



The Turkmen Authorities Must Immediately Release Forcibly Disappeared Prisoners Who Have Served their Full Terms

Statement by the Prove They Are Alive! Campaign on the International Day of the Disappeared

August 30, 2020

Today marks the International Day of the Disappeared, and the government of Turkmenistan continues to disappear people into its medieval prison system in gross violation of the country's own legislation and in violation of international conventions and human rights standards.

The Prove They Are Alive! campaign has documented over 120 cases of enforced disappearances in the Turkmen prison system, and we believe many more cases remain undocumented.

In an even more despicable violation of human rights, a number of those who are disappeared in Turkmenistan's prison system have not been freed after their prison terms ended. Although their terms are over, they continue to be disappeared in a system that routinely tortures inmates and forces them to live in inhumane conditions. Their families are unable to see them—in some cases for eighteen years; they have no access to legal or medical care, and they are unable to receive letters or packages. Their family members do not even know if they are alive. This is a violation, not only of international human rights law, but of Turkmen legislation. Not a single norm of Turkmen legislation allows for the concealment of a prisoner's place of detention or the status of their health.

At least seven disappeared individuals in Turkmenistan have served out their sentences, and yet, they have not been released. With the exception of one individual who was transferred to internal exile, the families of these people have no idea where they are or what their circumstances are. One person, **Gulgeldy Annaniyazov**, served his full term in March 2019, but instead of being freed, he was transferred to internal exile in a remote area of the country where he is living in extremely poor conditions.

Five of the seven whose terms have expired have been in prison since 2002. They are "Novemberists" accused of participating in an alleged coup to overthrow the previous president, Saparmurat Niyazov, Their names are: **Annageldy Akmuradov, Esen Buriev, Isa Garataev, Bazar Gurbanov, and Konstantin Shikhmuradov.**

Another of the seven, **Mamour Atayev**, has been imprisoned since 2004, also on charges related to the alleged coup attempt.

The terms of five other disappeared prisoners will expire in 2020-2021. These individuals include **Rustem Djumaev**, whose term should expire in the fall of 2020; **Saparmurat Mukhammedov**, whose term should also expire in the fall of 2020; **Batyr Sardzhaev**, expiration no later than 2020; **Orazmammet Yklymov**, whose term expires in the fall of 2021; and **Ovezmurat Yazmuradov**, whose term expires in the fall of 2021.

The Prove! campaign demands that the Turkmen authorities immediately and unconditionally release those among the disappeared whose terms have expired. We reiterate our demand that all enforced disappearances in prisons should stop immediately and that all inmates should receive access to visits by their families, lawyers of their choice, medical assistance, and international monitors.

We also call upon the international community, including international institutions, to publicly demand that the Turkmen authorities conform with international human rights standards and their international obligations and release these individuals immediately and unconditionally.

The Prove! campaign is outraged at the failure of the Turkmen authorities to solve the country's acute human rights problems, which a number of UN human rights structures and other UN member states have repeatedly pointed out to them. Instead, the Turkmen government addresses the UN with various global and declarative initiatives and proposals that distract from the situation in Turkmenistan itself. **We call on the Turkmen authorities to immediately start fulfilling their voluntary commitments under the 2018 UN Universal Periodic Review by ending disappearances in prisons, fighting torture, improving the situation in the prison system, and organizing visits to the country by the special procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.** The failure of the Turkmen government to resolve the most pressing human rights problems in the country, and the failure to include a plan to fulfill these key commitments within the framework of the UN UPR Roadmap, speaks louder than any words and declarations.

For almost 20 years, Turkmenistan has engaged in the gross and illegal practice of enforced disappearances. Despite numerous appeals from international organizations and highly placed foreign diplomats, the Turkmen authorities continue to deny the existence of the problem, ignoring and sabotaging international human rights standards and obligations associated with their membership in the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The Prove They Are Alive! campaign stands in solidarity with, and expresses its support for, the families and loved ones of the disappeared in Turkmenistan.

The international human rights Prove They Are Alive! campaign has been working since 2013 to protect the rights of people held incommunicado in Turkmen prisons and to halt the practice of enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan. The campaign acts with the support of the international Civic Solidarity Platform and actively interacts with a broad range of human rights defenders, experts, and intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union. For more information, please see the campaign's website <http://provetheyarealive.org>.