



## **The International Community Must Take Immediate and Strong Action on the Problem of Enforced Disappearances in Turkmenistan**

### **Statement on the death in custody of Begmurad Otuzov**

13 March 2018

We have learned from the [Chronicles of Turkmenistan](#) that the former First Deputy Prosecutor General and the former Head of the Investigative Department of the National Security Committee of Turkmenistan, Begmurad Otuzov, died in custody in early February 2018, after more than 15 and a half years in full isolation in Ovadan Depe prison. During all these years, he had no contact with the outside world, including his family, lawyers, medical care providers, or international human rights representatives. His body was released to his relatives for burial, and according to a witness, it weighed just 45 kilograms. There has been no official statement by the government of Turkmenistan about his death.

Having served as an officer of the National Security Committee (NSC) for many years, Begmurad Otuzov was promoted to the position of Head of the Investigative Department of the NSC in 1997 in the rank of colonel. In January 2001, he was appointed First Deputy Prosecutor General of Turkmenistan until his demotion in July of that year, when he became first deputy head of Lebap province. On April 2, 2002, he was dismissed “for serious shortcomings during the period of work in the National Security Committee of Turkmenistan,” deprived of his military rank and state awards, and arrested a few days later. In the summer of 2002, he was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment for alleged corruption, abuse of authority, and other crimes. Having actively participated in the persecution of dissidents during his work in the NSC, Otuzov fell victim to a massive purge of the NSC leadership and other “power agencies” organized in spring 2002 by President Niyazov, who was afraid of the growing influence of the security services. Several dozen high-ranking NSC officers and former NSC officers holding the highest level positions within the Ministry of Defense, the State Border Service, and other agencies were arrested during this purge and were sentenced to long prison terms under spurious charges.

The Prove They Are Alive Campaign! is confident that the death of Begmurad Otuzov, as well as the recent deaths of other influential government officials who had been subjected to enforced disappearances in secret prisons, represents a consistent unwritten policy of the Turkmenistan authorities to eradicate imprisoned former key political figures of the Turkmen state and erase memory about them. The news about Begmurad Otuzov’s death came a little more than year after another victim of the same wave of purges in spring 2002, [Head of the State Border Service General Turkish Tyrmyev, died in custody in January 2017](#), and six months

after the news of the [death of the former Head of the Security Service of the President of Turkmenistan General Akmurad Redjepov in August 2017](#). This tragic list of recent deaths includes former Deputy Prime Minister Yolly Gurbanmuradov (December 2015) and former Chairman of the State Committee for Tourism and Sport Vekil Durdyev (August 2016). They all were victims of enforced disappearances in Turkmen prisons. Altogether, at least 10 people from the “Prove They Are Alive!” list of the disappeared have died in custody in the last three years according to media reports and information from relatives. The fate of many other disappeared people in Turkmenistan’s prisons remains unknown.

Enforced disappearance of people sentenced to long prison terms is the most acute human rights problem in Turkmenistan. Reports by the “Prove They Are Alive!” campaign include [113 documented cases](#) of people kept in full isolation, some of them for as long as almost 16 years, with several dozen more people likely in the same situation.

In spite of sustained pressure from the international community, including OSCE institutions and participating States, UN human rights bodies, and EU institutions to put an end to enforced disappearances, the Turkmen authorities have avoided taking any real steps to end this gross violation of human rights and have not implemented any relevant decisions by inter-governmental bodies. They continue to defiantly ignore international obligations of the country within the frameworks of the UN and the OSCE and simulate an ineffective and cynical “dialogue” with international institutions on human rights issues.

The campaign calls on democratic countries and international organizations to respond in the most serious and active way to the situation of the victims of enforced disappearances who have been kept in isolation for many years in Turkmenistan’s prisons. Otherwise, all of them can expect a tragic fate.

Evidence of continued enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan, the growing rate of deaths of people held incommunicado, and the obvious ineffectiveness of efforts to engage the Turkmen authorities on this subject are a clear indication of the need for the international community to adopt a more effective strategy. The core of such a strategy should be the utilization of more resolute and proactive means, including conditionalities in economic cooperation agreements and the activation of existing political and legal mechanisms of reaction to human rights crises such as the OSCE Vienna and Moscow mechanisms. Any further delay of a stronger response and continuing “business as usual” would amount to complicity with the Turkmen regime in its atrocious and inhumane practice of disappearing people.

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*The international human rights campaign “Prove They Are Alive!” has been working since 2013 to protect the rights of detainees serving long-term sentences in Turkmen prisons who, since their sentences have been held incommunicado, and to halt the practice of enforced disappearances in Turkmenistan’s prisons. 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 inter-governmental organisations, including the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union.*

*For information on the Prove They Are Alive! campaign, please visit the website: <http://provetheyarealive.org/>. For the current list of the disappeared in prisons in Turkmenistan, produced by the “Prove They Are Alive!” campaign, see: <http://provetheyarealive.org/updated-list-of-the-disappeared/>*