defenders, police request regular reports on all her movements and she is not allowed to exit the region.

Bolbekova Bukhvol, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) in Jizzak province, was dismissed from the position of Chair of the women's council of the village by order of the regional *khokim* (administrator) after the Andijan events. She is under constant surveillance; police request regular reports on all her movements and she is not allowed to exit the region.

Togaeva Khurshida, Chair of the Pakhtakor regional branch of the HRSU in Jizzak province, is under close surveillance. On 23 September, she was beaten by two strangers who asked her which ambassadors had B. Khamroev (Chair of the HRSU branch in Jizzak) visited. She was hospitalized as a result of this attack.

Both **Kurbanova Saida**, member of the HRSU in Jizzak province and **Fazieva Gulnora**, member of the Initiative Group of independent human rights defenders in Tashkent, are under constant surveillance and are not allowed to leave their respective regions.

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