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Kyrgyzstan: Prisoner of conscience Azimjan Askarov must be released unconditionally

On 30 July 2019 Azimjan Askarov, prominent Kyrgyzstani human rights defender and director of the independent human rights organisation “Air” (Vozdukh), is scheduled to attend a court review of his life sentence following changes to the Kyrgyzstani Criminal Code that came into force in January 2019.

Azimjan Askarov was sentenced to life imprisonment in September 2010 following a trial that did not meet international fair trial standards. The charges against Askarov, who is 68, were fabricated and politically motivated, and he alleges torture while in detention. Appeals lodged by his lawyers in 2013, 2014 and 2017 to reopen the case were rejected. Appeal hearings and court reviews of his 2010 sentence were conducted in violation of fair trial standards.

On 13 February 2019 Askarov, who had been found guilty of complicity in the murder of a police officer under Article 30-340 of the Criminal Code, lodged a request with the courts to review his life sentence after amendments removed this article from the Code.¹

Amnesty International reiterates that Azimjan Askarov is a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. He should be immediately and unconditionally released and given urgent and required medical attention, in compliance with the 2016 decision of the UN Human Rights Committee.²

Background

Azimjan Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek, had filmed and photographed violence, killings and arson attacks on mostly ethnic Uzbek homes and other buildings in his home town of Bazar-Korgon during June 2010 violent unrest in southern Kyrgyzstan. He was subsequently accused of being an accomplice to the murder of a police officer during the violence. Amnesty International believes that the charges against him were fabricated and politically motivated and an attempt to stop his legitimate human rights work.

¹ FIDH-OMCT, the Urgent Appeal.

<https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/human-rights-defenders/kyrgyzstan-azimjan-askarov-s-conviction-will-be-reviewed-by-the-court>

² Human Rights Committee, “Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 2231/2012”, CCPR/C/116/D/2231/2012, 21 April 2016.

In March 2016 the UN Human Rights Committee recommended that Askarov be released immediately, recognizing that he had been tortured, denied the right to a fair trial and detained arbitrarily and under inhumane conditions. On 24 January 2017, the Chui Regional Court completed a retrial and upheld his conviction and life sentence for “participating in ethnic violence and the murder of a police officer” in 2010. Following this decision, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that the Court’s decision highlighted “serious shortcomings in the country’s judicial system”.

Azimjan Askarov’s health has seriously deteriorated over the last months but he has been denied necessary and adequate health care in prison.

Further information

Kyrgyzstan: Situation of Detained Human Rights Defender Azimjon Askarov (Index number: EUR 62/0629/2019)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur62/0629/2019/en/>

Kyrgyzstan: Profound Abuse of Rights Continues: Prisoner of Conscience Azimjan Askarov Remains Behind Bars (AI Index: EUR58/5553/2017)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/5553/2017/en/>

Kyrgyzstan: International Fair Trial Standards and Security Must Be Ensured at The Forthcoming Review Of The Case Of Prisoner Of Conscience Azimjan Askarov (EUR 58/4409/2016)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/4409/2016/en/>

Kyrgyzstan: Release prisoner of conscience Azimjan Askarov (AI Index: EUR58/3960/2016) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/3960/2016/en/>

Kyrgyzstan: Five Years On: Justice Still Denied (Index: EUR 58/1846/2015)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/1846/2015/en/>

Will there ever be justice? Kyrgyzstan’s failure to investigate June 2010 violence and its aftermath (Index: EUR58/001/2013)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/001/2013/en/>

Kyrgyzstan: Dereliction of Duty (Index: EUR58/001/2012)

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/001/2012/en/>

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