

URGENT ACTION

TORTURED JOURNALIST MUST BE IMMEDIATELY RELEASED

On 8 February, human rights activists reported that two SNB officers leading the investigation on the case against detained journalist Bobomurod Abdullayev had been suspended and that the General Prosecutor's Office had initiated investigations into allegations of torture and fabrication of a criminal case. Bobomurod Abdullayev, however, remains in SNB detention.

On 10 January, **Bobomurod Abdullayev's** mother, wife and children were allowed a short 25 minute visit with him in the SNB pre-trial detention centre (SIZO) where he has been detained since the end of September 2017. It was the family's first visit and took place in the presence of an SNB officer. At the time, the family said that there were no visible signs of torture on Bobomurod Abdullayev's body and that he had not complained about his conditions of detention, as they were concerned about the possible repercussions. On 2 February, however, the journalist's mother wrote a letter to the President confirming that SNB officers had tortured the journalist from the moment they apprehended him in a Tashkent street on 27 September 2017. She explained that Bobomurod Abdullayev told her that every time human rights activists and media published allegations that he was tortured to obtain a "confession" or to dismiss his lawyer, SNB officers punished him. They beat him, stripped him naked and made him stand in a freezing cold cell for hours on end. They also threatened to kill him or keep him forever locked up in the SNB SIZO and harm his family. Under pressure from the SNB and in fear for his life, he told his lawyer that he had admitted to the charges against him and that he had no complaints about his treatment in detention. During a visit in December 2017, Bobomurod Abdullayev refused to show his lawyer his back, which as it later transpired, was badly bruised and scarred, and complied with the SNB's demand that he dismiss his lawyer.

On 8 February, the Chairman of the NGO, Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Defenders in Tashkent announced that two SNB officers involved in the criminal case against Bobomurod Abdullayev had been suspended from duty with immediate effect due to allegations of torture; that criminal procedures against him had been stopped; and that the General Prosecutor's Office was opening an investigation against the SNB officers into allegations of torture and fabrication of a criminal case. Bobomurod Abdullayev, however, remains in detention.

Please write immediately in Uzbek, Russian, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Bobomurod Abdullayev;
- Welcoming reports that the General Prosecutor's Office has initiated investigations into the allegations of torture, and urging them to ensure that these investigations are thorough, independent and impartial, and that all those suspected of criminal responsibility are brought to justice in fair proceedings in accordance with international human rights standards;
- Pending his release, urging the authorities to ensure that Bobomurod Abdullayev is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and to ensure that he has full access to all legal safeguards in detention - including regular and unhindered access to, and opportunity to speak confidentially with, a lawyer of his choice and his family;

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 23 MARCH 2018 TO:

Chairman of the National Security Service

Ihtior Abdullaev
9 Matbuotchilar Street
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Salutation: Dear Chairman

Prosecutor General

Otabek Murodov
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. Gulyamova 66
Tashkent 700047 Uzbekistan
Fax: +998 71 133 3917
Email: prokuratura@lawyer.uz
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Director
Akmal Saidov
The National Human Rights Centre
Ul. Mustakillik maidoni 5/3
Tashkent 100029 Uzbekistan
Fax: +998 71 239 13 56
Email: info@nhrc.uz

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 232/17. Further information:

www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur62/7721/2018/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bobomurod Abdullayev is an independent journalist and sports commentator. He was detained by SNB officers in Tashkent on 27 September 2017 for allegedly attempting to overthrow the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He has since been held at one of the most notorious detention centres in the country, where torture is commonplace. Amnesty International's research shows that prisoners in the SNB detention centre are tortured, including in interrogation rooms, punishment cells, toilets and shower rooms, and in purpose-built torture rooms with padded rubber walls and sound-proofing. SNB officers have warned his family not to contact human rights organizations or the media, and only allowed him limited and supervised access to a lawyer of his choice ten weeks after he was detained. In November 2017, the authorities extended his pre-trial detention for another three months. On 26 December 2017, the SNB accused his lawyer of misrepresenting the case to the public and forced Bobomurod Abdullayev to dismiss him in favour of a state-appointed one. On 10 January, Bobomurod Abdullayev told his family during a brief visit that plain-clothes SNB officers had assaulted him in the street close to his home on 27 September and had put a hood over his head, tied his hands behind his back, beaten and kicked him and forced him into a waiting car.

Despite the easing of some undue restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in 2017, the government has retained firm control of access to information. Independent and international media platforms considered critical of the authorities have remained inaccessible. The authorities have allowed some critical reporting by the media and have released several prisoners convicted on politically motivated charges. However, prominent human rights defenders, government critics and independent journalists have continued to be subjected to sustained harassment and intimidation, routine monitoring, arbitrary arrests, beatings and smear campaigns. Many have been forced into exile while others are prevented from leaving the country. Human rights defenders and independent journalists, both those abroad and those in Uzbekistan, continue to find themselves and their families the target of extensive and repeated media campaigns on websites owned or controlled by the government, both on national television and in the official printed media.

Despite significant legal and judicial reform initiatives in 2017 to address persistent human rights violations in the judicial and law enforcement spheres, Amnesty International has continued to receive persistent and credible allegations of routine and pervasive torture and other ill-treatment by security forces during arrest and transfer, in police custody and pre-trial detention and by security forces and prison personnel in post-conviction detention facilities. Torture is used to coerce suspects, detainees and prisoners, including women and men charged with criminal offences such as theft, fraud or murder, into "confessing" to crimes or incriminating others. Individuals charged with or convicted of anti-state and terrorism-related offences, including those forcibly returned to Uzbekistan, have been particularly vulnerable to torture both in pre-trial detention and in prison following conviction.

A Presidential decree published in November 2017 explicitly prohibits the use of torture to obtain confessions and their admission as evidence in court proceedings. Nevertheless courts continue to rely heavily on torture-tainted "confessions" to hand down convictions. Because allegations of torture and other ill-treatment are rarely effectively investigated, a climate of impunity persists.

Name: Bobomurod Abdullayev

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 232/17 Index: EUR 62/7872/2018 Issue Date: 9 February 2018