

UZBEKISTAN

LEAVING NO WITNESSES: UZBEKISTAN'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST RIGHTS DEFENDERS

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SUMMARY

Local human rights defenders play a crucial role in promoting the rule of law. They are a lifeline of information, tying victims of government abuse to the rest of society, and providing the first recourse for victims in their search for redress and justice. Since their emergence in 1992, human rights defenders in Uzbekistan have worked under the pressure of rigorous government surveillance and harassment. The government of Uzbekistan since February 1999 has intensified its efforts to intimidate, silence, and punish those who expose abuses, to stop the flow of information to the international community, and to prevent international scrutiny of its disastrous human rights record. The crackdown began in the wake of the bombing of several government buildings in Tashkent that month.

As a result of the campaign against rights defenders, some of the most dedicated and outspoken promoters of human rights have been silenced. In 1999 alone, two leading activists were sentenced to prison terms, and one, jailed since 1998, died in custody. Police officers brutally beat activists upon detention and during interrogation sessions. Police investigators and a judge threatened activists with arrest, and subjected rights workers to intense and repeated interrogation. Officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs denied activists their rights to due process and access to medical treatment. They unlawfully confiscated property and fabricated evidence. Authorities used threats, intimidation, and, in one 1998 case, torture, to force activists to confess to false charges, to convince them to disclose information on human rights complainants or other human rights workers, or to compel them to abandon their work for human rights. They also intimidated and harassed family members of defenders, with the same aim. Prison officials subjected at least one convicted defender to severe psychological abuse and deprived others of necessary medical assistance.

Local authorities also organized public meetings designed to discredit, humiliate, and frighten human rights workers. These meetings, described by one foreign observer as "hate rallies," recalled some of the darkest days of Soviet public denunciations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Uzbekistan:

- Immediately release rights defenders Ismoil Adylov and Mahbuba Kasymova from prison pending a full and impartial review of the charges against them;
- Review the sentence of Meli Kobilov, a member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, and ensure that all relevant amnesty provisions are applied. Closely monitor his treatment by prison officials: ensure that they cease to penalize him for unfounded infractions and cease to prevent him from contacting an attorney;
- Ensure that members of human rights organizations are able to exercise their right to freedom of movement and can travel unimpeded both within Uzbekistan, and abroad;
- Return to rights defenders materials confiscated by police, including official identification and other documents, human rights materials, and office and other equipment;
- Register the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan as nongovernmental organizations, as provided for under Uzbek law;
- Name an independent legal investigative team to conduct a full and impartial investigation into the beating of Mikhail Ardzinov, Tolib Iakubov, Haidbai Iakubov, and Muidin Kurbanov and bring to justice those responsible for ordering and carrying out these attacks;

- Cease immediately all harassment, including intimidating and intrusive surveillance of members of human rights organizations and their families by police and members of the security forces;
- Provide local and international human rights monitors access to all trials and court proceedings;
- Allow local and international human rights monitors full and unimpeded access to places of detention;
- Provide the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) complete and accurate information on detainees, including the dates, legal basis, and circumstances of their arrest, and conditions of detention during all phases of investigations;
- Remove formal and informal restrictions on the domestic press that block coverage of local human rights groups and the human rights issues they document.

To the United Nations Commission on Human Rights:

- Pass a resolution condemning the deterioration of human rights in Uzbekistan and appointing a special rapporteur with a mandate to monitor the situation and report to the next session of the Commission;
- As a follow-up step to the 1998 adoption of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms by the General Assembly, establish a mandate of a special rapporteur on human rights defenders.

To the United Nations Development Programme:

- Condition continued financial support of the Uzbek government's National Center for Human Rights on the registration of independent, nongovernmental human rights groups, including the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan;
- Ensure that this financial assistance program has at its center support for nongovernmental human rights monitoring and advocacy groups, including training and other forms of technical assistance.

To the OSCE:

- Continue to urge the Uzbek government to register local human rights groups;
- Send a strong message to the government of Uzbekistan that all OSCE programmatic activities on all aspects of security are contingent upon clear progress in compliance with human dimension agreements, of which the ability of local human rights monitors to operate is a fundamental part;
- Include representatives of local human rights groups, including unregistered groups, in the semi-regular human rights briefings and in all other pertinent seminars organized by the OSCE Central Asia Liaison Office;
- Closely monitor the ability of unregistered human rights groups to carry out their monitoring activities, and immediately and forcefully protest to the government of Uzbekistan whenever these activities are blocked through violence, harassment, arbitrary arrests, or other means.

To the European Union (E.U.):

- Ensure that the Joint OSCE-E.U. program in support of human rights and democratization has at its center direct support for local, nongovernmental human rights monitoring and advocacy groups;
- Continue to include meetings with representatives of local nongovernmental human rights monitoring and advocacy groups for all high-level delegations visiting Uzbekistan;

- Citing the human rights conditions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Uzbekistan, which came into force in July 1999, urge the registration of local independent nongovernmental human rights groups as a condition for enhanced relations under the PCA. If no progress in registering groups is achieved, consider suspending the PCA;
- Raise concerns regarding the treatment of independent nongovernmental human rights groups in the context of all intergovernmental consultations carried out pursuant to the PCA;
- Support a resolution at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights condemning the deterioration of human rights in the country and appointing a special rapporteur to monitor the situation and report to the next commission.

To the United States:

- Continue to monitor the status of local nongovernmental human rights organizations, and to press for their registration by the government of Uzbekistan and for their ability to operate unimpeded;
- If there is no progress in registering independent, nongovernmental human rights monitoring groups, or in lifting the criminal penalties imposed on their members for the exercise of their internationally protected human rights, consider finding that the government of Uzbekistan is not making a good-faith effort to improve human rights conditions, and therefore should not be eligible for assistance such as credits granted through the Export-Import Bank or the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), or under the Cooperative Threat Reduction Treaty, all of which require human rights certification;
- If the government of Uzbekistan continues to block foreign travel by representatives of nongovernmental human rights groups, suspend all U.S. government-sponsored visitors' programs for Uzbek government officials' travel to the United States;
- Support a resolution at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights condemning the decline in human rights protection in the country and approving the appointment of a special rapporteur on Uzbekistan to monitor the situation and report to the next commission.

BACKGROUND

In 1992, the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) was founded and in 1996 two offshoots, born of dissent within the group, were created: the Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (IHROU) and the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Individual (CPRI).¹ To this day, the government has refused to register HRSU or IHROU. CPRI, however, gained registration almost immediately, raising suspicions that it enjoyed government patronage. The vast majority of local human rights workers in Uzbekistan are now or were at one point affiliated with one of the country's two major opposition movements: the Erk (Freedom or Will) Party and the Birlik (Unity) Popular Movement.² Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the government tolerated these organizations; beginning in 1992, opposition political leaders were jailed, "disappeared," blacklisted, or forced to flee Uzbekistan. The party structures largely disintegrated and organized political activity lapsed. Witnesses to government injustice and often themselves victims of human rights abuses during this period, many political activists began to organize around the cause of human rights.

¹CPRI was renamed the Uzbek Section of the Frankfurt, Germany-based International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) in November 1999. As of March 2000, the group's registration under the new name was pending.

²The Birlik Popular Movement was founded in 1989 and the Birlik Party, which grew out of the Movement, was established shortly thereafter, in 1990. The Erk Party was established in 1990.

HRSU claims some 350 members nation-wide, with twenty-five or thirty who actively investigate human rights abuses. Its representatives gather testimony from victims of human rights abuses and their families and collect supporting documentation. HRSU disseminates semi-regular information bulletins and longer reports. Recent work by the organization has included the preparation of several extensive lists of people the group believes were imprisoned on politically motivated charges and a report on the torture of detainees and convicted prisoners. It is particularly active in advocating for the rights of individual victims of rights violations. The group's members write to local officials on behalf of complainants, and arrange and attend meetings between a complainant or family member and relevant government officials to press for attention to a specific case.

The leadership of HRSU is regularly called upon by Western diplomats and international organizations, including the OSCE, to brief visiting delegations and officials on the situation in Uzbekistan.

The other major human rights group in Uzbekistan, IHROU, has produced substantial documentation on the government's crackdown since 1997 on religious Muslims who were independent of state-sponsored Islamic institutions. Through interviews with victims and their families and analysis of documentary evidence, such as court decisions and official results of police investigations, the group's members have compiled detailed case information on politically motivated arrests and other human rights violations against independent Muslims. IHROU representatives have monitored scores of trials of persons affiliated with the political opposition or independent Islam and reported upon the proceedings and due process violations that occurred.

Prior to the confiscation of the organization's computer, the group regularly sent out electronic bulletins updating interested intergovernmental organizations and international rights groups on the status of human rights protection in Uzbekistan. These reports drew on research conducted by the ninety active members the organization claims to have throughout the country. The IHROU disseminated information on topics including politically motivated arrests, torture, and religious discrimination. Recent publications authored by the organization's chairman include a pamphlet entitled "Information against Disinformation."

IHROU's representatives are routinely called upon to brief visiting experts and foreign delegations on the quality and degree of rights protection in the country.

Activists' continued links with opposition politics often blur the government's motives for harassing them. The members of the most prominent rights organizations in Uzbekistan operate with an agenda to create the conditions in which opposition political parties could function freely and legitimately. Thus, rights defenders' affiliations with independent parties and political dissidents, as well as their demonstrated commitment to creating the conditions for a genuine multiparty system and open political arena, make them natural targets for authorities who mistrust and fear such opposition. However, as documented below, those carrying out the recent attacks on members of local rights organizations have made it clear that it is these persons' human rights activities per se that the authorities find objectionable.

In the government's 1999 campaign against rights defenders, Uzbek law enforcement came down hardest on members of the two unregistered human rights groups. These groups' members were actively involved in documenting arbitrary arrests, torture, and unfair trials that took place during the brutal and extensive police crackdown following the February 1999 bombings. In the absence of an independent media that could report such abuses, these men and women served as an essential link to the international community and foreign press, reporting on the kinds and scope of human rights abuses taking place in Uzbekistan.³

³The Uzbek media do not regularly report on human rights violations in the country. Some representatives of foreign media outlets, however, frequently report on political arrests, religious persecution, and related human rights issues. The BBC World Service has been particularly active in reporting on the government's treatment of political and religious suspects in recent trials. On one occasion, however, police prevented one of the outlet's Uzbek national employees from attending such a trial, and

Rights workers also serve as advocates for victims with government authorities. Many victims of human rights abuses are not familiar with government agencies, and do not know where to turn or to whom to appeal when an injustice takes place. Local human rights defenders help them by attending and monitoring trials, and by submitting their appeals to government agencies such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ombudsman's office, the Office of the President, the procuracy, and the National Center for Human Rights. They sometimes accompany victims to meetings at these offices to press for attention to their cases.

LEGAL PROTECTION FOR RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Domestic Law

Freedom of conscience and freedom of expression are provided under article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which states, "Each person has the right to freedom of thought, speech, and belief. Each person has the right to seek, receive, and disseminate any information, with the exception of information directed against the existing constitutional order and other limitations established by law."⁴

The right to free association is spelled out in article 34: "Citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan have the right to associate in trade unions, political parties, and other public associations, as well as to participate in popular movements."⁵ Moreover, this provision specifies that, "No one may abridge the rights, freedoms, or dignity of persons who represent an opposition minority political party, public association, popular movement, or representative agency of power."⁶

International Law

threatened him with arrest when he persisted. The BBC reported the incident to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which issued an apology for the police misconduct and assured the BBC that its representatives would not be harassed again in the course of their duties. Human Rights Watch interview with Louise Hidalgo, BBC London Correspondent, Tashkent July 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview, name withheld, Tashkent, July 1999.

⁴Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, December 8, 1992.

⁵Ibid.

The United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (referred to hereinafter as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders) sets the standards by which the international community assesses states' treatment of rights defenders.⁷ Article 1 of this instrument states clearly that, "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels," while article 12 (1) elaborates: "Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms." Article 5 guarantees the right to assembly and to join and participate in nongovernmental organizations, associations, or groups for the purpose of promoting and protecting human rights.⁸ Of particular relevance to human rights defenders in Uzbekistan, who have seen their human rights documents confiscated by police and who have been threatened with criminal action because of their content, is the right, "...freely to publish, impart or disseminate to others views, information and knowledge on all human rights and fundamental freedoms."⁹

Since February 1999, the government of Uzbekistan has arbitrarily denied local human rights defenders access to nominally open trials, in contravention of the standard set by article 9 (3.b) of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, which provides everyone the right, "to attend public hearings, proceedings and trials so as to form an opinion on their compliance with national law and applicable international obligations and commitments."¹⁰

Two fundamental human rights treaties, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), recognize not just the right but the duty of individuals to act as guardians of the rights provided under international law. The preambles to these covenants set out that the states parties agree to the following provisions, "realizing that the individual, having duties to other individuals and to the community to which he belongs, is under a responsibility to strive for the promotion and observance of the rights recognized in the present Covenant."¹¹

Specific provisions in the ICCPR relate to rights defenders' ability to live and work unhindered by arbitrary harassment or punishment. The right to freedom of expression, article 19 of the ICCPR, is essential to human rights defenders' ability to carry out their work. Even unpopular speech is protected under this provision of international law. A government's sensitivity to criticism is not enough to provide grounds for silencing individuals or punishing those with dissenting views. For rights workers, the ability to impart information and to gather with others in exercise of their right to free assembly, guaranteed under articles 19 and 21, are also essential to their role as monitors and as reporters on rights abuses.

Human rights defenders were convicted on trumped-up charges at court proceedings that can be described only as show trials, in gross violation of the standards of due process guaranteed under article 14 of the ICCPR. The state has also violated article 7, which prohibits the use of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment when it has taken human rights activists into custody. In several instances, the government has arbitrarily prevented activists from leaving the country, in violation of article 12, which provides for freedom of movement, including the right to leave or enter one's own country.

ATTACKS ON RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU)

⁷The Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly on December 9, 1998. General Assembly Resolution 53/144, A/RES/53/144, March 8, 1999.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., article 6 (b).

¹⁰Ibid., article 9 (3.b)

¹¹Uzbekistan ratified the ICCPR and the ICESCR in 1995.

Haidbai Iakubov

Haidbai Iakubov is a long-time member of HRSU's branch in Khorezm, in western Uzbekistan. On the morning of April 11, 1999, police in Khorezm detained Iakubov for three hours at the Urgench district police station and demanded information about his human rights activities. When he refused to disclose the sources of information provided him in confidence by victims of rights abuses, a masked officer wielding a nightstick beat him repeatedly.

Iakubov told Human Rights Watch that he was detained by four plain clothes officers while on the street on his way to work at a local branch of the national insurance agency. He said that the officers took him to the Urgench district police station, to a hall containing approximately ninety other detainees. The hall was guarded by officers dressed all in black, wearing masks, and carrying automatic weapons.

Iakubov reported that officers called him in to one of the five offices being used to question detainees. As he stood to go into the office, one of the officers in a mask without warning struck him on the back with a nightstick. Once in the office, the masked officer ordered him to sit and continued to stand by his side. The officer in charge was questioning another detainee, whom Iakubov reported was an observant Muslim.¹² The officer shouted at the man and accused him of being a "Wahhabi."¹³ Iakubov reported that right before his eyes the masked officer began to severely beat the other detainee with his nightstick. The man started to cry and the masked officer ordered him out of the office.¹⁴

The officer in charge asked Iakubov for his name and passport and consulted a list, but apparently could not locate Iakubov's name. The officer left and, according to Iakubov, clarified the reason for the activist's detention when he returned:

He asked me why I work as a human rights defender. He told me to list all of the people I defend and gave me a piece of paper. I said, "I will give you no list." I said, "I belong to a human rights organization" and I showed him a business card I had been given by a representative of the OSCE.¹⁵

Iakubov then recounted that the officer accused him of defending people for money. He threatened to call in an investigator to question Iakubov about this. Iakubov recalled, "Then he screamed at me, 'You will go to jail!' He then said, 'If you write down all the names of those you defend, I will release you.'" Again, Iakubov refused to write the names of victims of human rights abuses who had come to him for help. He was told to return to the hall with the other detainees. As soon as he stood up, the masked officer again began to beat him, striking him six times on the back with the nightstick. Iakubov noted that many people in the hall were crying because they too had been beaten.¹⁶

At approximately 2:00 p.m., three hours after officers took Iakubov into custody, a police officer in uniform came to him, returned his passport and without offering any explanation said, "'You are free, but don't leave your house again.'"¹⁷

Local police continued to harass Iakubov. On June 8, while Iakubov was in Tashkent to meet with the head of the HRSU and with representatives of international organizations, including Human Rights Watch, men in plain clothes

¹²Name withheld.

¹³In Central Asia, the term "Wahhabism" refers to "Islamic fundamentalism" and extremism. The term "Wahhabi" is used to suggest radicalism and militancy. It is often used pejoratively. In Uzbekistan, the government has used this label to refer to those who are identifiably observant Muslims or who are independent Muslims, such as worshipers at mosques not affiliated with the government or followers of religious leaders who are critical of the government.

Historically, "Wahhabism" is a branch of Sunnism practiced in Saudi Arabia and named after its founder, Islamic scholar Muhammad 'Abd al-Wahhab. The eighteenth-century movement known as "Wahhabism" advocated a conservative agenda of purifying the Muslim faith and simultaneously encouraged independent thinking, a potentially liberal stance.

¹⁴Human Rights Watch interview with Haidbai Iakubov, Tashkent, June 10, 1999.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid

who refused to give their names or show any identification reportedly visited Iakubov's home in Khiva (Khorezm province) and questioned his son about his whereabouts.¹⁸

On July 16, Iakubov accompanied a Human Rights Watch researcher on a field mission to the town of Jaslyk, in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, home to an infamous prison that allegedly holds a large number of persons convicted on politically motivated charges. The prison is reportedly a work camp built on the site of a former Soviet military base and is said to still be under construction. Government officials, including Deputy Minister Sayfullo Asadov of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, assured Human Rights Watch in October 1999 that there are no prisons to which family members and lawyers cannot go in order to visit prisoners. He also stated that the city of Jaslyk is open to visitors and that authorized visitors can meet with detainees at the prison. "It is a regular prison with a reception room for families. Anybody who has a desire to go there and check what is going on there can just take the train," he said, adding, "It is not closed."¹⁹ However, Uzbek police stopped Human Rights Watch and Iakubov as the investigators approached the town, and ordered them to turn back. On the return trip, the rights defenders were repeatedly detained by police in Karakalpakstan and Khorezm. In the city of Khiva, the head of the police department's criminal investigation team threatened to put Iakubov in jail. When asked what charges he could possibly bring, he reportedly responded, "We'll find something."²⁰ In subsequent weeks, police in Khiva continued to threaten Iakubov with arrest and called him in for questioning several times.²¹

Komil Nuralaev

Komil Nuralaev, a member of the HRSU branch in Khorezm, was temporarily detained by authorities in Jaslyk in September 1999 for his human rights activities.

On September 6, 1999, Nuralaev and fellow HRSU member Haidbai Iakubov took a train to the town of Jaslyk in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan to investigate accounts of ill-treatment and deaths in custody in the prison there. Police reportedly recognized Iakubov and refused to allow him to disembark at Jaslyk.²²

Nuralaev, who was in possession of a pass allowing him to visit the gas compressor at Jaslyk, was able to enter the city. There, he met with a worker from the prison infirmary who reportedly recounted the disease and ill-treatment suffered by prisoners in Jaslyk.²³ HRSU general secretary Tolib Iakubov reported that as Nuralaev left the home of the infirmary worker, police approached and immediately took him into custody. He said that the Jaslyk police also confiscated Nuralaev's audio tapes of his interview with the prison worker. They held Nuralaev in the Jaslyk city police station for several hours of questioning and then released him the same day. In the following days, police in Khorezm province reportedly called Nuralaev in for two more interrogation sessions and then issued a protocol revoking his "exit visa," thereby depriving him of his right to leave the country. As of November 9, there were no indications that any criminal charges would be brought against the rights defender. His audio tapes were not returned.²⁴

¹⁹Human Rights Watch has received persistent reports of ill-treatment and deaths from torture in the Jaslyk prison during the past year. Credible reports indicate that as many as eight men may have died from torture in the prison during that period. HRSU has branded the prison a "concentration camp" and claims that death from ill-treatment and disease are common in the facility and that authorities routinely torture inmates. Human Rights Watch interview with Deputy Minister Sayfullo Asadov, Tashkent, October 28, 1999. However, as indicated in this report, human rights defenders who have tried to visit the city have been turned away and detained. Moreover, defense attorneys have failed to get permission to visit the prison and family members were reportedly ordered by authorities not to get off the train at Jaslyk when they went to look for their imprisoned relatives. Human Rights Watch interview with attorney Irina Mikulina, Tashkent, October 30, 1999.

²⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Haidbai Iakubov, Khorezm, July 17, 1999.

²¹Human Rights Watch interview with Haidbai Iakubov, Tashkent, July 1999 and November 9, 1999.

²²Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, November 26, 1999.

²³Prison worker's name withheld.

²⁴Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, October, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with

The prison worker himself was reportedly detained briefly for questioning on September 6 at the same time Nurulaev was detained. Police in Jasyk also reportedly subjected him to repeated interrogation following the initial detention. As of November 9, the prison worker's whereabouts remained unknown. It was believed he had left the country.²⁵

Tolib Iakubov

Tolib Iakubov is the general secretary of HRSU.²⁶ In the past year, he has been badly beaten, publicly humiliated, and terrorized by a crowd at a Soviet-style public denunciation session, and discredited as a "traitor" in newspaper articles printed in the government-controlled provincial media.

On November 3, 1998, unidentified men attacked Tolib Iakubov in Warsaw, where he was participating in the OSCE implementation meeting. The men attacked him in broad daylight on the street in front of his hotel, as he was on his way to the OSCE conference center, and made no attempt to rob him. Iakubov believed that his attackers were operating at the behest of the Uzbek secret service, and reported that he viewed the attack as retaliation for his outspoken criticism of the government's poor human rights record. The assault took place just days after Iakubov's speech before the OSCE forum criticizing Uzbekistan's human rights record. The severe beating sent Iakubov to the hospital with serious injuries, including several broken ribs. The OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights denounced the attack.

Iakubov's organization published lists of the names of scores of illegally detained Muslim men and exposed police and security forces' ill-treatment of those in custody after the February 16 bombings. The government made it clear that such public criticism would not go unpunished. According to Iakubov's own account, on March 10, 1999, Sarvar Hudayarov, the mayor of Iakubov's home town, Jizzakh, and the president of the local collective farm, Mumin Kakhkharov, came to Iakubov's home and forced him to accompany them to a public gathering. Dozens of people, including neighbors, community leaders, police officers, and local government officials attended the meeting, which Iakubov described as "a genuine inquisition."²⁷ Iakubov recalled that participants took turns standing up to insult and humiliate him, accusing him of engaging in anti-state activities and calling him an "enemy of the state."²⁸ Participants charged that he was protecting terrorists and some pressured him to confess his supposed crimes and to beg for the forgiveness of the people of Uzbekistan. Iakubov was forced to remain at the "hate rally" against his will, listening for more than three hours to continuous insults and accusations. He reported being particularly frightened when one participant announced to the group: "We need to kill him!"²⁹ Police officers present threatened to have him arrested for hooliganism when a woman grabbed him by the arm and he brushed her aside.³⁰ Iakubov was eventually permitted to return home.

One week after the "hate rally," on March 17, Iakubov sent a letter to the procuracy in Jizzakh, requesting that office open a criminal case against the mayor and the president of the collective farm. As of this writing, the local procuracy had reportedly taken no action.

²⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Haidbai Iakubov, Tashkent, November 9, 1999.

²⁶Tolib Iakubov is not related to Haidbai Iakubov. In 1992, administrators at the Tashkent State Pedagogical Institute fired Iakubov from his position as associate professor in the algebra department, allegedly at the instigation of President Karimov. Helsinki Watch (now Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia division), "Straightening Out the Brains of One Hundred: Discriminatory political Dismissals in Uzbekistan," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, vol. 5, issue 7, April 1993.

²⁷Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, May 9, 1999.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

Iakubov told Human Rights Watch that after the March 10 meeting, he was under constant surveillance by security officers whenever he returned to Jizzakh. The local newspaper, *Jizzakhskaia pravda*, published an article accusing Iakubov of supporting Islamic fundamentalist groups “that use religion as their weapons” and charged that the actual goal of his so-called democratic activities is to destabilize the peace and integrity of the country and ruin its international prestige.³¹ Iakubov reported in June that the local radio station also produced at least two pieces impugning his character, denouncing him as a traitor, and accusing him of “anti-state activities.”³²

Meli Kobilov

HRSU member Meli Kobilov is currently being held in Bekobod Prison, where authorities kept him in solitary confinement for fifty-six consecutive days.

Kobilov, aged fifty-seven, served as the representative of the HRSU’s Jizzakh branch of the from 1992 to 1994, when he was arrested in October 1994 on allegedly fabricated charges that included illegal possession of narcotics and ammunition.³³ After months of pre-trial detention he was tried and sentenced in February 1996 to ten years in prison.³⁴

Kobilov was reportedly a member of the Birlik Popular Movement and active member of the registered political party Vatan Taraqqiet (Development of the Fatherland). Although he has reportedly qualified under the terms of several separate presidential amnesties, authorities have failed to release him as dictated by the law.³⁵

Kobilov is currently serving his sentence in Bekobod Prison, number 64/21, after being transferred from Tashkent prison, where he allegedly attempted to organize prisoners to obtain better conditions and basic rights. In what his family and colleagues believed to be an act of retribution for this activity, prison authorities at the Bekobod facility placed Kobilov in an isolation cell for fifty-six consecutive days, from January 16 to March 12, 1999.³⁶ On January 16, 1999, prison warden Zainullo Rahmatullaev ordered Kobilov placed in an isolation cell for fifteen days as punishment for alleged violation of the internal prison rules. Kobilov described this cell as being a cold cement room, three meters by three meters in size, with an iron plank for a bed. During his detention in the punishment cell, Kobilov learned that guards claimed to find a knife and forbidden literature, including a May 1992 copy of the *Erk* newspaper, among his belongings. On February 1, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Colonel Rajab Kodirov, visited the prison. According to Kobilov, he threatened, “Old man, when you were in Tashkent prison, you wrote and wrote and didn’t give me any peace....If you write one more time, your corpse will be carried out of here or I will send you to Kyzyl Tepe [or] Jaslyk and nobody will find your corpse, do you understand?”³⁷ Kodirov was apparently alluding to Kobilov’s many complaints to authorities and human rights groups regarding the circumstances of his arrest and conditions at Tashkent prison, where he was confined before being transferred to the facility at Bekobod in 1998. Kobilov also wrote that, following Kodirov’s warning, prison warden Rahmatullaev punished Kobilov with another thirty days in isolation, effective February 1. Kobilov related he was put in cell number eight, where the temperature was well below zero degrees Celsius. The prison doctor accused Kobilov of hoarding medicine, a violation of prison rules. He was condemned to another ten days in isolation and moved to cell number five, near the lavatory. In a recent letter, Kobilov described conditions in the cell:

³¹Marat Zakirov, “Ungratefulness: Or, Actions of a Fake Democrat,” *Jizzakhskaia pravda*.” Date and volume number not available. Translated from Uzbek.

³²Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

³³Written statement by Meli Kobilov addressed to Human Rights Watch chair Jonathan Fanton, May 1998.

³⁴The sentence was upheld on appeal in November 1996 and then reduced to six years, taking into account time served and a 1996 amnesty decree that applied, according to HRSU general secretary Tolib Iakubov. Electronic communication by Tolib Iakubov to Human Rights Watch, January 13, 2000.

³⁵Human Rights Watch interviews with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, May and June, 1999; and HRSU Information Bulletin, May 1999. According to Iakubov, Kobilov was granted a sentence reduction in 1996 under an amnesty decree of that year (see above). However, HRSU claims that authorities failed to apply subsequent relevant amnesty provisions to Kobilov, with the explanation that he had violated internal prison rules and therefore did not qualify under the law. Electronic communication written by Tolib Iakubov to Human Rights Watch, January 13, 2000.

³⁶Human Rights Watch interview with Raikhon Kobilova, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

³⁷Letter from Meli Kobilov to Lieutenant-General B. Gulomov, First Deputy of the Chairman of the National Security and Human Rights (SNB), January 14, 2000.

In cell number five, there were fifteen or twenty big rats and they gnawed at bread and ran through the cell. Once, at night, I fell down from the second tier [top bunk] of the iron bed and my chest hit an iron stool, then my upper vertebra bone was broken and my right hand was swollen, finally, I fainted. When I came to myself, I could hardly move. I called for doctor Alimov, who said it would be okay and didn't take any x-rays. My chest bone is still curved, anyone can see it.³⁸

According to Kobilov's wife, Raikhon Kobilova, authorities made four separate attempts to coerce Kobilov into abandoning his political and human rights activities, promising to release him if he did.³⁹ He refused every time. In May 1998, one of the prison authorities, Mr. Sharipov, also tried to force Raikhon Kobilova to sign a similar statement on behalf of her husband, promising Kobilov would be freed if she did so. She also refused.⁴⁰

Authorities again placed Kobilov in an isolation cell for an unspecified length of time beginning on May 17, 1999, but allowed him out of the cell for at least part of one day to visit with his wife, who came to the prison to see him on his birthday, May 20. She said that his health was deteriorating; that he looked pale and was not getting enough food. Further, Kobilov is now ill and requires several medications, including treatment for a heart condition. Prison authorities have reportedly refused to provide him with this medical assistance.⁴¹ "They are trying to break him by putting him in isolation," Kobilova alleged.⁴² She reported in June that the term in solitary confinement had a severely detrimental effect on Kobilov's physical health and psychological well-being.

Kobilov's long term in solitary confinement violated domestic and international standards. According to Uzbekistan's penal code, even prisoners who are found guilty of grave violations of prison administrative rules can be placed in an isolated punishment cell only for a maximum of fifteen consecutive days.⁴³ Further, the United Nations General Comment on Article 7 of the ICCPR, regarding torture and ill-treatment, notes that the prohibition in that article "...relates not only to acts that cause physical pain but also to acts that cause mental suffering to the victim."⁴⁴ This comment states that, "...prolonged solitary confinement of the detained or imprisoned person may amount to acts prohibited by article 7."⁴⁵

In addition, Kobilov is being denied his right to access to an attorney. When he met with his wife on May 20, he passed a letter to her, asking her to give it to a lawyer. Authorities took the letter from Kobilova as she was leaving and refused to return it to her.⁴⁶ In November 1999, HRSU reported that authorities had denied Kobilova's latest request to visit her husband.⁴⁷

Muidin Kurbanov

Kurbanov has been a member of HRSU's chapter in Jizzakh province since 1994 and is also a member of the Vatan Taraqqieti party. In September 1998, law enforcement authorities in Jizzakh arrested Kurbanov on the basis of fabricated evidence of narcotics possession, held him incommunicado for three weeks, tortured him with repeated beatings, and questioned him about his human rights organization and alleged links to a famous Islamic leader; a judge later tried him in the absence of a lawyer and sentenced him to three years of imprisonment. Kurbanov was released from prison in January 1999 under a presidential amnesty decree. Authorities in Jizzakh have since repeatedly harassed Kurbanov and threatened to charge him with membership in the banned Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation).

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Human Rights Watch interview with Raikhon Kobilova, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Article 109, Criminal Penal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, April 25, 1997.

⁴⁴Human Rights Committee, General Comment 20, Article 7 (Forty-fourth session, 1992), Compilation of General Comments and General Recommendations Adopted by Human Rights Treaty Bodies, U.N. Doc. HRI/GEN/1/Rev.1 at 30 (1994).

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Human Rights Watch interview with Raikhon Kobilova, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁴⁷Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, November 2, 1999. March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Kurbanov recalled his arrest and the grueling months of detention, torture, and imprisonment that followed:

On September 3, 1998, four men stopped me as I was walking down the street. I recognized one of the men...and wanted to greet him and reached out my hand. He took both of my hands, twisted them behind my back and put me in the car...The men on either side of me in the car began to beat me...they beat me all the way to the neighborhood police station.⁴⁸

Kurbanov reported that before they entered the police station he felt one of the men put something in his pants pocket and then felt the sting of a needle, and realized he was being given an injection. At the police station, Kurbanov was ordered to empty his pockets, but, suspecting that the arresting officers had planted narcotics on him, he immediately declared that the packet in the pocket of his pants was not his. The officers then put him back in the car and drove to Kurbanov's home, where they conducted a search of the house. There, in the presence of two "witnesses" they had brought along to observe, the four officers claimed to have discovered two packets allegedly containing a total of 20 grams of marijuana. Kurbanov said they took him directly from the house to the basement of the Jizzakh regional police department. Authorities kept him there one night and then took him the next day to the local clinic, where they drew his blood for analysis. They claimed he tested positive for narcotics in the blood stream and charged him with illegal use of narcotics (article 96 of the criminal code), and possession of illegal narcotics (article 276 (1) of the criminal code).⁴⁹

Officers then transferred Kurbanov to a pre-trial detention cell in the neighboring Pakhtakor district police station, where he remained incommunicado for a week. Next, authorities transferred him to a basement cell in the Ministry of Internal Affairs building in Tashkent for questioning:

They began to interrogate me as if I were a 'Wahhabi': where did I study, who did I teach, who was my teacher, did I know Obid Qori [Obidhon Qori Nazarov] or not, how was I connected with Tolib Iakubov [general secretary of the HRSU]?...Men in plain clothes would come in and question me and then others would come in and beat me, every day. They put sheets of paper on a table and told me to write down everything that happened. I wrote everything down, they read it, but they didn't approve of it and beat me. Then they left the room, saying, "Think it over a little while."⁵⁰

The officers instructed Kurbanov to write a statement against Tolib Iakubov, but he refused. "In the basement, they said, 'are you relying on Tolib Iakubov? Tolib Iakubov will soon be gone so don't pin your hopes on him.'" ⁵¹ According to Kurbanov, the primary questions the officers asked were: "Do you know Imam Nazarov?" And, "Where does Tolib Iakubov get his money?" ⁵² The beatings also continued. Kurbanov reported that different men, all in plain clothes, came into his cell and beat him each day:

They beat me with their fists. One, he beat me on the sides from behind and then they turned me around and hit me in the stomach...I was even afraid to eat after that. If you're hit like that, your stomach could burst, so I didn't eat. The first three days they didn't touch me; they simply interrogated me. Then, after three days, this situation repeated every day and for a week they beat me.⁵³

A detailed account by Kurbanov of the physical mistreatment he suffered at the hands of police was published in a September 1999 HRSU bulletin:

⁴⁸Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid. Leading independent Imam Obidhon Nazarov was last seen on March 5, 1998. For more information on his case, see: Human Rights Watch/Helsinki (now Human Rights Watch, Europe and Central Asia division), "Crackdown in the Farghona Valley: Arbitrary Arrests and Religious Discrimination," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, vol. 10, no. 4, May 1998.

⁵¹Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁵²Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, June 10, 1999.

⁵³Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999. March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

For several days they forced me to stand with my legs spread apart and they kicked me between my legs. Sometimes they would force me to lay down on the floor, tie my hands behind my back, someone would push me to the floor by pressing his foot in between my shoulder blades and a third person would beat me on the bottoms of my feet...most often they beat me on the head, which hurt for a long time afterwards.⁵⁴

At the end of the week, Kurbanov was questioned by two new officers who identified themselves as agents from the National Security Service (SNB, formerly the KGB). They told him that he was suspected of “Wahhabism” and must write a statement about all that he knew. He wrote a statement describing his earlier activities as a middle school teacher and tutor in a mosque. SNB officers had ordered him in 1994 to stop teaching children Arabic script in school and in private lessons. According to Kurbanov, he had already ceased giving such lessons well before his 1998 arrest. He complained to the two new SNB officers that the other officers were beating him for no reason. During his last three days in the Ministry of Internal Affairs basement cell, Kurbanov was left alone by the officers, who discontinued the beatings after his discussion with the SNB agents.⁵⁵ Kurbanov was then transferred to another basement cell, this time in the pre-trial detention facility within the Jizzakh city police department.⁵⁶

Kurbanov related that during his two-week detention in Jizzakh, officers continued to question him about his alleged possession of drugs. They finally convinced him to sign a document confirming the charges:

One day the investigator came [to the Jizzakh city police department] and said that I was being charged now with part two, not part one, of article 276. I signed the document and the next day they took me to prison, to Khavast [in the Syrdarya province]. They kept me there for a month. After one month, they took me to Zamin district to try me.⁵⁷

Kurbanov reported that authorities denied him the right to legal counsel, failing even to provide him with a state-appointed attorney. In addition, the criminal trial took place, against Kurbanov’s wishes, in the absence of any witnesses to the proceedings, in the absence even of a prosecutor to try the case. Alone in a room with a judge, Kurbanov was sentenced to three years in prison:

I had no lawyer. They said a lawyer costs money and I didn’t have any. Since I didn’t have a lawyer, I pressed for my relatives to be present at the trial. The next day, they said, “Look, your parents and brother are not here and your wife didn’t want to come.” So there were no relatives, no witnesses. They tried me alone. They tried me without a lawyer, without witnesses, without relatives, no one. Just me. I was alone, in the judge’s room, alone. This was around the 8th of November. There, they found me guilty of article 276, part two, and gave me three years. The first day went by, the second day the judge had already decided, and the third day they took me away. Really you could say the trial was only two days. They gave me three years and took me away to prison, to Khavast.⁵⁸

⁵⁴HRSU Information Bulletin number 2, September 12, 1999, p. 25.

⁵⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999. March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Authorities shuffled Kurbanov around to a series of prisons, moving him from Khavast to Tashkent prison and then to another in Karshi. Overcrowding in Tashkent prison made it particularly harsh. "They put up to fifty-seven people into cells meant for fourteen," he charged. The cramped quarters made it virtually impossible to sleep, he recalled, so prisoners would sleep sitting upright or would take turns sleeping. Disease was rampant and prisoners, including Kurbanov, suffered from infestations of lice and bedbugs, but medical personnel in Tashkent and Karshi prisons refused to provide medical assistance. Kurbanov's description of Khavast prison only served to highlight the intensely inhuman conditions in the others: "Khavast was a bit better than the others. Once a week we were allowed to shower, and they changed the sheets."⁵⁹

On January 13, 1999, Kurbanov was freed from prison under a presidential amnesty which provided for the release of prisoners tried under article 276. The criminal conviction, however, remains on his record, and his personal property and passport, confiscated upon arrest, have not been restored.⁶⁰

Moreover, Kurbanov's release from prison did not mean freedom from harassment by officials. After his release, local police in Jizzakh called him in for questioning several times without issuing a written order to report to the station. They accused him of continuing to teach children and disseminate books; they further accused him of being a member of Hizb ut-Tahrir. "After that, now I am living in fear. If they took me once, they could take me again, as a 'Wahhabi' or 'member of Hizb ut-Tahrir,'" he told Human Rights Watch.⁶¹ He added, "I am under a great weight, we cannot live peacefully, I am constantly in fear. How can you live peacefully when eyes are watching you all the time?"⁶²

On September 3, 1999, Kurbanov was reportedly called in to the Zarbdor district procurator's office in Jizzakh region, where he was told by deputy procurator Olimjon Jabarov that he was still under state surveillance and that the procurator could send him back to prison at any time.⁶³

In January 2000, Kurbanov appealed to local police officials to return personal items they had confiscated at the time of his arrest in 1998, including a typewriter and several library books. According to Kurbanov, the response from the officers was only further harassment. After he issued his appeal, Kurbanov was ordered to report to the Zarbdor police station, where two officers allegedly ordered him to sell his house and move out of town within a week, or else, they threatened, there would be "even more trouble."⁶⁴

The Independent Human Rights Organization of Uzbekistan (IHROU)

Ismoil Adylov

IHROU steering committee member Adylov was arrested in July on fabricated charges, held incommunicado in a basement cell, and then convicted and sentenced in an unfair trial to six years in prison. Authorities have denied him essential medical attention in custody. His whereabouts in custody are unknown.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰HRSU Information Bulletin number 2, September 12, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁶¹Human Rights Watch interview with Muidin Kurbanov, Jizzakh, June 12, 1999.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Open letter written by Tolib Iakubov, general secretary of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, to Zarbdor district procurator Mardonov and Jizzakh regional procurator Atabaev, October 30, 1999. The procurator serves as prosecutor in criminal cases.

⁶⁴Letter written by Muidin Kurbanov to the Dustlik Mahallah (neighborhood council), January 20, 2000. As of this writing, Kurbanov is in the process of preparing to leave his home. Human Rights Watch March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Prior to Adylov's arrest, Uzbek government officials made it clear that they objected to his human rights activities. On June 11, 1999, Adylov attended a trial of three alleged members of Hizb ut-Tahrir, at which Judge Mansur Akhmajonov presided. Judge Akhmajonov recognized Adylov, who had monitored an earlier trial of accused Hizb ut-Tahrir members. According to Adylov, Akhmajonov accused him of being a member of a terrorist group, along with his colleague Mahbuba Kasymova. The judge further threatened to charge Adylov with membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir, alleging that the human rights group's researchers were not human rights defenders at all, but Hizb ut-Tahrir members. Akhmajonov also noted Adylov's past participation in the Birlik opposition party and accused that group of having been against the government in 1990. Finally, in parting, Adylov reported, the judge informed him he would not be allowed to attend the trial.⁶⁵ When the trial began, Judge Akhmajonov denied Adylov entry. Adylov was again denied entry to the next hearing in the case, on June 14, to which he intended to accompany a Human Rights Watch researcher.⁶⁶

On July 10 around 8:00 p.m., a uniformed officer from the neighborhood police station, Halbai Sirinov, went to Adylov's home along with two officers in plain clothes. Sirinov took Adylov's passport and told him that there was someone at the local neighborhood council who wanted to speak with him. At first, Adylov refused to go. At 8:30 p.m., however, Adylov and his wife Mamura agreed to go with the officer. When they got to the end of the street, there were three cars waiting with about six plain clothes officers. They put Adylov in one of the cars and told his wife they were taking him to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, leaving her behind.⁶⁷

Throughout his arrest, detention, investigation, and trial, authorities consistently violated Adylov's rights. According to family members, about ninety minutes after officers took Adylov into custody, thirty additional plainclothes Ministry of Internal Affairs officers came to his home. Soldiers in uniform carrying machine guns closed off the street surrounding the neighborhood. When Mamura Adylova refused to let the officers conduct a search without her husband present, they threatened to order the soldiers to attack the house and enter by force. She relented, and they entered without presenting a search warrant. The officers ransacked the family home and confiscated Adylov's human rights documents.

At that time, family members believe, police planted a plastic bag with one hundred leaflets of the banned Islamic group Hizb ut-Tahrir in a notebook.⁶⁸ Adylov's daughter had opened the very notebook police claim held the leaflets when she handed over her father's passport to the arresting officers. She testified that there was no religious literature there.⁶⁹ Adylov's wife further testified that the officers declared, "There are one hundred leaflets here" immediately after "discovering" the packet, without making any effort to count or examine the materials.⁷⁰

During a prison visit in October, Adylov reportedly told his wife about the actions of police after they took him away. According to him, the officers took him to a local police station, handcuffed him, and stuffed several leaflets in his pants pockets while in the car. After approximately fifteen minutes at the local police department, the officers took him to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁷¹ There, authorities kept Adylov incommunicado in an Ministry of Internal Affairs basement cell for nine days. Worried family members and Adylov's lawyer searched for him during this period, but were unable to obtain official confirmation of his whereabouts until July 20, when Adylov's lawyer was allowed his first visit with his client.

⁶⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Ismoil Adylov, Tashkent, June 14, 1999.

⁶⁶Human Rights Watch interview with Judge Mansur Akhmajonov, Tashkent, June 14, 1999.

⁶⁷Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, July 10, 1999; Human Rights Watch interview with Manzura Adylova, Tashkent, July 11, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Mamura Adylova, July 11, 1999.

⁶⁸Human Rights Watch interviews with Mamura Adylova, Manzura Adylova and Shukrullo Adylov, Tashkent, July 11, 1999.

⁶⁹Human Rights Watch interview with Manzura Adylova, Tashkent, July 11, 1999.

⁷⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Mamura Adylova, Tashkent, October 23, 1999. Uzbek law enforcement officials' practice of planting religious pamphlets on men in order to incriminate them is infamous and well documented. Independent research by Human Rights Watch has found that the number of such cases has in fact risen dramatically during the government crackdown on members of the banned Islamic organization Hizb ut-Tahrir and on other Muslims not affiliated with government-sanctioned mosques.

⁷¹Human Rights Watch interview with Mamura Adylova, Tashkent, October 23, 1999. March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Authorities not only obstructed Adylov's contact with the counsel of his choice, but attempted to force him to refuse that lawyer's services. According to a written complaint filed by the lawyer, Hamid Zainutdinov, for two days police refused even to tell him which officer was conducting the investigation. When Zainutdinov was finally able to contact the investigator, "he stated that the defendant already had a lawyer, one that was appointed by [the investigator], and he (Kasymov) advised me not to get involved in this case. In that way he indicated that my participation in the case was UNDESIRABLE..."⁷²

In a second complaint, Zainutdinov emphasized that:

From the very beginning my client had refused the services of the lawyer that was proposed to him by the investigator. But the one chosen by the client himself was not allowed access into the investigation. So the whole investigation, except for the literature expert's review, took place without me being present, and thus was carried out by unlawful methods. Therefore, it constitutes a violation of the defendant's right to a proper defense.⁷³

On September 29, Syrdarya District Court Judge Mirsharaf Meliev sentenced Adylov to six years in prison on charges of anti-constitutional activities, sabotage, and distribution of literature of a banned organization. The prosecution based its case on the materials that police claimed to have found in Adylov's house. The government charged that the ideas contained in these religious pamphlets included criticisms of Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov and a call for the establishment of an Islamic state, and thus that their possession constituted "encroachment upon the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan" (criminal code article 159, part 3). Moreover, the state charged Adylov with intent to distribute these pamphlets because police claimed they found one hundred leaflets, a large number.

Police also claimed to have found among Adylov's belongings a blueprint or map of the lay-out of Tashkent prison. Alleged possession of this document served as the basis for the state's charge of sabotage, criminal code article 161. Adylov strenuously denied that the blueprint was his.

Adylov's trial lasted only three hours; an hour and a half on each of two days. Adylov's lawyer reported that the evidence against his client consisted solely of witness statements regarding the search and a written report by an unnamed expert asserting the anti-constitutional nature of the leaflets police claimed to have found in the Adylov home. He further alleged that several of the witnesses testified in great detail about police conduct of the search, although they had been on the street at the time of the search.⁷⁴ In addition, in his written appeal addressed to the Syrdarya court following the trial, Adylov's lawyer complained that Judge Meliev refused to admit evidence the defense regarded as crucial, namely, Adylov's trousers with a ripped pocket that was allegedly torn when police shoved additional leaflets onto Adylov while he was handcuffed in the police car on the way to the police station.⁷⁵ Authorities arbitrarily denied the public access to the trial, barring local human rights monitors and a representative from the United States Embassy in Tashkent.⁷⁶

Despite Adylov's denials of membership in the banned group, the judge found that Adylov "worked systematically under the disguise of the religion of Islam to change the current state structures of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in a way

⁷²Letter of complaint written by Hamid Zainutdinov, attorney for Ismoil Adylov, to the procurator general, July 16, 1999, translated from Russian. Emphasis is in the original.

⁷³Letter of complaint written by Hamid Zainutdinov, attorney for Ismoil Adylov, to the Prosecutor General, August 2, 1999, translated from Russian.

⁷⁴Written appeal of Ismoil Adylov to the sentence of the Syrdarya District Court, addressed to the Syrdarya Regional Court, submitted by Hamid Zainutdinov, attorney for Ismoil Adylov, October 4, 1999.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Written communication to Human Rights Watch from Mikhail Ardzinov, chairman of IHROU, September 29, 1999; Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, September 30, 1999; and Human Rights Watch telephone interview with John Paul Schutte, Second Secretary to the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, September 30, 1999.

that is against the Constitution, by distributing leaflets which are aimed at the destabilization of the country, and for which [aim] they used ideas such as extremism, separatism, fundamentalism and fanaticism.”⁷⁷

Adylov, who was released from the hospital just one week before police arrested him, suffers from a chronic kidney ailment and requires medication. Authorities have reportedly denied him medical treatment since his arrest. At trial, Adylov’s lawyer offered a doctor’s certification of his client’s poor health and status as an invalid. The judge apparently ignored the request for leniency on health grounds.

A regional court left the verdict unchanged in an October 26 appeal. Family members and independent human rights monitors, including members of his own organization, the IHROU, and a representative from Human Rights Watch, were again denied access to the hearing, which lasted twenty-five minutes. Adylov himself was not present.⁷⁸ As of this writing, Adylov's attorney was preparing an appeal to the Supreme Court.

According to Adylov's family, on February 22, 2000 authorities transferred Adylov and ten other prisoners from Chirchik prison to Tashkent prison, where officers informed Adylov and the others that they would be sent to yet another, unspecified location. Although authorities had not notified Adylov's family of the transfer, Adylov was able to get word to his relatives, who arrived at South Station, located on the outskirts of Tashkent and officially closed for passenger transport, after he and the other prisoners had already been loaded into a train compartment. They spoke briefly and Adylov reportedly informed his wife that he was in poor health and had not been told where he was being taken, other than "somewhere in the vicinity of Bukhara." His wife also reported that he was not receiving medication provided by the family.⁷⁹ As of early March, authorities still had failed to officially notify the family of the transfer and Adylov's whereabouts in custody remained unknown.⁸⁰

Mahbuba Kasymova

Mahbuba Kasymova is a long-time Birlik party member who served on the IHROU steering committee. After her houseguest, Rafshan Hamidov, was arrested in May 1999 on charges of illegal possession of narcotics and a grenade, Kasymova was charged with concealing a crime.⁸¹ In July 1999, a district court sentenced Kasymova to five years in prison.

On May 12, 1999 police arrested Rafshan Hamidov in Kasymova's home. Hamidov is also reportedly a member of the IHROU in the city of Kokand.⁸² One of Kasymova's daughters later issued a public statement that she was a witness as police planted evidence, including a grenade, narcotics, and what she was told were religious leaflets among Hamidov's belongings. She also saw officers beat Hamidov at the time of arrest, holding his arms behind him and punching him in the ribs and lower back. Police searched the Kasymov home, confiscating a number of human rights documents, including victims' confidential accounts of abuses.⁸³

⁷⁸Human Rights Watch interview with Adylov's attorney, Hamid Zainutdinov, Syrdarya, October 26, 1999.

⁷⁹Human Rights Watch interview with Mamura Adylova, Tashkent, March 10, 2000.

⁸⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, February 29, 2000; and Human Rights Watch interview with Mamura Adylova, Tashkent, March 10, 2000.

⁸¹Police alleged Hamidov was wanted for additional, unspecified crimes. He was sentenced in early October 1999 to twenty years in prison on unknown charges. He is currently serving his sentence in Zarafshan prison. Human Rights Watch interview with Gulya Kasymova, Tashkent, March 10, 2000.

⁸²Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 30, 1999.

⁸³Human Rights Watch interviews with Kasymova's family members—Nosir Kasymov, Muhayo Kasymova, and Surayo Kasymova—all of whom were present at the time of Hamidov's arrest. Tashkent, May 1999; and Human Rights Watch interviews with Mamura Adylova and Gulya Kasymova, Tashkent, March 10, 1999. March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

In the following two months, authorities summoned Kasymova, her husband, and her adult daughters for questioning at the Iunusabad district police station and later the Tashkent city police station. Investigator Zokhir Kholmukhamedov of the Tashkent city police department allegedly threatened one of Kasymova's daughter's during questioning. In July, the daughter, Muhayo Kasymova issued a public statement, provided in written form to Human Rights Watch, declaring that Investigator Kholmukhamedov had forced her to withdraw her previous written statement testifying to the planting of evidence by police and that he attempted to coerce her to confirm that the narcotics and grenade planted were in fact Rafshan Hamidov's. She reported that he eventually succeeded in forcing her to sign a statement that asserted she had seen nothing during the police search, threatening that if she did not, the situation would be worse for her mother, who was then under investigation.⁸⁴ Muhayo Kasymova stated, "I was afraid for my mother. I completely reject the statement [I signed] during interrogation, since it was written in the words of [Investigator] Kholmukhamedov, who frightened me and forced me to sign."⁸⁵

During the investigation, Mahbuba Kasymova—who suffers from high blood pressure and chronic chest pains and was hospitalized for two weeks in June—had to report for questioning on eighteen occasions.⁸⁶

During questioning, according to her own account, Investigator Kholmukhamedov concentrated on Kasymova's role as a human rights defender. He also compelled IHROU chairman Mikhail Ardzinov to report for questioning. Ardzinov related that during the interrogation Kholmukhamedov denounced IHROU as an "illegal organization" and accused Ardzinov and Kasymova of supporting terrorists.⁸⁷

Public pressure on Kasymova was particularly intense. While Kholmukhamedov and others interrogated Kasymova day after day, neighborhood police officers paid repeated visits to her house late at night and early in the morning, intensifying the pressure on her and her family. On May 14, the national news program, *Akhborot*, featured a segment that described Kasymova as "...a member of an unofficial 'Independent Organization for Human Interest Protection,' whose work supported activities of religious extremists, [and] was a partisan of establishing a kind of Islamic state in the country."⁸⁸ Images of Rafshan Hamidov being led through a prison corridor were reportedly splashed across the screen as the anchor listed Kasymova's supposed misdeeds.⁸⁹

On May 19, after subjecting her to a full day of questioning, police compelled Kasymova to attend a "hate rally" that branded her an "enemy of the state" and accused her of aiding terrorists. Kasymova told Human Rights Watch that police took her to an auditorium filled with some 200 to 250 people, some of whom she recognized as plainclothes police officers and others as residents of her neighborhood. Investigator Kholmukhamedov accompanied Kasymova to the meeting and was joined by the ranking elder of Kasymova's neighborhood council (mahallah), the mayor (khokim) of her municipal district (Iunusabad), and the deputy mayor of Tashkent. Also in attendance were four women dressed in black, later introduced as family members of those who died in the February 16 bombings. The entire scene was recorded by three cameramen. When Kasymova tried to sit down, the officers at her side ordered her to remain standing.⁹⁰

Kasymova reported that each of the three officials spoke against her in turn, lacing their remarks with personal insults and impugning her dignity as a wife and mother. They each accused her of aiding and abetting the February bombings. Iunusabad district mayor Shahrudin Fahrudinov proposed to expel Kasymova from the city. Then,

⁸⁴Signed statement by Muhayo Kasymova to Human Rights Watch, July 21, 1999.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Hospital release form for Mahbuba Kasymova, from City Cardiological Hospital number 15, document number 13-58-52. This document states Kasymova was hospitalized from June 1 to June 14 for high blood pressure and hypertension and that she also suffers from chronic chest pain.

⁸⁷Human Rights Watch interviews with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, May and June, 1999.

⁸⁸Human Rights Watch, unofficial transcript of Uzbek television broadcast of the news program *Akhborot*, May 14, 1999.

⁸⁹Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbuba Kasymova, Tashkent, May 15, 1999.

⁹⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbuba Kasymova, Tashkent, May 22, 1999.

referring to the women in black, according to Kasymova, he added, "She must answer to them." One of the women stood and accused Kasymova of killing her son, who died in the February blasts.

Kasymova was prevented from speaking in her own defense throughout the public denunciation. Investigator Kholmukhamedov announced that the state's investigation was on-going and assured the crowd that those under investigation would be punished. Kasymova recalled that at this, one of the women in black cried out, "They should be punished right amidst the people!"⁹¹

After the rally ended, police brought Kasymova to the Iunusabad district police station. When she asked the investigator about the rally, he reportedly replied that, "The orders come from above, and we fulfill them." Then he offered to call in one of the cameramen to give her a chance to speak, but only if she agreed to ask for forgiveness from the people.⁹²

At 8:00 p.m. the same day, officers returned Kasymova, hungry and tired, to the Tashkent city police department, where Investigator Kholmukhamedov questioned her until midnight. He offered her the opportunity to ask for forgiveness in front of video cameras, but she again declined. Kasymova related that, during interrogation, Investigator Kholmukhamedov threatened that if she did not do as he instructed, she would not go home that evening.⁹³ He also reportedly informed Kasymova that on May 16 she had been charged with concealing a crime (article 241 of the criminal code); however, no order was issued for her arrest.⁹⁴ The interrogation ended around midnight and Kasymova was allowed to return home.

On July 12, authorities requested that Kasymova come to the courthouse the next day, but, according to Kasymova, did not state that proceedings would begin, thereby depriving her of the right to the counsel of her choice.⁹⁵ Kasymova said she believed that she would meet with a judge to have the charges explained and to learn when the trial was scheduled to begin. However, when she arrived at the courthouse on July 13, it soon became clear that the trial would begin that day.

The trial, witnessed by a Human Rights Watch representative, lasted less than three hours. Judge Erkin Iusupov of the Iunusabad District Court refused to postpone the trial to give Kasymova an opportunity to retain counsel. Instead, ignoring her protests, he appointed her a government attorney on the spot.⁹⁶ Judge Iusupov also refused to postpone the hearing so that key witnesses, including one of Kasymova's daughters who claimed to have seen police plant evidence, could testify in Kasymova's defense. During the hearing Judge Iusupov disregarded testimony presented by Kasymova in her own defense.

The charges included concealing a crime (article 241 of the criminal code) and fraud (article 168 of the criminal code). The charge of concealing a crime was based on the state's allegation that Kasymova knew that Rafshan Hamidov was a criminal sought by police and that she willingly allowed him to hide in her home despite this.⁹⁷ Throughout the investigation period and trial, Kasymova flatly denied any knowledge of Hamidov's alleged criminal activity and rejected the notion that he had been "hiding" in her house, stating that he was openly staying with her family in their home as a guest. In reference to this charge, the procurator (prosecutor) made sweeping statements in an apparent attempt to link Kasymova with the explosions in February. He stated in court:

Our president is trying his best to improve the country. There are some elements who do not want our people to be free and independent and they are not even afraid of killing people to reach their aims. They want to seize power. The events of February 16 are evidence of this. Recently, the Supreme Court sentenced 22 defendants...the law has given its verdict toward those criminals. Still, there are other elements who are...continuing their activities. Knowing they are wrong, they continue. Some Uzbek citizens are trying to help them, hiding them, and one of these people is Kasymova.⁹⁸

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, May, 1999.

⁹⁵Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mahbuba Kasymova, July 13, 1999.

⁹⁶Human Rights Watch, unofficial transcript prepared by Human Rights Watch, Iunusabad District Court hearing, Tashkent, July 13, 1999.

⁹⁷The state prosecutor in Kasymova's trial offered no evidence that Hamidov had been sought by police prior to his arrest and failed to specify the charges against him. As of March 2000 Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm the charges on which Hamidov was eventually sentenced. He was condemned to twenty years in prison in October 1999.

⁹⁸Human Rights Watch, unofficial transcript prepared by Human Rights Watch, Iunusabad District Court hearing, Tashkent,

The procurator assailed Kasymova's participation in a human rights organization, calling that group "illegal" and implying its members were less than forthright about their activities: "She is an active member of an illegal human rights organization and together with Ardzinov allegedly tries to help people..."⁹⁹

The fraud charge apparently originated from testimony obtained by police from a neighbor, stating that Kasymova had taken money from her to help her obtain a lawyer, but had not hired the lawyer or repaid other money she had borrowed. Regardless, in court, the neighbor and her relatives denied any claim against Kasymova, stating they trusted Kasymova would repay her debt.¹⁰⁰

The court took less than fifteen minutes to consider the charges and the evidence, and to deliberate, convict, and sentence Kasymova to five years in prison. Police took her directly to Tashkent prison, where she remained until police transferred her to a women's prison in September.

In a bizarre twist, a young man in civilian clothes delivered an order to the Kasymov household on November 18, 1999, calling for Mahbuba Kasymova to appear before the Iunusabad court. The order, which was undated, stated that Kasymova must appear before the court or be brought in by force. When her daughter, Muhayo Kasymova, objected, informing the plainclothes officer that her mother was already in jail, the officer insisted that the daughter would therefore be compelled to appear before the court the next day. Not receiving an official order addressed to her, Muhayo Kasymova declined to appear the following day.¹⁰¹

On August 17, the Tashkent City Court rejected Kasymova's appeal. As of this writing, Kasymova remained in prison; and she and her lawyer were preparing an appeal to the Supreme Court.

Mikhail Ardzinov

In June, authorities detained Mikhail Ardzinov, chairman of IHROU, interrogated and brutally beat him and threatened him with criminal charges.¹⁰² Officers who beat and detained Ardzinov also confiscated his human rights records, personal documents, and computer equipment.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. This neighbor's husband, Bakhtior Musaev, was condemned to nine years in prison just one month earlier on charges of membership in an illegal religious group. Musaev's sentence was reportedly later reduced to a five-year term on appeal. Human Rights Watch interview, Tashkent, Dildora Musaeva, November 1999. Human Rights Watch observed his trial, on May 28, 1999 at the Iunusabad District Court, in which Musaev claimed innocence and recounted the torture he said police inflicted on him during interrogation. According to Kasymova, documents relating to his case were among those confiscated by police when they arrested Rafshan Hamidov from her house. Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbuba Kasymova, Tashkent, May 1999. Although Human Rights Watch has no evidence that the testimony of this neighbor and her relatives was coerced by police, it is difficult to rule it out entirely because of the vulnerability of Bakhtior Musaev to physical mistreatment in custody or the imposition of additional charges.

¹⁰¹Human Rights Watch interview with Mahbuba Kasymova's daughters, Muhayo and Surayo Kasymova, Tashkent, November 19, 1999; and undated order to appear before the court, addressed to Mahbuba Kasymova, delivered November 18, 1999.

¹⁰²A former engineer and deputy director of the Republican Construction trust, Ardzinov was fired from his job in January 1992. In July the same year, he was sentenced to fifteen days of administrative arrest and in August his apartment was damaged by a bomb attached to his door. The deputy chief of the municipal police acknowledged in a private conversation with Ardzinov that the bomb had been planted at the instigation of individuals in his office. Helsinki Watch (now Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia division), "Straightening Out the Brains of One Hundred: Discriminatory Political Dismissals in Uzbekistan," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, vol. 5, issue 7, April 1993; and Helsinki Watch (now Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia division), "Human Rights in Uzbekistan," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, May 1993. Samarkand police detained, beat, and forced Ardzinov leave the city in 1997 for his human rights activities. *Human Rights Watch World Report 1999* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998), p. 308.

On the morning of June 10, Ardzinov was called in for questioning by Tashkent city police department Investigator Zokhir Kholmukhamedov, the officer in charge of IHROU member Mahbuba Kasymova's case. Kholmukhamedov reportedly said he had incriminating testimony against Ardzinov, but did not produce it.¹⁰³

Ardzinov reported that at approximately 3:00 p.m. that day, he noticed two men outside his apartment building whom he understood to be plainclothes officers. When he approached the men to let them know he was aware of their surveillance, one reportedly grabbed Ardzinov's arm and tried to twist it behind his back. As Ardzinov wrenched his arm away, he stumbled, hitting his forehead on the corner of the building's wall. The two men began to run away. Ardzinov said that when they saw him running after them, one threw stones at him and yelled "We'll show you!" They jumped into a car and drove off.¹⁰⁴

On June 25, police detained Ardzinov as he was standing at a bus stop, on his way to observe a trial. Ardzinov, aged sixty-three, told Human Rights Watch that at approximately 9:30 a.m., three plainclothes officers—who identified themselves as being from the Ministry of Internal Affairs—seized him and drove him to his apartment, beating him in the chest, ribs, and kidneys on the way. They reportedly continued to beat Ardzinov on the sides and lower back as they took him out of the car. He screamed to neighbors for help and believed at least one neighbor witnessed the beating.¹⁰⁵ Another six plainclothes officers and two witnesses were waiting at Ardzinov's home. With them was a uniformed investigator from the Tashkent city police department, Liudmila Sich, who informed Ardzinov that he was being charged with "hooliganism" (article 277 of the Uzbek criminal code).

Under the supervision of Investigator Sich, the officers confiscated all of Ardzinov's human rights documents, including the archives of his organization and his address book, which contained the names of sources and victims whose identities were meant to remain confidential. He said they also confiscated his passport, his pension card, engineering diploma, and his organizational identification, along with his computer, xerox machine, fax machine, typewriter, all of his blank paper, and his only good suit. They provided no record of what was taken. During the search, the officers reportedly left the apartment in complete disarray. As Ardzinov protested, one officer allegedly punched him in the nose. Then three officers pounced on him, beating him to the floor. According to Ardzinov, they continued to kick and beat him as he lay on the floor of his living room and as they transported him to Tashkent city police department.¹⁰⁶

At the police station, Investigator Hatam Iakubov reportedly subjected Ardzinov to nine continuous hours of interrogation during which more physical violence was threatened. Between rounds of questioning, as Ardzinov was led to various interrogation rooms in the building, officers repeatedly punched him in the lower back and kidney area. Ardzinov related that they threatened him with detention in the notorious basement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs building, where prisoners in pre-trial detention are often tortured. One officer reportedly told Ardzinov, "You are a dead man."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 10, 1999. Although Ardzinov was not at the Kasymovs' home at the time of Rafshan Hamidov's arrest, he was called in to the Tashkent city police department for questioning by Investigator Kholmukhamedov on three occasions. On May 18 and May 27, and again on June 10, Investigator Kholmukhamedov interrogated Ardzinov about his connection to Hamidov and Kasymova and the activities of IHROU. Human Rights Watch interviews with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, May, July, and November 1999. When Kasymova's case went to trial, the procurator alleged that it was at Ardzinov's instigation that Rafshan Hamidov went into hiding at Kasymova's apartment. Human Rights Watch, unofficial transcript prepared by Human Rights Watch, Iunusabad District Court hearing, Tashkent, July 13, 1999. Ardzinov has denied this allegation. Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, July 13, 1999.

¹⁰⁴Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 10, 1999.

¹⁰⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 26, 1999.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

Investigator Iakubov refused Ardzinov's repeated requests for medical attention and denied him access to his lawyer. Iakubov presented him with written testimony from two witnesses describing offensive letters which Ardzinov allegedly wrote and distributed to other people. One complainant, Vasilia Inoiatova, a human rights activist from another unregistered rights group, confronted Ardzinov in person. Investigator Iakubov questioned another person affiliated with Ardzinov's own organization, Rafshan Hamidov, and pressed him to give testimony against Ardzinov. Hamidov, who had been in police custody since his arrest on May 12, stated when confronting Ardzinov in person in the police station that Ardzinov was involved in anti-state activities and was against the government. Ardzinov alleges that Hamidov's statement was coerced under torture by police.¹⁰⁸

Iakubov did not, however, question Ardzinov about the letters he allegedly wrote, but rather about his human rights organization, his alleged support of Islamists, and his alleged links to exiled opposition leader Muhammad Solih.¹⁰⁹

In the course of the interrogation, Iakubov informed Ardzinov that he would be allowed to undergo a medical exam, as he had requested. Ardzinov recounted that instead of sending him to a physician, however, Iakubov sent him to Tashkent's main psychiatric clinic. Ardzinov, whom Soviet officials subjected to two months of groundless psychiatric detention in 1985, refused to speak with doctors. After Ardzinov returned from the clinic, Iakubov and Lieutenant Colonel Derganinov continued questioning. They released Ardzinov at 11:00 p.m., ordering him to appear for further questioning the next day.¹¹⁰

A U.S. Embassy medical officer who examined Ardzinov after his release confirmed that he had suffered two broken ribs, contusions to his kidneys, and a concussion.¹¹¹ He was also dehydrated and in considerable pain. Human Rights Watch's Tashkent-based representative provided Investigator Iakubov with a written record of the U.S. Embassy medical officer's examination of Ardzinov, which recommended strict bed rest. Iakubov refused to rescind the order for Ardzinov to appear for questioning, however, calling the medical report, which had been signed by the doctor and notarized by the embassy, a "fabrication."¹¹²

Following a press conference held in Ardzinov's home on June 30, officers from the Tashkent city police department, including officer Derganinov, again came to the activist's door and attempted to deliver a summons for him to report to Investigator Iakubov the following day. Ardzinov refused to open the door to receive the order, explaining that he was under doctor's orders to rest.¹¹³ Two IHROU members, poet Rauf Parfi and physicist Suleiman Murodov, stayed away from the press conference after they were reportedly warned by state security agents not to attend.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 26, 1999. A person close to Hamidov was reportedly called in for questioning by police and saw Hamidov in August 1999, prior to his trial. That person reportedly claimed to have seen signs of beating on Hamidov's body and noted that he was unable to lift his arms or bend his fingers. Human Rights Watch interview with Gulya Kasymova, Tashkent, March 10, 2000. The name of the person who saw Hamidov in custody has been withheld for his own safety. Hamidov was reportedly held incommunicado at the Tashkent police department until his trial in October 1999. He was allegedly allowed no visits with family members and refused to be represented by a lawyer. Following his conviction, he also declined to appeal his case to a higher court. Human Rights Watch interview with Gulya Kasymova, Tashkent, March 10, 2000. Although we have no direct evidence, Human Rights Watch is concerned that Hamidov was pressured by law enforcement officers to reject legal representation and decline his right to appeal.

¹⁰⁹Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 26, 1999. The government has charged Erk party leader Solih, in exile since 1993, with masterminding the bombings that took place in Tashkent on February 16.

¹¹⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, June 26, 1999.

¹¹¹Medical exam report signed by examining physician Ty Flewelling, U.S. Embassy, Tashkent, notarized by the vice- consul, June 26, 1999.

¹¹²Subsequently, another police investigator also denied that the beating had ever occurred. According to Muhayo Kasymova, Investigator Zokhir Kholmukhamedov discussed Ardzinov's case with her and her mother, Mahbuba Kasymova, during an interrogation session in late June 1999. Kholmukhamedov reportedly said, "No one beat him up, he beat himself against the wall and smeared himself with blood." Signed statement of Muhayo Kasymova to Human Rights Watch, July 21, 1999.

¹¹³Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, June 30, 1999.

¹¹⁴Human Rights Watch interviews with Mikhail Ardzinov, July 19 and 20, 1999. March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Authorities have yet to return to Ardzinov the equipment and documents, including his passport, which police confiscated. Ardzinov reported in November that he had written to the procurator general six times and by way of answer had only received notices that his complaints were forwarded to the Tashkent city procurator. The latter agency has issued no response to Ardzinov's request that a criminal case be opened against his attackers and those who illegally detained him and that his belongings be returned immediately.¹¹⁵

On the day of parliamentary elections, December 5, 1999, Ardzinov observed the voting process in an unofficial capacity. He began by watching voters and officials at his own neighborhood polling station number 465 in Tashkent.¹¹⁶ At around 3:00 p.m., he decided to move on to another nearby polling station, number 454, located in a public school. As he approached the building, Ardzinov noticed two cars following him, one with no license plates. Ardzinov related that four men in plain clothes got out of this car and a tall blond man walked over to him and threatened to beat him if he did not return home within five minutes and cease going to polling stations. Ardzinov continued toward the polling station, but two of the men physically blocked the entrance. Ardzinov immediately left this location and went on to a third polling station in public school 101. Once again, the men blocked his approach, even before he reached the school's door. Ardzinov said he was forced to abandon his attempts to further monitor election day events and returned home.¹¹⁷

Otanazar Arifov

Arifov, a member of the IHROU steering committee and the Tashkent representative of the unregistered Erk political opposition party, was repeatedly called in for questioning by police in connection with his human rights activity and political affiliation.¹¹⁸

Arifov is active in the IHROU steering committee, which makes decisions about the organization's research priorities and advocacy strategies. He occasionally serves as the organization's spokesperson, as at a July 1999 press conference where he decried the arrest and harassment of fellow human rights defenders and criticized sharply the government's policy against "different thinkers," or those whose ideas do not match the sentiments of the political elite.

Arifov was recently called upon by the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent and the Central Asia Liaison Office of the OSCE, based in Tashkent, to meet with high-level officials visiting Uzbekistan to discuss the context in which rights abuses are taking place in the country.

In March 1999, Arifov, aged sixty-one, was questioned by officers from the Shaikhantaur district police station. He was called in for questioning twice more in April, once by the procuracy and once by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In these interrogation sessions, authorities repeatedly questioned Arifov about Erk's activities, about his relationship with exiled Erk party leader Muhammad Solih, and about his connection with one of Solih's brothers, Rashid Bekjonov.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, November 7, 1999.

¹¹⁶Ardzinov is unable to vote, as his passport was confiscated by police in June.

¹¹⁷Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, December 5, 1999; and IHROU press release, issued by Mikhail Ardzinov, December 5, 1999.

¹¹⁸Arifov is a former political prisoner who served a ten-month term in 1994 on political charges and fabricated charges of narcotics possession.

¹¹⁹Written communication to Human Rights Watch from Mikhail Ardzinov, March, 1999; Human Rights Watch interviews with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, May, July, and October 1999. Bekjonov was arrested by Tashkent police on February 23, 1999. His whereabouts remained unknown until Arifov was given an opportunity to visit him in Tashkent prison in April. Bekjonov was condemned to twelve years in prison on charges of attempted overthrow of the constitutional order (criminal code article 159), publicly insulting or slandering the president through the use of mass media (criminal code article 158), illegal possession of weapons (criminal code article 248), and participation in an illegal public or religious organization (criminal code article 216) on August 18 along with five others (convicted on similar but not identical charges), including his brother Muhammad Bekjonov, in a political trial in which the judge ignored defendants' complaints of brutal and repeated torture during interrogation. See: Human Rights Watch press release "Uzbek Torture Victims Sentenced to Prison Terms," August 18, 1999. Although police questioned

Arifov about Bekjonov's activities, they never called him as a witness in the trial and he was, in fact, denied access to the proceedings on several occasions. According to Arifov, reports from unidentified sources within the Ministry of Internal Affairs had earlier indicated that he might be called as a witness and then tried along with the others. Human Rights Watch interview with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, October 1999. In September 1993, Arifov was fired from his post as professor at the department of physics at Tashkent State Technical University. He worked as an engineer at a production plant from 1995 to his retirement in 1997. Helsinki Watch (now Human Rights Watch/Europe and Central Asia division), "Human Rights in Uzbekistan," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, May 1993.

Harassment of Arifov took on various forms. Arifov reported heavy police surveillance, which apparently included video surveillance of the road in front of his house and entryway to his home. He recounted that several times the authorities' technical equipment appeared to have malfunctioned, because the Arifov family found themselves watching their own street and doorway broadcast on the family television set. There, the family could watch the recording of all who came in or out of the house. Arifov recounted with some bitter amusement his grandchildren's unwillingness to change the channel or turn off the television, because they wanted to see "when grandpa was coming home."¹²⁰

Arifov also reported that police prevented him from attending the U.S. ambassador's U.S. independence day reception on July 2, to which he had been invited, making him wait in the street for forty minutes before turning him away.¹²¹

The following day, July 3, police detained Arifov's son, Abdulaziz, directly outside the U.S. Embassy while he was attempting to deliver documents from human rights activist Mukhtabar Akhmedova. The arresting officer confiscated the documents and threatened their use as a basis for charges under criminal code article 159, attempted encroachment on the constitutional order of the state.¹²² Police reportedly held and questioned Abdulaziz for a total of eighteen hours, and threatened him with arrest on charges of attempted overthrow of the government. Following his son's detention, Arifov was compelled to report to officers at the Chilanzar and Sobir Rakhimov district police stations. They interrogated him again about his political activities and relations with Muhammad Solih.¹²³ During the following months, officers continued to phone the Arifov home and ask Abdulaziz to come in for questioning, to visit his home, and even to threaten to arrest him.¹²⁴

Police called in Abdulaziz Arifov for further questioning following his initial detention in July. In October, Otanazar Arifov reported that police threatened also to impose an administrative fine on the young man, but did not specify the offense for which such a fine could be levied. As of this writing no fine had been imposed and no court date appointed.¹²⁵

Abdullo Abdurazakov

¹²⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, October 1999. Arifov reported that he first became aware of the video surveillance during the summer of 1998, when neighbors informed him that his house was being broadcast on their television sets. The family last saw their home on their own television in September 1999.

¹²¹Human Rights Watch interview with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, July 1999.

¹²²The documents included a grant application and a letter of complaint regarding the March detention of Mukhtabar Akhmedova. For details on Akhmedova's detention, see below.

¹²³Human Rights Watch interview with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, July 5, 1999.

¹²⁴Human Rights Watch interview with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, October 1999.

¹²⁵Human Rights Watch interviews with Otanazar Arifov, Tashkent, October 25 and 27, 1999. *Human Rights Watch*, March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Abdullo Abdurazakov is a member of IHROU in Tashkent and a former member of both Birlik and Erk.¹²⁶ In an attempt to pressure his wife to reveal his whereabouts, authorities intimidated her for months, and eventually fined her for tax evasion. He has been wanted by police on unspecified charges since at least July 1999.

On July 10, a female officer in civilian clothes came to Abdurazakov's home in the Shaikhantaur district of Tashkent. She reportedly asked family members when Abdurazakov, who was away to attend a wedding, would be returning home. Apparently alerted that authorities were inquiring about him and would be coming back, Abdurazakov did not return home.¹²⁷ At 10:00 p.m. that night, six plainclothes Ministry of Internal Affairs officers arrived at the house, and asked for Abdurazakov. They entered the courtyard to the house without presenting a warrant of any kind. Among them was Ministry of Internal Affairs lieutenant colonel Alisher Ergashev.¹²⁸ When Abdurazakov's wife told them that she did not know where her husband was, one officer reportedly threatened, "We'll still find him and put him in jail."¹²⁹

Officers then began to question Abdurazakov's wife, Nigora Abdurazakova, about the family business selling *kumis*, or fermented mare's milk, and asked to see the business license and other documents. They also threatened to press criminal charges against Abdurazakov and his wife for tax evasion.

¹²⁶Abdurazakov is a former political prisoner who was arrested in 1994 and served two years of a three-year sentence in an Uzbek jail on fabricated charges of illegal possession of narcotics and ammunition. He was released under a presidential amnesty. Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardinov, Tashkent, November 5, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Nigora Abdurazakova, Tashkent, November 12, 1999. Following his arrest and conviction, Abdurazakov was fired from his job as a professor of Uzbek literature.

¹²⁷Human Rights Watch interview, name withheld, Tashkent, July 12, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardinov, Tashkent, October 23, 1999. Abdurazakov's whereabouts remain unknown. In February 2000, it was reported to Human Rights Watch that Abdurazakov had fled Uzbekistan to a neighboring country where he obtained refugee status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and was awaiting placement to a third country. Human Rights Watch interview, name withheld, Tashkent, February 25, 2000. Human Rights Watch was unable to independently confirm this report.

¹²⁸Human Rights Watch interview with Nigora Abdurazakova, Tashkent, November 12, 1999.

Ergashev is well known among human rights defenders as one of the officers assigned to cases involving rights defenders and political opposition members. He was one of the officers responsible for the search of Otanazar Arifov's home at the time of his arrest in 1994 and has been identified as one of the agents assigned to surveillance of the Arifov family. According to IHROU chairman Mikhail Ardinov, Ergashev also took part in the arrest and incommunicado detention of Ismoil Adylov in July 1999. Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardinov, Tashkent, July 20, 1999. Human Rights Watch has also noted his presence as the apparent officer-in-charge during Supreme Court trials of those accused of the murders of police officers in Namangan in 1997 and the first round of trials relating to the February 16 bombings in Tashkent. As of this writing, Ergashev had reportedly been demoted from his post as deputy to Botir Tursunov, head of investigations in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to a position at the Tashkent city police department. Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm his new title and responsibilities. Human Rights Watch interview, name withheld, Tashkent, March 8, 2000.

¹²⁹Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardinov, Tashkent, October 23, 1999; March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

According to her own account, the officers spent two hours questioning Abdurazakova and scouring the family home for signs of her husband. Abdurazakova related that she noticed several leaflets in the jacket pocket of one of the officers and became concerned that the officers planned to plant religious literature in the house. As the officer moved to the attic, Abdurazakova ordered one of her daughters to follow and watch him. The young woman reportedly followed the officer through the house and to a room where she saw him open a chest and reach into his pocket for the leaflets. Seeing this, she screamed, "What are you doing? I see you!" and he reportedly removed his hand and left the room.¹³⁰ The officers did not claim to find anything incriminating in the house and a search by family members after the officers departed at midnight revealed nothing planted in the home.¹³¹

Officers from the local tax inspectorate came several times to the Abdurazakov home in the following days and weeks to question Abdurazakova about the family business. A criminal investigator accompanied the officers on each visit and was present during repeated interrogations of Abdurazakova at the offices of the tax inspectorate. Then, on October 26, 1999, Judge Sodykov of Tashkent's Akmal Ikramov District Court tried Nigora Abdurazakova and fined her 130,000 som [about U.S. \$ 650] under criminal code article 188, illegal business dealings. When she said she did not have sufficient funds to pay the fine, the court ordered the confiscation of family property.¹³² As of this writing, that order had not been carried out.

Following her trial, Abdurazakova reported that she received another visit from the criminal investigator who had attended her interrogation sessions. Abdurazakova related that he demanded she give him a photograph of her husband, informing her then that he was officially wanted by police. He reportedly declined to specify under what charges Abdurazakov was being sought, saying only, "Maybe he went to Kyrgyzstan and got mixed up with all that. Maybe he was fighting against us."¹³³

Akhmadkhon Turakhonov

Akhmadkhon Turakhonov was a former representative of the Birlik party in the city of Namangan and member of IHROU. He died in custody on June 19, 1999.

Turakhonov was arrested on December 29, 1998 after openly criticizing local Namangan officials in a public meeting there. Reportedly, witnesses called to testify at his trial accused Turakhonov of addressing the officials with insulting language and calling for the creation of an Islamic state. Turakhonov himself reportedly denied these charges. On March 4, 1999 he was found guilty under criminal code articles 159 and 277, encroachment upon the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan (article 159) and hooliganism (article 277). He was sentenced to five and a half years in prison.¹³⁴

A doctor who testified in Turakhonov's trial reportedly warned that the activist was ill with diabetes and could not survive without proper medication. Turakhonov was held in a detention cell in Namangan and later transferred to Tashkent prison's infirmary, where he died on June 19. The official cause of death was reportedly given as tuberculosis.¹³⁵ Persons close to Turakhonov allege that he died because prison authorities failed to give him proper medical care for diabetes. His body was returned to his family and buried on June 20, 1999.¹³⁶

¹³⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Nigora Abdurazakova, Tashkent, November 12, 1999.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Human Rights Watch interview with Nigora Abdurazakova, Tashkent, November 12, 1999. This was an apparent reference to the Kyrgyz hostage crisis, in which four Japanese geologists and several Kyrgyz military officers were taken hostage in August 1999 by alleged Uzbek militants who reportedly entered the country through Tajikistan. The hostage-takers reportedly demanded the release of thousands of alleged political prisoners in Uzbekistan. The crisis was resolved in October without the release of prisoners in Uzbekistan.

¹³⁴Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Tolib Iakubov, June 24, 1999.

¹³⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, Tashkent, December 5, 1999; and Human Rights Watch interview with Tolib Iakubov, Tashkent, December 7, 1999.

¹³⁶Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mikhail Ardzinov, June 23, 1999; and Human Rights Watch telephone

Independent Activist
Mukhtabar Akhmedova

Mukhtabar Akhmedova is an independent human rights activist and a member of Amnesty International.¹³⁷ In March 1999, officers from the Sobir Rakhimov district police station put her under administrative arrest and forced her to stand as the target of a “hate rally” organized by police and local government and neighborhood officials. They arbitrarily confiscated personal items and human rights documents from her home. Since then, authorities have reportedly threatened to charge her with engagement in anti-state activities.

Akhmedova related that at around 12:30 p.m. on March 4, she noticed a man on her roof and another standing atop her gateway. Both were in plainclothes. She said that when she asked them repeatedly to identify themselves, they refused. Taking them to be thieves, she grabbed a shovel and hit the legs of the man on the roof. When he jumped into her yard, she ran inside to the telephone, but found that the line was dead. As she began to beat the man in the yard on the legs with a piece of metal, additional men in plain clothes appeared, along with a local police officer in uniform, Jamal Suliev. Akhmedova told Human Rights Watch that the officer insulted her, kicked her twice, twisted her arms behind her back and then forced her out of her gate and into the alley way. She reported that in the alley way she saw approximately thirty-five men in plain clothes and another officer in uniform, known to her by his first name, Avas. Akhmedova charged that this officer also cursed at her, hit her on the head, forced her into a car, and drove her to the Sobir Rakhimov police station.¹³⁸

Arriving at the police station at 1:00 p.m., Akhmedova demanded to be told the grounds for her detention, but the duty officer refused. According to Akhmedova, one officer remarked to her, “Look, you know about the February 16 events.” Akhmedova countered, “What does that have to do with me? What connection do I have to those bombings?” Minutes later, the head of the Sobir Rakhimov police station, Bakhtior Khokimov, approached her along with officer Suliev, who again insulted her, reportedly calling the sixty-year-old Akhmedova, an observant Muslim, a “prostitute.” Khokimov then threatened to charge Akhmedova with assaulting a police officer. She objected, noting the way in which the officer had gained access to her home and his failure to identify himself as a law-enforcement agent.¹³⁹

According to her own account, police held Akhmedova in custody at the station until approximately 6:00 p.m. on March 4, when they announced they were taking her home. Instead, they brought her to school number 24 where some twenty five to thirty people were gathered in the main hall.¹⁴⁰ Akhmedova reported that she recognized several local officials, including deputy district mayor Shavkat Pulatov. Two officials gave general remarks decrying the February 16 bombings and blaming them on terrorists, “Wahhabis,” and members of Hizb ut-Tahrir. The chairman of Akhmedova’s neighborhood council (mahallah committee), Hamid Gafurov, according to Akhmedova, accused her of being an “Islamic murderer...who tried to kill the president.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ After openly criticizing policies of the mayor and deputy mayor of Tashkent, Akhmedova was convicted of slander in 1995 and sentenced to four years in prison. She was released under a Victory Day amnesty declared one week after the sentence. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki (now Human Rights Watch, Europe and Central Asia Division), “Persistent Human Rights Violations and Prospects for Improvement,” *A Human Rights Watch Report*, vol. 8, no. 5 (D), May 1996. When Tashkent police broke up a January 1998 gathering of women protesting the illegal arrest of their male relatives, they detained Akhmedova, accused her of organizing the demonstration, and fined her a portion of her monthly pension. *Human Rights Watch 1999 World Report*.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Mukhtabar Akhmedova, Tashkent, June 13, 1999.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Written complaint from Mukhtabar Akhmedova addressed to government officials and international organizations, including Human Rights Watch, undated.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mukhtabar Akhmedova, Tashkent, June 13, 1999; March 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

Next, the former chairman of Akhmedova's mahallah committee, Matkam Karimov, accused Akhmedova of having publicly called President Karimov "bloodthirsty," a charge she denies. Akhmedova said he also claimed that she used "Islamic methods" to teach and corrupt young girls and that she forced them to cover themselves in hijab.¹⁴² A woman who said that her son was among those who died in the February blasts also spoke during the meeting. Akhmedova recalled that, in conclusion, Gafurov announced, "We, the population of the Mahallah Hafes Kukhaki have decided to ask the mayor's office to expel Akhmedova, Mukhtabar from the mahallah."¹⁴³

When the "hate rally" had concluded, the officers forced Akhmedova to remain in the hall. Gafurov, Karimov, Komil Toshpulatov, the district mayor, a representative of the mayor's office, and six women formed a circle around her. Then the cameraman moved in on her as the representative from the mayor's office asked if she would ask for forgiveness. She declined.

After the forty-minute public denunciation, the police returned her to the Sobir Rakhimov district police station. Akhmedova related that, just a half-hour later, she was sentenced to ten days of administrative detention in a two-minute "trial" conducted by a young man in plainclothes who called himself a judge but refused to give his name. She told Human Rights Watch that when she protested the illegality of the procedure, he threatened to increase the sentence to fifteen days.

After the so-called trial, police officers took Akhmedova and several other prisoners to the Tashkent city police department, where they confined her to a cell in the basement. Around midnight, she was transferred, without explanation, back to the Sobir Rakhimov police department. At 1:00 p.m. on March 5, she was released.¹⁴⁴

Akhmedova related that she arrived home to find several officers exiting her house. Upon inspection, she noticed that a search had been conducted. Several items were missing, including personal documents such as her university diploma in geology and mineral sciences, medical and pension records, books on Islam and art history, and also equipment such as her fax machine, tape recorder, and several audio and video cassettes. Akhmedova said she was shown no warrant for the apparent search, nor was she given any record of the confiscated items.¹⁴⁵

Akhmedova reported that she feared that the continued presence of plainclothes officers on her street boded ill for her, so she went into hiding for three months. Later, she said she learned from neighbors that police had come to the homes in the area and questioned people about her while she was away.

In September, Akhmedova was notified that she had been fined in what she linked to earlier police harassment and her detention in March:

On September 12 at 9:00 p.m. a man entered my courtyard. I had left the front gate open, so he came in without knocking or identifying himself. He was tall and thin, and in civilian clothes. Without identifying himself, he announced that I was sentenced by the Sobir Rakhimov Khokimiat to a fine of 1,320 som [approximately U.S. \$7]. He held a paper in his hand, but when I tried to grab and read it he took it away from me.

¹⁴²Muslim attire ranging from a scarf covering the hair to clothing covering the entire body and face.

¹⁴³Human Rights Watch interview with Mukhtabar Akhmedova, Tashkent, June 13, 1999.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

¹⁴⁵Human Rights Watch interview with Mukhtabar Akhmedova, Tashkent, June 13, 1999; and written complaint from Mukhtabar Akhmedova to Uzbek government officials and international organizations, including Human Rights Watch, June 25,

The fine was purportedly linked to reconstruction she was doing on her house and a claim that her new wall infringed on public property, however, Akhmedova notes, "I never received any written confirmation of the fine and the reasons for it." The payment of the fine was taken directly from her pension in October and the same amount was withheld again in November.¹⁴⁶

In early October, police returned some of the items they had confiscated in March, including her fax and other equipment and official identification, without explanation. Some of the personal items, however, such as a valuable coin collection and several books, were not returned.

Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Individual (CPRI)

Hashim Irisboev

Hashim Irisboev is the former Tashkent representative of Birlik and a member of the CPRI.¹⁴⁷ Authorities confiscated his passport in 1998 and failed to return it for a full year.

In October 1998, the Polish Committee for Human Rights invited Irisboev to a seminar in Warsaw. He submitted his documents to the Mirabad District Visa and Registration Department in Tashkent to obtain the necessary exit visa. Irisboev told Human Rights Watch that, concerned that the process would take too long there, he also applied to the main Tashkent City Visa and Registration Department, where they took his passport and promised to expedite the processing of his documents. According to regulations, authorities should have returned Irisboev's passport within fifteen days. Irisboev related that when he arrived to pick up his documents, however, employees at the Tashkent City Visa and Registration Department informed him that his passport had been given to the SNB.¹⁴⁸ Finally, in October 1999, officials returned Irisboev's identification, reportedly without offering any explanation.¹⁴⁹ Irisboev also claims that he is regularly followed by security agents.¹⁵⁰

Bureau on Human Rights and the Rule of Law, Kyrgyzstan

Natalia Ablova

Kyrgyz activist Natalia Ablova, who had received an official invitation to attend a seminar in Uzbekistan, was barred from entering the country and deported.

Ablova, a Kyrgyz citizen and director of the Kyrgyz Bureau on Human Rights and the Rule of Law, was invited by the Soros Foundation's Tashkent office to attend a seminar for representatives from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Ablova had been appointed head of the Kyrgyz delegation. Ablova informed Human Rights Watch that when she arrived at the Tashkent airport on May 27, 1999, border guards initially informed her there were irregularities with her passport and told her they would have to ask for permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before allowing her into the country; soon afterwards, they announced she would be deported. Ablova reported that the border officials denied her request to contact the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan for assistance, failed to provide her with any documentation ordering her deportation, refused to provide her with their names or show identification, confiscated her passport, and put her on a plane back to Bishkek. Upon her arrival in Kyrgyzstan, Ablova's passport was returned. According to the activist, the Kyrgyz authorities who had assured her that her passport was in order before her departure again testified that her passport and visas were in compliance with the law and showed no irregularities.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶Human Rights Watch interview with Mukhtabar Akhmedova, Tashkent, November 7, 1999; and Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Mukhtabar Akhmedova, November 17, 1999.

¹⁴⁷The CPRI was renamed the Uzbek Section of the Frankfurt, Germany-based International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) in November 1999.

¹⁴⁸Human Rights Watch interview with Hashim Irisboev, Tashkent, June 24, 1999; written statement provided by Hashim Irisboev to Human Rights Watch, June 24, 1999.

¹⁴⁹Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Hashim Irisboev, January 13, 2000.

¹⁵⁰Human Rights Watch interview with Hashim Irisboev, Tashkent, June 24, 1999.

¹⁵¹Human Rights Watch documents provided by Natalia Ablova to Human Rights Watch, May 28 and March 29, 2000, Vol. 12, No. 4 (D)

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