

# Prisoners of conscience pressured to implicate others, banned from reading Koran

Qorovulbozor Prison officials threatened prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov to further implicate seven fellow Muslims jailed alongside him. "We are not sure, but others arrested with him may have been threatened to do the same," Muslims told Forum 18. Zarafshon Prison administration banned Khasan Abdirakhimov from calling his family. Police pressured relatives not to speak publicly about him. Prisoner of conscience Faryozbek Kobilov hoped for early release in September 2024. But after days in the punishment cell, he was transferred to a harsher prison, which banned him from reading the Koran.

Several Muslim prisoners of conscience jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief are facing further pressure in prison. In August, officials of Qorovulbozor Prison No. 17 in Bukhara Region threatened prisoner of conscience Khayrullo Tursunov to write statements to further implicate his fellow-believers who were jailed at the same time. "We are not sure, but others arrested with him may have been threatened to do the same," Muslims who know him told Forum 18.

The 50-year-old Tursunov was among eight now-jailed Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi who attended a meal in June 2024 to discuss their faith at the home of a man known to have worked with the regime to entrap others. Karshi Criminal Court handed him an 8-year strict regime jail term (see below).

Calls to Rustam Tursunov, Head of the Chief Inspectorate of Execution of Punishments in the capital Tashkent, or the duty officer went unanswered each time Forum 18 called (see below).

Damir Sultanov, an inspector at the foreign relations section of the Chief Inspectorate of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent, refused to say why prisoner of conscience Tursunov was threatened in prison to further implicate those jailed in the same case. "No one will answer you from the Chief Inspectorate. You need to write a letter to the Foreign Ministry, and then we will see how we can answer," Sultanov told Forum 18 (see below).

Another of the seven Muslim men from Karshi jailed with Tursunov has faced pressure. The administration of Prison No. 12 in Zarafshon in Navoi Region did not allow 43-year-old Khasan Abdirakhimov to make phone calls to his family since late June. His wife Iroda Nekboyeva appealed to the authorities, including President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to pardon Abdirakhimov since the family considers that he is innocent. However, the authorities have not responded to her appeals, Muslims familiar with his case told Forum 18 (see below).

The duty officer at Prison No. 12 wrote down Forum 18's questions why Abdirakhimov was not allowed to call his family and why prison officers had earlier insulted and mocked him by refusing to allow him properly to pray the namaz prayer. The duty officer consulted other officers before refusing to answer. He also refused to put Forum 18 through to the Governor of the prison, Farkhod Kobilov (see below).

Kashkadarya Regional Police summoned prisoner of conscience Abdirakhimov's relatives during the summer, Muslims from the region complained to Forum 18. Colonel Abduvokhid Ismoilov, Chief of the Regional Police, warned them not to complain to the state authorities or the public about his imprisonment. The duty officer at the Regional Police wrote down Forum 18's questions why it had summoned and warned Abdirakhimov's relatives. He claimed that Colonel Ismoilov is "busy at the moment, call back in one hour." Called back the same day, the officer did not answer the phone (see below).

The local mahalla Committee in Karshi similarly warned Abdirakhimov's wife not to make public

complaints. Sanjar Khudoyberdiyev, Director of the Karshi school which Abdirakhimov's daughter and son attend, summoned the two children to his office. "He scolded [his daughter] for wearing a hijab to school. He also warned the son not wear hair longer than 1 cm," Muslims told Forum 18 (see below).

The 27-year-old Muslim prisoner of conscience Faryozbek Kobilov had been hoping for early conditional release in September 2024. But a month before, the administration of the prison sent him to the punishment cell for several days in an apparent move to prevent him being eligible for early conditional release or to make it easier to transfer him back to a harsher-regime prison. In August 2025, the prison authorities transferred Kobilov from Akhangaron's Labour Camp No. 48 to strict regime Prison No. 5 in Kyzylteppa District of Navoi (see below).

"We wrote many complaints early this year to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to the Chief Inspectorate of Execution of Punishments and to the Ombudsperson's Office but have not received any answers until now," Kobilov's parents told Forum 18. "Our son was on purpose given extra punishments while in Akhangaron prison in order to extend his prison stay and move him to a stricter prison." The administration of the new prison has banned him from reading the Koran. Forum 18 was unable to reach Kyzylteppa prison (see below).

Muslim former prisoner of conscience Fazilkhoja Arifkhojayev – given conditional release in December 2023 – has to pay 15 per cent of his income via the probation service. His bank cards remain blocked and he has been banned from selling his Tashkent flat to support his family. "I have looked for jobs and often they refuse to give me a job because of my age. And a few places where they could have employed me also refused when I told them that I am a former prisoner," Arifkhojayev complained to Forum 18 (see below).

Another prisoner of conscience, released after a shorter criminal prison term for teaching children the Koran without state permission, complained to Forum 18 that he also has difficulty in finding a job, that he is paying fines to the state, and that the authorities also blocked his bank cards. He did not wish to give more details for fear of state reprisals (see below).

## Banning exercise of freedom of religion or belief

Without state registration, religious communities do not have state permission to exist and it is [illegal for them to exercise freedom of religion and belief collectively](#). Among Muslims, the regime allows only communities subject to the state-controlled Sunni Muslim Muftiate (Muslim Board) to exist.

Muslims in particular who meet for worship or to discuss their faith without state permission [can face harsh prison terms](#). Accusations can be extremism- or terrorism-related (typically against devout Muslims) without any credible evidence. A symptom of this attitude is the long-standing involvement of police "Struggle with Extremism and Terrorism Department" officers in human rights violations against people of all beliefs.

The State Security Service (SSS) secret police are continuing to investigate Shia Muslim Anvar Aliyev, Shia Muslims from Samarkand told Forum 18 on 29 September. On 14 July, Samarkand City Police arrested the 35-year-old Aliyev. SSS secret police investigators then [opened a criminal case against him](#) on charges of "Production, storage, distribution or display of materials containing a threat to public security and public order" when carried out by a group. He remains in pre-trial detention.

## Tursunov: Prisoner of conscience threatened to further implicate his fellow-believers

Khayrullo Turdievich Tursunov (born 4 April 1975) was among eight now-jailed Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi who attended a meal in June 2024 to discuss their faith at the home of a man known to have worked with the regime to entrap others. Police officers - some armed with machine guns - were dressed in military camouflage and used violence when they arrested the eight in their homes later that day.

On 18 December 2024, Karshi Criminal Court [jailed the eight Muslim men](#). It jailed Tursunov for 8 years in a strict regime prison. Kashkadarya Regional Court rejected the eight men's appeal on 30 April 2025.

In August, officers of Qorovulbozor Prison No. 17 in Bukhara Region threatened prisoner of conscience Tursunov to write statements to further implicate his fellow-believers who were jailed at the same time, Muslims from Kashkadarya region, who know Tursunov and his family and asked not to give their names for fear of state reprisals, complained to Forum 18. Reportedly Tursunov refused to do so.

"We are not sure, but others arrested with him may have been threatened to do the same," the Muslims added. "Their families are afraid to speak to the public or with us."

Forum 18 was unable to reach Qorovulbozor Prison.

Damir Sultanov, an inspector at the foreign relations section of the Chief Inspectorate of Execution of Punishments in the capital Tashkent, on 24 September refused to answer why prisoner of conscience Tursunov was threatened in prison to write statements to further implicate his fellow-believers who are also prisoners of conscience.

"No one will answer you from the Chief Inspectorate. You need to write a letter to the Foreign Ministry, and then we will see how we can answer," Sultanov said.

Officials at the Office of the regime-appointed Oliy Majlis Human Rights Commissioner or Ombudsperson in Tashkent refused to talk to Forum 18 about the treatment of the prisoners of conscience. Asked on 25 September about the cases of Tursunov and another of those sentenced with him Abdirakhimov (see below) as well as others, one official, who answered the phone of Aziz Yuldashev, asked it to call back the same number to reach him. When Forum 18 called back the same number, no one answered the phone.

The phones of Feruza Eshmatova, the Ombudsperson, and other numbers also went unanswered. One official, who answered one of the numbers, switched on a pre-recorded message with a female voice saying in Russian that "you have reached a pig farm". Then the same voice said: "Sorry, I was joking, you have called a wrong number."

Tursunov's address in prison:

Uzbekistan  
200900 Bukhara viloyati  
Qorovulbozor tumoni  
Istiklol kuchasi 1  
17 sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

## **Abdirakhimov: Prisoner of conscience banned from calling family, pardon appeals ignored**

Khasan Doniyorovich Abdirakhimov (born 18 October 1981) was among eight now-jailed Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi who attended a meal in June 2024 to discuss their faith at the home of a man known to have worked with the regime to entrap others. Police officers - some armed with machine guns - were dressed in military camouflage and used violence when they

arrested the eight in their homes later that day.

On 18 December 2024, Karshi Criminal Court [jailed the eight Muslim men](#). It jailed Abdirakhimov for 8 years and 3 months in a labour camp. Kashkadarya Regional Court rejected the eight men's appeal on 30 April 2025.

Abdirakhimov has been held at Prison No. 12 in Zarafshon in Navoi Region. The prison administration did not allow him to make phone calls to his family since late June 2025, Muslims from Kashkadarya told Forum 18. On 26 August his wife Iroda Nekboyeva was finally able to visit him in prison.

Nekboyeva earlier appealed to the authorities, including President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to pardon Abdirakhimov since the family considers that he is innocent. However, the authorities have not responded to her appeals, the Muslims told Forum 18.

The duty officer at Prison No. 12 (who refused to give his name) confirmed to Forum 18 on 24 September that Abdirakhimov is an inmate in the prison. He wrote down Forum 18's questions why he was not allowed to call his family since June and why prison officers had earlier insulted and mocked him by refusing to allow him properly to pray the namaz prayer. The duty officer consulted other officers before refusing to answer the questions. He also refused to put Forum 18 through to the Governor of the prison, Farkhod Kobilov.

Calls to Rustam Tursunov, Head of the Chief Inspectorate of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent, or the duty officer went unanswered each time Forum 18 called between 23 and 29 September.

Damir Sultanov, an inspector at the foreign relations department of the Chief Inspectorate in the capital Tashkent, on 24 September refused to answer why officials refused prisoner of conscience Abdirakhimov phone calls from the prison to his family.

"No one will answer you from the Chief Inspectorate. You need to write a letter to the Foreign Ministry, and then we will see how we can answer," Sultanov responded.

Abdirakhimov's address in prison:

Uzbekistan  
Navoi viloyati  
Ichki ishlar boshqarmasi  
Zarafshan shaxri  
Sharq ko'chasi, uy No. 1  
Jinoyati Ijro Etish Bo'limi  
12-sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

## **Abdirakhimov: Regional and local authorities pressure, attack relatives**

Kashkadarya Regional Police summoned prisoner of conscience Khasan Abdirakhimov's relatives during the summer, Muslims from the region complained to Forum 18. Colonel Abduvokhid Ismoilov, Chief of the Regional Police, warned them not to complain to the state authorities or the public about his imprisonment.

The duty officer at the Regional Police on 29 September wrote down Forum 18's questions why it had summoned and warned Abdirakhimov's relatives. He claimed that Colonel Ismoilov is "busy at the moment, call back in one hour." Called back the same day, the officer did not answer the phone.

The local mahalla Committee (state-controlled smallest residential administration), where the

family lives in the city of Karshi, have pressured Iroda Nekboyeva, Abdirakhimov's wife, not to complain to the authorities or the public about his prison conditions. The mahalla Committee also instructed her to ensure that her daughter, who attends a public school in Karshi, does not wear to school a hijab or any headcover that covers her neck.

Zokir Avazov, who chaired the Mustakillik mahalla Committee, answered the phone on 29 September but passed it to his wife to answer the questions "since he is sick and cannot talk". Avazov's wife, on his instructions, told Forum 18 that they "know of the family" but declined to comment since "He is no longer the Chair of the Committee since last May. We cannot comment, and please talk to the new Chair."

The new chair of the Mahalla Committee, Sherzod Sultonov, insisted to Forum 18 on 29 September that "we are not against her or her daughter wearing hijab. If the school is against it then you can talk to the school." He also denied that he or his subordinates pressured the family not to make complaints.

## **Abdirakhimov: School which daughter and son attend also pressure them**

Sanjar Khudoyerdiyev, Director of the Karshi school which prisoner of conscience Khasan Abdirakhimov's daughter and son attend, summoned the two children to his office several times. "He scolded [his daughter] for wearing a hijab to school. He also warned the son not wear hair longer than 1 cm," Muslims told Forum 18.

## **Kobilov: Prisoner of conscience transferred to stricter regime prison, not allowed to read Koran**

Muslim prisoner of conscience Faryozbek Vosiljon ugli Kobilov (born 21 November 1997) was a student at Andijan State University at the time of his March 2022 arrest. In July 2022, Markhamat District Criminal Court of Andijan Region sentenced him to [a seven-year jail term](#) for attending one shared meal with five other Muslims where religious themes were discussed. His sentence was [reduced to five years' imprisonment](#) on appeal.

In August 2024, the administration of Akhangaron's Labour Camp No. 48 [put prisoner of conscience Kobilov in the punishment cell](#) for several days in an apparent move to prevent him being eligible for early conditional release or to make it easier to transfer him back to a harsher-regime prison. His family said he had been hoping for early release on 29 September 2024. Akhror Mirzokarimov, Governor of the prison, refused to talk to Forum 18. Asked about Kobilov's case in August 2024, he put the phone down.

In August 2025, the prison authorities transferred Kobilov from Akhangaron's Labour Camp No. 48 to strict regime Prison No. 5 in Kyzylteppa District of Navoi. Initially on 4 August they took him for a "few days" to Tashkent's Temporary detention prison before transferring him to the Navoi prison, his parents complained to Forum 18 on 24 September.

"We wrote many complaints early this year to President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, to the Chief Inspectorate of Execution of Punishments and to the Ombudsperson's Office but have not received any answers until now," Kobilov's parents told Forum 18. "Our son was on purpose given extra punishments while in Akhangaron prison in order to extend his prison stay and move him to a stricter prison."

Kobilov's parents told Forum 18 that the prison authorities do not allow Kobilov to read the Koran, "but are compelling him to read books for his correction". The officers claim to Kobilov that if he reads these books they may transfer him to a prison closer to where his parents live. "We do not

know what these books are and whether they are against Muslim morals," his parents lamented. "The last time we talked with him was when he called in mid-August. He said that he is in severe depression."

Kobilov's new prison address:

Uzbekistan  
Navoi viloyati  
Kyzylteppa tumani  
5-sonli Jazoni ijro etish bulimi

Forum 18 was unable to reach Kyzylteppa prison.

## **Arifkhojayev: Post-prison life difficult for former prisoner of conscience**

Police arrested Fazilkhoja Talipjanovich Arifkhojayev (born 25 November 1980), a Muslim known for his criticisms of the regime's religious policies, in June 2021. At a closed trial in January 2022, Tashkent's Olmazor District Criminal Court [jailed him for seven and half years](#) in a labour camp.

Prisoner of conscience Arifkhojayev was [given conditional early release](#) and transferred to his home in Tashkent in December 2023. He is serving the rest of his sentence under restrictions.

Arifkhojayev is officially registered in Tashkent at Chilanzar District Police, but because he lives in Yunusabad District he gets invited regularly for talks to both District Police Departments. "They usually ask me who I talk to and whether I am publishing anything critical on the government," he told Forum 18 on 25 September. "They check my cell phone."

Arifkhojayev has been placed under total financial and physical control of the authorities, Muslims told Forum 18 in September 2025. He cannot find a suitable salaried job to support himself and his family, his wife and new born child, both of whom are dependent on him. Nor can he use his bank cards to which his friends and family living outside Uzbekistan would like to transfer money. He also cannot travel abroad for work.

"I have looked for jobs and often they refuse to give me a job because of my age. And a few places where they could have employed me also refused when I told them that I am a former prisoner," Arifkhojayev complained to Forum 18. "I have three bank cards, all of which were blocked by the authorities. I cannot withdraw money from them."

Arifkhojayev also complained that when he tried to sell his flat in Tashkent to use the money to support his family, the notary's office told him that officials had blocked it from being sold.

Arifkhojayev complained that it is difficult for him to live in Uzbekistan. "I would like to travel abroad to work and support my family but the authorities have confiscated my travel passport so I cannot leave Uzbekistan. I am trying to be as quiet as possible and not criticise the government, but it has become unbearable for me to live here." He said that he feels "emotionally and morally tired of all the pressure. I feel like I will break down from stress."

## **Arifkhojayev: Paying 15 per cent of his income in exchange for his pardon**

Former prisoner of conscience Fazilkhoja Arifkhojayev complained to Forum 18 that "I have to pay 15 per cent of my income to the state, under the control of the probation authorities. The authorities handed down this payment in exchange for my pardon and early release from prison. But I do not

know for how long I will have to pay this."

In November and December 2024, Arifkhojayev's lawyer, Sergei Mayorov sent requests to the President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, his Advisor responsible for pardons, to the Chief of Prison No. 5 in Kyzylteppa in Navoi Region (where Arifkhojayev was serving his sentence), and to the local Probation Offices at Chilanzar and Yunusabad Districts of Tashkent (where Arifkhojayev lives). Mayorov asked them to inform him and his client Arifkhojayev in writing of the exact details of the pardon, including how long he would have to pay the penalties and the end date of his punishment.

The only written answer up till now came from Zhobir Azimov, Deputy Advisor to President Mirziyoyev. The 14 December 2024 letter – seen by Forum 18 - merely states that Arifkhojayev was pardoned on 4 December 2023 under Decree No. U11-202. "By this Decree, Arifkhojayev was pardoned in the form of replacing the unserved part of his imprisonment with correctional labour, with a 15 per cent deduction of his salary for the benefit of the state." Azimov's letter does not give the end date of the penalty payments.

Officials of the Chief Probation Office of the Interior Ministry in Tashkent refused to answer Forum 18's questions on Arifkhojayev's case on 25 September or refer it to Sharof Uralov, its head. Umida (she refused to give her last name), Chief of the Chancellery, also refused to discuss the case with Forum 18 the same day.

## **Freed prisoner of conscience similarly obstructed post-prison**

Another prisoner of conscience, who was imprisoned for a shorter criminal prison term for teaching children the Koran without state permission and who was released in 2025, complained to Forum 18 that he also has difficulty in finding a job, that he is paying fines to the state, and that the authorities also blocked his bank cards. He did not wish to give more details for fear of state reprisals. (END)