

Türkiye: Don't Deport Turkmen Activists

Risk of Torture, Unfair Trial if Forcibly Returned

(Berlin, April 30, 2025) – [Turkish](#) migration authorities should immediately suspend any plans to deport two detained Turkmen activists to [Turkmenistan](#), Human Rights Watch said today. If deported they would be at grave risk of torture and arbitrary imprisonment.

On the morning of April 28, 2025, migration authorities in Sinop, northern Türkiye, detained the two activists, Alisher Sakhatov, 39, and Abdulla Orusov, 31, and at noon transferred them to the Akyurt Deportation Center in Ankara. Turkish authorities should immediately release them.

“Turkmenistan tolerates no public criticism and does not spare those who openly criticize the government and its policies,” said [Rachel Denber](#), deputy Europe and Central Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “Sakhatov and Orusov face a serious risk of persecution, torture, an unfair trial, and enforced disappearance if they are sent back to Turkmenistan. Türkiye should not send them anywhere they could face ill-treatment and should immediately release them.”

Returning a person to a country where there is a real risk that the person will be tortured is a serious breach of international law, Human Rights Watch said. Türkiye’s international partners should call on Ankara to uphold its international legal obligations and not deport any activists to Turkmenistan, including those currently in custody.

In recent years, Sakhatov and Orusov have maintained online social media platforms on which they have openly criticized Turkmen government policies. These include the government’s refusal to renew passports through consular services abroad and other violations of freedom of movement, lack of support for Turkmen migrants abroad, the authorities’ suppression of free speech, and abuses by Turkmenistan’s Ministry for National Security and law enforcement agencies.

At time of their detention, Sakhatov and Orusov were in the process of applying for international protection in Türkiye, which protects applicants from deportation while their applications are under review.

On April 29, the activists’ lawyer told Human Rights Watch that the men are being deported because the authorities claim they are a threat to Türkiye’s public order and public security. [Article 54 \(1\), items d\) and i\)](#) of the Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection allows for the deportation of people who threaten public order, public security or public health, and whose international protection application has been refused, or whose application is considered withdrawn. The lawyer also said the authorities provided no concrete evidence or explanation to substantiate their claim.

Sakhatov has lived in Türkiye since 2018 and since 2023 has operated a Turkmen language YouTube channel “Erkin Garaýyş” which has about 5,000 subscribers. In April 2024, Turkish migration authorities granted him international protection applicant status, which expired on April 30, 2025.

Orusov, a blogger and founder of YouTube channel “Abdulla,” has been living in Türkiye since 2018. Orusov was allegedly detained after he was summoned to the Sinop’s migration department on April 28, reportedly for a routine check-in with the migration authorities.

His international protection applicant status was originally valid through July 3, 2025. However, on April 29, the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation told Human Rights Watch that after Orusov’s detention, Turkish authorities allegedly terminated and cancelled his protection applicant status for violating the terms of residence registration.

On April 28, the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation [reported](#) that Orusov and Sakhatov had declined the Turkish migration authorities' request to voluntarily return to Turkmenistan. On April 29, the activists' lawyer filed an appeal of the deportation decision with the Samsun Administrative Court in northern Türkiye. Under [Turkish law](#), the court has seven days to issue a ruling, which is final.

Turkmen authorities severely punish peaceful critics of the government. They allow no independent media or human rights scrutiny, suppress all dissent, and have imprisoned or driven into exile the political opposition, human rights defenders and activists, and independent journalists.

Government critics who remain in the country [face](#) repeated harassment and intimidation. The justice system completely lacks independence and transparency. Torture is widespread and dozens of people have been forcibly disappeared in Turkmen prisons, some for more than 20 years. The Turkmen government routinely imposes informal and arbitrary travel bans on various groups, including activists and relatives of exiled dissidents. Turkmen consulates systematically refuse [to renew the passports of Turkmen nationals abroad](#).

Sakhatov's and Orusov's public criticism of the Turkmen government through their social media platforms and in online chat groups in Türkiye puts them at immediate risk of persecution and torture and other ill-treatment upon return to Turkmenistan, Human Rights Watch said.

Turkish authorities should ensure that Sakhatov and Orusov are not forcibly removed to Turkmenistan and that they can be resettled to a third country where they can be safe from deportation to Turkmenistan, Human Rights Watch said.

Turkish authorities routinely detain and deport Turkmen migrants who have become undocumented due to the refusal by Turkmenistan's authorities to renew passports through consular services in Türkiye. These [include activists](#) who had become government critics during their stay in Türkiye.

Turkmen rights groups in exile reported that [Turkmen officials promptly detained](#) several activists upon their return to Turkmenistan following deportation from Türkiye and [imprisoned](#) some on what appear to be politically motivated charges.

Türkiye's treaty obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the 1951 Refugee Convention also require it to uphold the principle of nonrefoulement, which prohibits the return of anyone to a place where they would face a real risk of persecution, torture or other ill-treatment, or a threat to life.

"Türkiye should take into account the credible reports documenting ongoing repression in Turkmenistan, including torture and ill-treatment, in considering the deportation of the activists," Denber said. "The only right thing for Turkish authorities to do is to protect these men from torture and persecution by refraining from forcibly returning them to Turkmenistan."