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Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Uzbekistan

Latest update: 30 June 2013

We remain concerned by the human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

We strongly welcome the release of the writer Mamadali Makhmudov, who had previously been informed that he would face a new five year jail sentence. We remain gravely concerned about other writers, journalists and human rights defenders in prison in Uzbekistan, including Akzam Turgunov, Azamjon Formonov and Dilmurod Saidov, where acute humanitarian concerns have been reported. We are also concerned for Murad Juraev, whom reports of ill-health continue to surface. Juraev is an Erk party member and former member of the Supreme Council of Uzbekistan, whose jail term was extended for a fifth time, for a further three years, in December 2012.

In April, the ICRC announced it would discontinue prison visiting in Uzbekistan as it was unable to follow standard working procedures for visits. In the same month, Uzbekistan underwent its second Universal Periodic Review in Geneva. In its interventions, the UK highlighted concerns about freedoms of assembly and expression; registration of independent political parties and independent NGOs; mistreatment and torture of detainees; and pressure on Uzbekistan's independent human rights community. In total, Uzbekistan received 203 recommendations of which it accepted 101 and rejected 58, including a UK recommendation on torture. It considered that 30 recommendations, including one from the UK on registration of NGOs and political parties to already have been implemented or were in the process of being implemented. Uzbekistan will consider its position on a further 14 recommendations.

In June, the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Committee on the Application of Standards held hearings in Geneva on Uzbekistan's compliance with its obligations under ILO conventions. The US downgraded Uzbekistan to Tier 3 in its 2013 Global Trafficking in Persons Report. The UK has continued to encourage Uzbekistan to consider inviting the ILO to visit Uzbekistan to monitor compliance with Article 3 of ILO Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour.

In a report released in May, Freedom House listed Uzbekistan third in its "ten worst countries for journalists" category. The Committee for the Protection of Journalists reiterated in April its concern for Mohammad Bekjanov, whose health has reportedly severely deteriorated since January 2012, when his imprisonment was extended for a five further years. We remained concerned about Salijon Abdurakhmanov, an independent

journalist from Karakalpakstan in jail since 2008 who is reportedly suffering from severe health problems in a prison hospital in Tashkent.

There were several reports of pressure on the Christian community in Uzbekistan including raids and confiscation of materials and books. Practising Christian Naziya Ziyatdinova reported that – despite suffering from Parkinson's disease – she was subjected to an "anti terror" raid. Forum 18 expressed concern in May for Khayrullo Tursunov who may receive a jail sentence of up to fifteen years for religious extremism. Having left Uzbekistan at the end of 2011 for Kazakhstan, Mr Tursunov – a devout Muslim – was detained in Kazakhstan for eleven months before his extradition to Uzbekistan and subsequent arrest. Mr Tursunov has appealed against what he claims was an unfair extradition.

Pressure has remained high on human rights activists and journalists. Uktam Pardaev, an activist based in Jizzakh region, continued to report surveillance and pressure from the security services on him and his family. Gulshan Karaeva also reported pressure and harassment. Dmitri Tikhonov, an Angren-based activist based, reported that upon arrival at a meeting with the US Ambassador to Uzbekistan he was arrested and detained for several hours, preventing him from meeting with the Ambassador. The father of the founder of the independent Birdamlik movement, 71 year old Khasan Choriev, was arrested on 17 June and accused of rape. He is reportedly being held in Kashkadarya region and family members have reportedly had no access to him. We are concerned that aspects of Mr Choriev's case appear politically motivated. On 13 May, two activists were detained overnight for attempting to lay flowers at Uzbekistan's Monument of Courage in commemoration of the shootings in Andijan in 2005.

We continue to have serious concerns about the incarceration of Said Ashurov, Chief Metallurgist at the Uzbek-British joint venture Amantaytau Goldfields, sentenced in August 2011 to 12 years imprisonment for espionage. As reported previously, we continue to urge the Uzbek authorities to consider Mr Ashurov's release at the earliest opportunity, particularly in light of reports of Mr Ashurov's ill-health.

Update: 31 March 2013

During the last quarter we learned that a rolling prisoner amnesty took place under a law adopted by the Uzbek Senate in December 2012. The amnesty was reportedly applied to over 19,000 citizens. Of these, 2,095 people were reported to have been discharged from prison sentences. It is disappointing to note that just one human rights defender, Gulnoza Yuldasheva, appears to have been among those released. We remain concerned about several cases of journalists and human rights defenders in prison, including Akzam Turgunov, Azamjon Formonov and Dilmurod Saidov, where acute human rights concerns have been reported. In addition, reports of ill-health continue to surface in the case of Murad Juraev, an Erk party member and former member of the Supreme Council of Uzbekistan, who in December 2012 saw his prison term extended for the fifth time, for a further three years.

Mamadali Makhmudov, an Uzbek writer and activist, was informed on 5 March that he would face a new prison term of up to five years based on Article 221 of the criminal code (breaking prison rules). Mr Makhmudov, who suffers from tuberculosis, was due to be released in March following 14 years in prison on charges which he denies of attempting to overthrow the Uzbek constitution. Mr Makhmudov's relatives say that they have not been permitted to visit him in prison since 14 November 2012. The Embassy will monitor this latest case against Mr Makhmudov closely and urges the Uzbek authorities to take all necessary steps to guarantee him the right to a fair trial.

Human rights defenders Saida Kurbanova (Chair of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan) and Nuriniso Kholbaeva, based in Jizzakh region, reported continued harassment from the security services and pressure on their activities in the first three months of 2012. Both alleged torture following their sentencing to 15 days' detention in December 2012. Uktam Padaev, who served 15 days in prison in October 2012, and is also based in Jizzakh, alleged in February that he was under round-the-clock surveillance from plain clothed police officers and was concerned for his and his family's safety.

In February Mutabar Tajibaeva, a human rights defender from Uzbekistan based in Paris, filed a complaint against Uzbekistan with the UN Human Rights Committee. Ms Tajibaeva alleges that during her two years and eight months' imprisonment in Uzbekistan she was tortured and forcibly sterilised. Ms Tajibaeva is asking the Committee to order Uzbekistan to investigate her allegations and punish those responsible. She is also requesting her full medical records, to which she claims she does not currently have access.

We continue to have serious concerns about the incarceration of Said Ashurov, Chief Metallurgist at the Uzbek-British joint venture Amantaytau Goldfields, who was sentenced in August 2011 on espionage charges to 12 years in prison. As reported previously, we continue to urge the Uzbek authorities to consider Mr. Ashurov's release at the earliest opportunity, particularly in light of reports of his ill health.

Article 19, a religious freedom organisation, reported in February that practising Christian Sharofat Allamova, from Urgench in Uzbekistan, was facing criminal prosecution and a jail sentence of up to three years under Article 244 of the Criminal Code for allegedly illegally storing religious literature.

