



The Disappeared in Turkmenistan's Prisons Whose Terms Have Expired Must Be Immediately Released: An Appeal by the Prove They Are Alive! Campaign to the President of Turkmenistan

A Statement from the Prove They Are Alive! Campaign

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For over seventeen years, Turkmenistan has continued the practice of enforced disappearances in its prison system. Hundreds of people have become victims of enforced disappearance. Being held in complete isolation from the outside world is a gross violation of Turkmenistan's national legislation and of its international obligations, and is a human rights crime.

The international campaign, Prove They Are Alive!, has documented over 120 cases of disappearance in Turkmenistan's prisons. Inhuman conditions in the prisons where the disappeared are held correspond to torture. At least 27 individuals from this list have died in prison; the real number of those who have disappeared and died in isolation during these years is likely much higher. This is an ongoing crime: people continue to disappear into prison following arrest and are held in complete isolation. No one has access to them—not their relatives or lawyers or representatives of international organizations. Their fate is unknown and no one knows if they are alive or not. The loved ones of the disappeared are also tortured by this lack of information.

There is a group of people from the list of disappeared published by the Prove They Are Alive! campaign, whose terms have already expired or will expire in the next two years. Among these prisoners are: Esen Buriev (term expired in 2017), Isa Garataev (2017), Bazar Gurbanov (2018), Annageldy Akmuradov (2019), Mamur Ataev (2019), Konstantin Shikhmuradov (2019), Rustem Dzhumaev (2020), Saparmurat Mukhammedov (2020), Batyr Sardzhaev (no later than 2020), Orazmammet Yklymov (2021), and Ovezmurat Yazmuradov (2021).

On December 10, 2019, the Prove They Are Alive! campaign wrote a letter to President of Turkmenistan Berdymukhamedov regarding this list. The campaign received confirmation that the letter was received by the authorities in the beginning of January. In the appeal, the campaign called on the Turkmen leader to

employ all his power to comply with the norms of Turkmen national law and Turkmenistan's international obligations and to demonstrate his humanity by ensuring unconditional and immediate release of prisoners from the list of the disappeared whose sentences have ended, and in the event of the death of any of them, immediately inform their families and provide them the opportunity to say goodbye to their families according to national custom. The campaign hopes that President Berdymukhamedov will take positive steps to resolve this critical situation in the nearest future.

The continued deprivation of liberty of civic activist Gulgedy Annaniyazov demands particular attention. Until March 2019, the Turkmen authorities held him in complete isolation in prison for 11 years based on a court verdict, which no one had seen, including Annaniyazov's family. Annaniyazov was held in prison all those years, despite the fact that his term had ended long ago in accordance with changes to the legislation, which were adopted in 2010. In March 2019, Annaniyazov was transferred from prison to internal exile for a five year sentence in the village of Karabogaz, where living conditions are extremely harsh. His relatives have been able to visit him only once. Annaniyazov must be immediately freed from internal exile and allowed to reunite with his wife and son, who live in Norway.

The completion of prison sentences for an entire group of disappeared prisoners in Turkmenistan's prisons, whose fates are closely monitored by the international community, provides the government of Turkmenistan with a legal opportunity, and simultaneously imposes on it a legal obligation to release these people. This can be the beginning of a real resolution of the problem of enforced disappearances in prisons. This situation creates a "new reality" for the country's leadership, in which it will be required to present to relatives and the public those prisoners whose terms have expired, and provide the details of the fates of those who have died in prison.

The international community must continue to attentively follow this situation and demand real action from the Turkmen leadership to stop enforced disappearances. Any international cooperation with the government of Turkmenistan must be contingent upon positively resolving the problems of the disappeared in Turkmenistan's prisons.

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The international human rights campaign, Prove They Are Alive! has been working since 2013 defending the rights of those prisoners who are held in complete isolation in the prisons of Turkmenistan, and demands that the government of Turkmenistan cease the practice of enforced disappearance. The campaign works with the support of the international Civic Solidarity Platform and actively cooperates with a wide circle of human rights defenders, experts, and governments. It also works with intergovernmental organizations including the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union. More information about the Prove They Are Alive! campaign is available at <http://provetheyarealive.org>.