



Individuals continue to be at risk of violations in Turkmenista

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Cover photo: Boris Shikhmuradov, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, is one of the dozens of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearance in Turkmenistan
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Individuals continue to be at risk of violations in Turkmenistan

The government under President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, who took office on 14 February 2007, has reversed some policies of his predecessor, Saparmurad Niyazov. Two years on, however, many of the people whose cases are described in this document¹, are still awaiting justice and new cases are emerging of individuals subjected to human rights violations for their perceived opposition to the government.

Amnesty International, on behalf of these people, calls on President Berdymukhamedov to live up to his earlier promises of human rights reforms by swiftly ending enforced disappearances, releasing prisoners of conscience, ensuring fair trials, putting an end to torture or other ill-treatment, and lifting restrictions on freedom of expression of journalists, civil society activists, and on freedom of religion. Taking action to protect the human rights of the individuals described below would also be an important first step by the government towards implementing key recommendations made during the United Nations' Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan in December 2008. Among the 19 recommendations arising from this review which were supported by Turkmenistan were calls to:

- ensure that everyone is entitled to a fair trial;
- ensure the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas;
- act against any form of harassment and intimidation of journalists;
- ensure that members of civil society are allowed, free of harassment, to meet with representatives of foreign media and governments and international organizations;
- ensure the right to freedom of religion;
- fully respect the right to be free to leave and return to one's own country;
- co-operate with UN bodies and special procedures.

Amnesty International welcomes the government's express support of these recommendations and trusts that they will be acted on within a reasonable time.

FEW RELEASES

In 2007 and 2008 the situation of several individuals whose cases had been acted on by the international community has been improved: some prisoners were released and some individuals, including conscientious objectors and one environmental activist, had suspended sentences lifted, mostly through pardons. While welcoming the release of prisoners and lifting of suspended sentences in cases raised by human rights organizations, Amnesty International is concerned that these pardons do not represent transparent and legal processes in line with international laws and standards and often set repentance as a precondition. Pardoned prisoners reportedly continue to be required to swear the state oath with their hands on the Koran and the *Rukhnama* (Book of the Soul)², and to express regret for the alleged deeds they were convicted of – often in unfair trials – and swear not to repeat them. Amnesty International is also concerned at reports that many prisoners or their relatives, regardless of whether or not the cases had a political element, had to pay bribes in order to ensure inclusion in the list.

¹ This document is an update to AI Indexes: EUR 61/001/2008 and EUR 61/004/2007.

² A book, allegedly written by then President Saparmurad Niyazov, had been a core element of his personality cult. For example, state employees, such as teachers and doctors, had to know passages of the book by heart.

Possible prisoner of conscience **Valeri Pal** was released from the prison in Mary city on 7 December 2008. He was one of 390 prisoners who were pardoned under a presidential amnesty before a national holiday (Neutrality Day) on 12 December. Turkmenbashi City Court had found Valeri Pal, who worked at an oil refinery in Turkmenbashi for most of his professional life, guilty of crimes including "misappropriation of property," "abuse of power" and "forgery", and had sentenced him to 12 years' imprisonment on 13 May 2008. Valeri Pal's supporters believe the case against him was fabricated to punish him for his peaceful activities as a social activist. He had taken part in protests against the renaming of his town from Krasnovodsk to Turkmenbashi, in honour of then President Saparmurad Niyazov who had proclaimed himself as "Turkmenbashi" (Leader of All Turkmen). He had also provided advice to fellow citizens about various social problems and supported other activists and human rights defenders with his knowledge of information technology.

Despite initial reports of the release of **Yazgeldi Gundogdiev** in 2007 on grounds of poor health, one of his relatives informed Amnesty International in May 2008 that he continued to be imprisoned. He was among dozens of people who were convicted in unfair trials to sentences ranging between five years' and life imprisonment for their alleged involvement in an armed attack on then President Saparmurad Niyazov in November 2002.

The family of **Mukhametkuli Aymuradov** received a confirmation letter from the authorities that he would be released on 2 May 2009. The death in custody of his co-defendant **Khoshali Garayev** in 1999 remains unexplained and uninvestigated. Both men had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment following conviction for alleged anti-state crimes in an unfair trial in 1995. In December 1998 they had received an additional sentence of 18 years' imprisonment on charges in connection with an alleged escape attempt. Amnesty International remains seriously concerned about reports that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov's health has seriously deteriorated. A manager of a building conglomerate at the time of his arrest, and a family man with children and grandchildren, he was reportedly imprisoned solely because of his association with exiled opponents of the government.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- promptly release Mukhametkuli Aymuradov on the grounds that repeated calls for a fair retrial in his case have gone unheeded for over 12 years;
- ensure that Mukhametkuli Aymuradov and Yazgeldi Gundogdiev receive adequate medical treatment;
- ensure that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out into the death in custody of Khoshali Garayev and to make public the scope, methods and findings of the investigation, and bring anyone suspected of involvement in human rights violations to justice.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Amnesty International is gravely concerned that dozens of people, including the brothers **Boris** and **Konstantin Shikhmuradov**, have been subjected to enforced disappearance in Turkmenistan.

In December 2002 and January 2003 at least 59 people were convicted in unfair trials to sentences ranging between five years' imprisonment and life imprisonment for their alleged involvement in an armed attack on then President Saparmurad Niyazov in November 2002. Many of them were labelled as "traitors of the motherland". Many were reportedly also tortured by law enforcement officers in pre-trial detention.

Boris Shikhmuradov, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, was sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment in a closed trial on 29 December 2002. The People's Council³ reportedly increased his sentence to life

³ The People's Council consisted of representatives of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of power. It performed functions which, under international human rights law, should have been carried out by independent, impartial and competent courts. It was abolished in the new Constitution, adopted in September 2008.

imprisonment the next day. His brother Konstantin Shikhmuradov was sentenced to 17 years' imprisonment. Boris Shikhmuradov's wife, Tatyana Shikhmuradova, told Amnesty International shortly after her husband stood trial: "It is impossible to find out whether the lawyers were allowed to speak, whether any witnesses were questioned [and] who chaired the hearing."

The authorities continue to withhold information about the whereabouts of this group of prisoners; deny them all access to families and independent bodies including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and refuse to respond to allegations that at least eight of them died in custody. There were rumours that two of them, Boris Shikhmuradov and **Batyr Berdyev**, had died. However, in September 2007 President Berdymukhamedov was quoted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty as saying that he was positive that they were alive. This is the only piece of information that gives the two men's relatives hope the men still live.

Since her husband's arrest, Tatyana Shikhmuradova has regularly written letters to government officials including former President Niyazov, President Berdymukhamedov, the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Justice and the Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Russia on behalf of her husband and her brother-in-law. Konstantin Shikhmuradov's wife Ayna Shikhmuradova regularly goes to the Department of the Execution of Punishments asking for information about her husband and Boris Shikhmuradov. However, neither women has been given any information and their letters to government officials have remained unanswered.

According to non-governmental sources, most of the prisoners are held in the Ovadan-depe prison, not far from the capital, Ashgabad, known for its particularly harsh conditions. However, Amnesty International has not been able to verify this information as the authorities have to date not disclosed the prisoners' whereabouts.

Amnesty International calls on the government of Turkmenistan to:

- publicly condemn enforced disappearance under any circumstances, and commit to ending the practice - including by immediately revealing the fate and whereabouts of all persons who have been subjected to enforced disappearance, including Boris and Konstantin Shikhmuradov;
- investigate all cases of enforced disappearance and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice, in fair trials without imposing the death penalty;
- ensure Boris Shikhmuradov and Konstantin Shikhmuradov, as well as other people who had been sentenced to long-term imprisonments following the November 2002 events, are retried in proceedings which meet international standards of fairness and to which international trial observers have access;
- ensure that victims of enforced disappearance and their families are given full reparation for their suffering.

PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE CONTINUE TO BE IMPRISONED

Amnesty International has received reports that prisoners of conscience **Annakurban Amanklychev** and **Sapardurdy Khadzhiev** appealed to President Berdymukhamedov for pardon in 2008. Both are believed to be imprisoned in the Caspian port town of Turkmenbashi.

There has been no prompt, independent, thorough, and impartial investigation into the disputed and unexplained death in custody of their co-defendant **Ogulsapar Muradova** in September 2006.

Ogulsapar Muradova was a former member of the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, a human rights organization that cannot openly function inside the country, and a correspondent for the US-funded international radio station, Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe (RFE/RL). Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiev were also associated with the Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation. All three were

arrested in June 2006 and sentenced to terms of imprisonment in August 2006 after being convicted on firearms charges widely believed to have been fabricated. There were strong indications that all three were ill-treated in an attempt to extract “confession” statements. Amnesty International adopted the three as prisoners of conscience, believing that they were targeted because of their human rights activities.

Amnesty International continues to call on the government of Turkmenistan to:

- immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience, including Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhev;
- ensure that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out into the death in custody of Ogulsapar Muradova and into allegations that Annakurban Amanklychev, Sapardurdy Khadzhev and Ogulsapar Muradova were tortured or ill-treated;
- make public the scope, methods and findings of these investigations, and bring those suspected of involvement in human rights violations to justice.

RENEWED ATTEMPTS TO SILENCE INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS AND JOURNALISTS

All domestic media remains state-controlled. The authorities have continued to pursue their policy of silencing civil society activists and denying freedom of expression, including for journalists. In April 2008 the authorities launched a new wave of repression against independent civil society activists and journalists with the aim of identifying contributors to reports of foreign media outlets and non-governmental organizations based outside the country.

Among the targets were suspected sources of information of the Austria-based non-governmental organization (NGO) Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights, run by exiled director Farid Tukhbatullin. A civil society activist from Turkmenistan told Amnesty International that he had received reliable information that the President ordered officials to ensure that the group’s website was not accessible from inside Turkmenistan and to identify those contributing to the group’s publications. The NGO’s website carries reports and articles about human rights violations in Turkmenistan and aims to provide non-partisan commentary on government policies and practices. Reportedly, officers of the Ministry of National Security invited all those whom they suspected of links with the human rights group “for a conversation”, trying to extract information about the NGO’s contacts inside Turkmenistan and how information is passed to Farid Tukhbatullin. In April 2008 Turkmenistani diplomatic representatives “recommended” to Farid Tukhbatullin that he “tone down” criticism of the authorities on his website.

Amnesty International has learnt of many cases where journalists who co-operated with foreign media outlets publishing information critical of the authorities were subjected to harassment and intimidation. However, owing to fears of reprisals, in this report Amnesty International has only documented below cases of individuals who have been willing to state publicly that they had been subjected to harassment or other forms of pressure. These cases all concern correspondents of the Turkmen Service of RFE/RL. However, the human rights violations faced by them should be placed within the context of a much broader pattern of intimidation and harassment of journalists in Turkmenistan.

Officers of the Ministry of National Security reportedly questioned the correspondent **Gurbansultan Achilova** several times in 2008 about her cooperation with RFE/RL. When she was summoned to the Ministry of National Security in Ashgabad on 3 April she was reportedly told that she should not continue her work for the radio unless she was issued accreditation by the authorities. She had to sign a letter stating that she would cease her reporting until the authorities issued her with such an accreditation. Joanna Levison, RFE/RL’s Senior Media Advisor, told Amnesty International on 23 May: “Achilova is now in a kind of double jeopardy. If she resumes her journalism, she risks working illegally and in contravention of an agreement she signed. If she remains silent, she effectively is choosing to self-censor

and appease the regime.” Since the government of President Berdymukhamedov came to power, RFE/RL has twice written to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, in November 2007 and January 2008, requesting accreditation on behalf of four Turkmenistan-based correspondents, including Gurbansultan Achilova. No reply has been reported.

Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, a RFE/RL contributor, told Amnesty International on 23 May 2008 that since 2006 he had been visited by doctors of the psychiatric hospital of Balkan region and officers of the Ministry of National Security on many occasions, urging him to come for psychiatric check-ups. Amnesty International had adopted him as a prisoner of conscience when he was forcibly confined in psychiatric hospitals from 2004 to 2006.⁴ Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev reported that on 7 and 14 April graffiti appeared on the walls of his house with intimidating text and drawings. It is not known who sprayed them on his walls. In the night of 21 April someone threw burning petrol-filled bottles on the veranda of his house where he was sleeping. He believed the intention of the attacks was to discourage him from co-operating with RFE/RL and from complaining to the authorities about local social and economic problems. He informed the police about the attacks, but reported that they did not open a thorough and impartial investigation in order to bring to justice the perpetrator/s.

JOURNALISTS REPORTED INTIMIDATION AND HARASSMENT INCREASED A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE EU-TURKMENISTAN MEETING ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASHGABAD ON 24 JUNE 2008.

On 20 June 2008 **Sazak Durdymuradov** a school history teacher and also a RFE/RL regular contributor, was detained by law enforcement officers in his home in Bakharden town, around 200km west of Ashgabad on 20 June. He was reportedly taken to the psychiatric hospital in Bezmein town near Ashgabad and then moved to a detention facility of the Bakharden security service. According to his wife, who was able to visit him on 24 June, he had been ill-treated and subjected to electric shocks after refusing to give a written commitment to stop working with RFE/RL and was in a bad state of health at the time of her visit. Subsequently, the authorities forcibly confined Sazak Durdymuradov in a psychiatric hospital in eastern Lebap region where he remained until 4 July 2008. Bowing to international pressure, the authorities released Sazak Durdymuradov on 4 July after he had reportedly signed a letter stating that he would stop working as a journalist for RFE/RL. In December 2008 his candidature for parliamentary elections was rejected for unclear reasons. He reported to RFE/RL that he received death threats from local government officials against himself and his family.

Osmankuly Khallyev, a correspondent of RFE/RL in Turkmenistan’s Lebap region, reported being placed under house arrest in June 2008. According to him, his mobile telephone communication was cut off and his house was placed under surveillance 24 hours a day. Apparently, his son **Umyt Khallyev** had been also targeted in connection with his father’s work. Umyt Khallyev was expelled from the Turkmen State University of World Languages on 20 June. Quoted by RFE/RL on 24 June, Umyt Khallyev reportedly stated that although the official reason for expelling him was failing an exam, one of his professors had admitted to having been pressured by the authorities. Reportedly, the university administration had told him on prior several occasions that he and his father must stop collaborating with RFE/RL.

While covering the parliamentary elections in December 2008 Osmankuly Khallyev was further subjected to harassment with his phone line and his internet connection cut off. According to the international NGO Reporters without Borders, several of his close relatives were dismissed from their jobs. Since the beginning of January 2009 Osmankuly Khallyev has been under renewed house arrest after he was detained for several hours in a regional prison.

Dovletmurat Yazguliev, another RFE/RL correspondent who covered the parliamentary elections on 14 December 2008 in Turkmenistan, was summoned in late December together with his wife and reportedly

⁴ For further information on his forcible confinement in psychiatric hospitals, see AI Indexes: EUR 01/005/2004, EUR 01/002/2005 and EUR 01/017/2006.

threatened by local authorities in his native Akhal region. Dovletmurat Yazguliev told RFE/RL that since then he felt under additional pressure from the local government and feared that his continued reporting for foreign media could lead to his imprisonment in Turkmenistan.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- respect and protect the human rights of independent civil society activists and journalists, ensuring that they are able to carry out their peaceful activities free from harassment and without threat of detention and imprisonment and other human rights violations.

IMPRISONMENT OF A RETURNED ÉMIGRÉ GULGELDY ANNANIYAZOV

Law enforcement officers reportedly detained **Gulgeldy Annaniyazov**, who returned to Turkmenistan after having lived in exile on 24 June 2008, the same day that the EU and Turkmenistan conducted talks as part of their Human Rights Dialogue in Ashgabad. According to eyewitnesses, the arresting officers did not show their identity documents and did not specify their reasons for arresting Gulgeldy Annaniyazov. According to the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), Gulgeldy Annaniyazov was subsequently sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment in a closed hearing by an Ashgabad court on 7 October 2008. He was reportedly convicted of having crossed the Turkmenistani border without valid Turkmenistani travel documents and possibly other unknown offences. The NHC stated on 19 November 2008 that Gulgeldy Annaniyazov had been held in a maximum security prison in Turkmenbashi but was due to be transferred to Bairam-Ali prison.

The NHC also reports that Gulgeldy Annaniyazov has been held incommunicado since his arrest. His daughter was reportedly prevented from boarding a plane on 29 September 2008 and told that she would not be allowed to leave the country.

Gulgeldy Annaniyazov had been first targeted by the Turkmenistani authorities in connection with an anti-government demonstration in Ashgabad in July 1995, and reportedly sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in a closed trial. While serving his sentence in prison, he had reportedly been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment and his health seriously deteriorated; one of his co-defendants **Charymurat Gurov** died in prison in January 1998 allegedly following sustained beatings. According to unofficial reports Gulgeldy Annaniyazov was released in January 1999 to coincide with a fact-finding visit by the NGO Human Rights Watch, after which he left the country.⁵

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- respond to allegations that the trial of Gulgeldy Annaniyazov was not in line with international fair trial standards, in particular that he was tried in a closed hearing;
- make public information regarding his trial, including details of charges and sentence and his current whereabouts;
- ensure that, in accordance with the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, he is able to exercise his right to be visited by and to correspond with members of his family and his legal counsel;
- ensure that thorough and impartial investigations are carried out into the death in custody of Charymurat Gurov and to make public the scope, methods and findings of the investigation, and bring anyone suspected of involvement in human rights violations to justice

OTHER PRISONERS

Former Speaker of Parliament **Ovezgeldy Ataev**, his wife **Guzel Ataeva**, and **Akmurad Redzhepov**, former

⁵ See the Amnesty International reports: *Turkmenistan - The "Ashgabad Eight": Two Years On, Time for the Truth*, AI Index: EUR 61/10/97, and AI Indexes: EUR 57/002/2002, EUR 57/003/2002.

head of the State Security Council, reportedly continue to be imprisoned near Ashgabad following unfair closed trials. Amnesty International is concerned at allegations that Ovezgeldy Ataev and Akmurad Redzhepov may have been targeted as potential political rivals to President Berdymukhamedov. The organization is also concerned that trials of political figures reportedly continue to be held behind closed doors in Turkmenistan. A non-governmental source from Turkmenistan told Amnesty International that Ovezgeldy Ataev and Akmurad Redzhepov are being held in the prison Ovadan-depe, a detention facility known for its especially harsh conditions. Reportedly, no relatives have been granted access to them. Guzel Ataeva is imprisoned in the women's colony in Dashoguz where she is kept in a special closed unit, known as a "prison within the prison". Amnesty International was told that in late 2008 Guzel Ataeva attempted suicide. After the incident her prison conditions were tightened.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- respond to allegations that the trials of Ovezgeldy Ataev, his wife Guzel Ataeva and Akmurad Redzhepov were not in line with international fair trial standards, in particular that they were tried in closed hearings;
- ensure that, in accordance with the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, they are able to exercise their right to be visited by and to correspond with members of their families and their legal counsel.

HARASSMENT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Harassment and intimidation of members both of registered as well as unregistered religious groups continue to be reported. Religious gatherings in homes have been raided in many cases; often the participants were temporarily detained, given large fines, dismissed from their work places. Communities have been warned that their religious activities could lead to them losing their registration. In some cases police have beaten religious believers or threatened them with violence.

In early 2008 a religious gathering of a Baptist congregation in the district of Khalach in the eastern Lebap region was reportedly raided by representatives of the local administration, the Ministry of National Security and the police. All participants of the gathering were reportedly taken to the local police station. They were pressured to commit in writing not to attend religious gatherings anymore. Some of the believers were reportedly dismissed from their work places.

According to the web-based news service on religious freedom issues Forum 18, **Bilbil Kulyyeva**, a mother of four children from Ashgabad, filed a complaint to various government agencies on 24 October 2008 regarding harassment of her and her family on the grounds of being Jehovah's Witnesses. As a result the authorities threatened to forcibly confine her to a psychiatric hospital and take away her four children.

On 19 June 2008 three young male Jehovah's Witnesses were stopped and searched by local police in Ashgabad. The police claimed they resembled suspects in a criminal case. After the officers found Bibles they took the three men to a building of the Ministry of National Security where they were questioned by 10 officers. They were put under pressure to sign statements but refused. Forum 18 was told that one of the three, **Timur Bazarov**, was taken to another room and beaten. The National Security officers reportedly filmed the three on video and released them afterwards.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- ensure respect for the human rights of religious believers and ensure that they are able to carry out their peaceful activities free from harassment and without threat of detention and imprisonment and other human rights violations.

BARRED FROM LEAVING THE COUNTRY

The authorities continue to bar dissidents, political opponents and their relatives from leaving the country. There were reports that the number of people included in a “black list” barring them from travelling abroad was reduced under the government of President Berdymukhamedov; however, new names have been added to the list since his new government came to power.

Artygul Atakova, the wife of former Baptist prisoner Shageldy Atakov, was barred from leaving Turkmenistan in June 2008. According to *Forum 18*, she and six of her children were refused permission to check-in for their flight to Russia, where she was due to have medical treatment. After Shageldy Atakov asked for an explanation by the Ministry of National Security, officials reportedly told him that they had received an order not to allow him and his family to leave the country. Shageldy Atakov had been imprisoned for his faith on fabricated charges from December 1998 to January 2002.

In 2004 doctors at the Ashgabad Oncology Centre diagnosed **Jennet Gylychdurdyeva** (or Zhenet Gylychdurdyeva) with breast and uterine diseases. Jennet Gylychdurdyeva’s father, Khalmurad Gylychdurdyev, told Amnesty International on 10 June 2008 that doctors refused to treat her. The family believes that the Ministry of National Security instructed the doctors not to treat her as a punishment because her father was a correspondent of RFE/RL. In 2007 she had attempted to travel to Moscow for medical treatment; she had been stopped at the airport by an official of the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan and refused permission to leave the country. She reported: “The official said the reason was that I had problems with the [Ministry of National Security] and so I submitted a complaint letter to the Ministry. I was told I would get a reply within two months.” She says that she received no reply and has since submitted several further complaint letters, which have also remained unanswered.

Altyn Magauina, a Prague-based broadcaster at the Turkmen Service of RFE/RL, told Amnesty International on 23 May 2008 that the authorities had prevented her mother from leaving Turkmenistan in May 2007. It is believed that she was barred from travelling because of Altyn Magauina’s work for the service.

Travel bans on **Svetlana Orazova**, the sister of Khudayberdy Orazov, an exiled opposition figure, and her husband **Ovez Annaev** have not been lifted. In June 2008 the Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reportedly raised the case of Svetlana Orazova and her daughter, Alisa, with the government of Turkmenistan during his visit to Turkmenistan and was reportedly assured the case would be “solved”. Her husband Ovez Annaev, who was staying in Moscow at this time for medical treatment for heart disease, flew to Ashgabad on 7 June, planning to stay for a week. However, when he went to Ashgabad airport on 15 June to fly back to Moscow, officers of the Migration Service did not allow him to board the plane. They reportedly told him that he was not permitted to leave Turkmenistan. Ovez Annaev told Amnesty International that he is in a poor state of health and that he has to urgently continue medical treatment for his heart disease in Moscow. He lodged a complaint with the UN Human Rights Committee in October 2008.

In January 2007 the environmental activist **Andrei Zatoka** was given a suspended sentence of three years’ imprisonment. He was included in the September/October 2007 pardon and his suspended sentence was lifted. However, the activist remains barred from leaving the country and, as a result, has been unable to attend meetings and conferences abroad related to his work as an environmentalist.

In November 2007 Andrei Zatoka was told at the Migration Service in Ashgabad that he was not allowed to travel outside Turkmenistan. A subsequent complaint letter to the Service remained unanswered. In February 2008 an official of the Ministry of National Security reportedly called him on the phone and confirmed that he was still banned from travelling. At the beginning of April he reportedly submitted a complaint letter to the Ministry urging that the travel ban be lifted or that he be given an explanation for the ban. He received no written reply but was said to have been told that he would soon receive

permission to travel. He bought a flight ticket to Moscow for 1 June to visit his family but was reportedly again not allowed to leave the country. Later in 2008 he sought an explanation from the Prosecutor General about why he was prevented from flying to Moscow. Amnesty International has received information from a non-governmental source in Turkmenistan that the Prosecutor General told Andrei Zatoka that his sentence had not formally expired after the pardon.

On 28 April 2008 RFE/RL correspondent **Murad Nurmamedov** (also spelled Myrat Nurmamedov) was stopped at Ashgabad airport to prevent him from flying to Istanbul. He was on his way to a job interview for a Prague-based broadcasting job at RFE/RL. Shortly afterwards Murad Nurmamedov sent a complaint to the Migration Service about the disruption of his travel. On 5 June he and RFE/RL correspondent **Gurbansultan Achilova** were planning to go to Kyrgyzstan to attend a training seminar conducted by the service. However, they were prevented from leaving the country.

Amnesty International calls on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- stop the intimidation and harassment of civil society activists, journalists and lift travel restrictions imposed on them;
- lift the travel restrictions imposed on Svetlana Orazova, Ovez Annaev and their daughter Alisa as well as other relatives targeted because of their family relationship with dissidents or opponents of the regime.

INTERNAL EXILE

Sazak Begmedov, the 83-year-old father of the director of the NGO Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation, Tadzhi gul Begmedova, has been in internal exile in Dashoguz since 2003. Strong evidence suggested he had been seriously assaulted during his forced removal from Ashgabad, in 2003 and suffered a heart attack as a result. There has been no public explanation for his internal exile or investigation into his alleged ill-treatment.

Amnesty International believes that Sazak Begmedov was targeted in connection with his daughter's human rights work.

Amnesty International continues to call on the authorities of Turkmenistan to:

- promptly lift the restrictions on Sazak Begmedov's freedom of movement and ensure that a thorough and independent investigation be carried out into the allegations that he was ill-treated, with a view to bringing those suspected of involvement in human rights violations to justice.