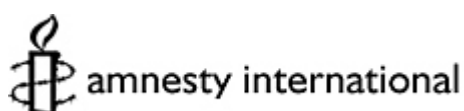


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Amnesty International Annual Report 2011 - Uzbekistan

Head of state: Islam Karimov
Head of government: Shavkat Mirzioiev
Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes
Population: 27.8 million
Life expectancy: 68.2 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 63/53 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 99.3 per cent

Reports of torture or other ill-treatment continued unabated. Dozens of members of minority religious and Islamic groups were given long prison terms after unfair trials. Human rights defenders continued to be imprisoned after unfair trials. The authorities forcefully rejected all international calls for an independent, international investigation into the mass killings of protesters.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Despite assertions by the authorities that the practice of torture had significantly decreased, reports of torture or other ill-treatment of detainees and prisoners continued unabated. In most cases, the authorities failed to conduct prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into these allegations.

Several thousand people convicted of involvement with Islamist parties or Islamic movements banned in Uzbekistan, as well as government critics and political opponents, continued to serve long prison terms under conditions that amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment.

Uzbekistan again refused to allow the UN Special Rapporteur on torture to visit the country despite renewed requests.

- In June, the authorities released opposition politician Sanzhar Umarov on humanitarian grounds and allowed him to rejoin his family in the USA. Sanzhar Umarov had been sentenced to eight years in prison in 2006 on charges of fraud and embezzlement after an unfair trial. His supporters claimed the charges were politically motivated. In September, he described in the *New York Times* how he

had spent months in solitary confinement in small concrete punishment cells with little natural light and no heating. He reported being beaten by prison guards and other prisoners and being denied medical treatment.

- The European Court of Human Rights ruled on 10 June in the case *Garayev v. Azerbaijan* that the extradition of Shaig Garayev from Azerbaijan to Uzbekistan would violate the prohibition of torture under the European Convention on Human Rights. The court stated that "any criminal suspect held in custody [in Uzbekistan] faces a serious risk of being subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment".

Counter-terror and security

Closed trials started in January of nearly 70 defendants charged in relation to attacks in the Ferghana Valley and the capital, Tashkent, in May and August 2009 and the killings of a pro-government imam and a high-ranking police officer in Tashkent in July 2009. The authorities blamed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) and the Islamist Hizb-ut-Tahrir party, all banned in Uzbekistan, for the attacks and killings. Among the scores detained as suspected members or sympathizers of the IMU, the IJU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir in 2009 were people who attended unregistered mosques, studied under independent imams, had travelled abroad, or were suspected of affiliation to banned Islamic groups. Many were believed to have been detained without charge or trial for lengthy periods. There were reports of torture and unfair trials.

- In April, a court in Dzhizzakh sentenced 25 men to terms ranging between two and 10 years in prison in connection with the attacks in 2009. All were convicted of attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and of religious extremism. At least 12 of the men alleged in court that their confessions had been obtained under torture. The trial judge ordered an investigation into these allegations, and then declared they were unfounded. Independent observers reported that the men had admitted to having participated in prayer meetings and practised sports together, but had denied that they were part of a group intent on overthrowing the constitutional order.
- In April, Kashkadaria Regional Criminal Court sentenced Zulkhumor Khamdamova, her sister Mekhriniso Khamdamova and their relative, Shakhlo Pakhmatova, to between six and a half and seven years in prison for attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and posing a threat to public order. They were part of a group of more than 30 women detained by security forces in counter-terrorism operations in the city of Karshi in November 2009. They were believed to have attended religious classes taught by Zulkhumor Khamdamova in one of the local mosques. The authorities accused Zulkhumor Khamdamova of organizing an illegal religious group, a charge denied by her supporters. Human rights defenders reported that the women were ill-treated in custody; police officers allegedly stripped the women naked and threatened them with rape.
- Dilorom Abdukadirova, an Uzbek refugee who had fled the country following the violence in Andizhan in 2005, was detained for four days upon her return in January, after receiving assurances from the authorities that she would not face charges. In March, she was detained again and held in police custody for two weeks without access to a lawyer or her family. On 30 April, she was convicted of anti-constitutional activities relating to her participation in the Andizhan demonstrations as well as illegally exiting and entering the country. She was sentenced to 10 years and two months in prison after an unfair trial. Family members reported that she appeared emaciated at the trial and had bruises on her face.

Freedom of expression – human rights defenders and journalists

Human rights defenders and independent journalists were subjected to harassment, beatings, detention and unfair trials. Human rights activists and journalists were

summoned for police questioning, placed under house arrest and routinely monitored by uniformed or plain-clothes officers. Others reported being beaten by police officers or by people suspected of working for the security forces.

- In January 2010, Umida Ahmedova, a prominent Uzbekistani documentary photographer was sentenced to three years in prison for insulting the dignity of Uzbekistani citizens and damaging the country's image on account of photographic and video projects documenting poverty and gender inequality in Uzbekistan. However, the presiding judge gave her an amnesty and she was released from the courtroom. Her continuing appeal against her sentence was rejected in May.
- In October, courts in Tashkent convicted two independent journalists working for foreign media outlets of criminal defamation and sentenced them to large fines. Vladimir Berezovski, the correspondent of Russian newspaper *Parlamentskaia Gazeta*, was accused of publishing 16 articles on the independent website Vesti.uz which contained defamatory information intended to mislead the Uzbekistani people and could have created panic. The articles focused on the IMU and labour migration and were not authored by Vladimir Berezovski but re-posted from Russian news agencies. Abdumalik Boboev, the correspondent for the US Congress-funded Voice of America Radio Station was sentenced to a large fine. The court found that his print and radio materials insulted the judiciary and the security forces. His articles and reports covered restrictions on freedom of expression, arbitrary detentions and unfair trials of journalists and human rights defenders. Both journalists had their appeals against their sentences rejected.
- In December, the authorities conditionally released human rights defender Fakhad Mukhtarov, after he had served 11 months of a five-year sentence for bribery and fraud. At least 11 other human rights defenders continued to be imprisoned. Some had new charges brought against them for allegedly violating prison rules and had their sentences extended by several years following unfair secret trials. At least three further human rights defenders were sentenced to long prison terms in 2010 on allegedly fictitious charges brought to punish them for their work.
- In January, human rights defender Gaibullo Dzhaliilov was sentenced to nine years in prison for attempting to overthrow the constitutional order and membership of a banned religious organization. A member of the unregistered, independent Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, Gaibullo Dzhaliilov had been monitoring the detentions and trials of members or suspected members of Islamic movements banned in Uzbekistan and had raised allegations of torture or other ill-treatment. Gaibullo Dzhaliilov claimed that he had been forced under duress to confess to being a member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. His sentence was upheld on appeal in March. In August, new charges were brought against him based, according to the prosecution, on new eyewitness testimony placing him at religious gatherings during which DVDs with extremist religious content were shown. He was sentenced to an additional four years in prison during a closed hearing at Kashkadaria Regional Criminal Court, even though no prosecution witnesses were called.

Freedom of religion

The government continued its strict control over religious communities, compromising the enjoyment of their right to freedom of religion. Those most affected were members of unregistered groups such as Christian Evangelical congregations and Muslims worshipping in mosques outside state control.

- Suspected followers of the Turkish Muslim theologian, Said Nursi, were convicted in a series of trials that had begun in 2009 and continued into 2010. The charges against them included membership or creation of an illegal religious extremist organization and publishing or distributing materials threatening the social order. By December 2010, at least 114 men had been sentenced to prison terms of

between six and 12 years following unfair trials. Reportedly, some of the verdicts were based on confessions gained under torture in pre-trial detention; defence and expert witnesses were not called; access to the trials was in some cases obstructed while other trials were closed.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

The authorities briefly granted temporary shelter to tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbek refugees who fled violence in neighbouring southern Kyrgyzstan in June. The authorities allowed emergency teams from UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, access to Uzbekistan and the refugee camps, the first time since ordering the agency to leave the country in 2006. Security forces tightly controlled the movement of the refugees, including those injured and in hospitals, and their contact with the outside world. At the end of June all but a couple of thousand refugees returned to Kyrgyzstan amid concern that the returns were not genuinely voluntary and that Kyrgyzstani and Uzbekistani local authorities had put pressure on them.

International scrutiny

Five years after the killing of hundreds of mainly peaceful demonstrators by the security forces in Andizhan on 13 May 2005, the authorities continued to reject all calls for an independent, international investigation. The lifting of sanctions by the EU was cited as evidence that the matter was now closed.

At the UN Human Rights Committee's examination of Uzbekistan's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in March, the Uzbekistani delegation denied that human rights defenders were detained and persecuted. The delegation insisted that Uzbekistan's "enemies" were waging an "information war" against the country and that international NGOs were paid to spread defamation and disinformation.

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