

Dr. Michael Woods T.D.
Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs
Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas
Leinster House
Dublin 2
Ireland

**Re: Imprisoned human rights defenders in Uzbekistan at great risk
of torture and ill-treatment**

Dear Dr. Woods,

In support of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), and in solidarity with all human rights defenders in Uzbekistan, Front Line urges the Irish Government to call on the Uzbek authorities to immediately release 15 human rights defenders, as well as 4 family-members of a human rights defender, who remain in detention and who are at great risk of torture and ill-treatment.

The Uzbek Government has a long-standing record of torture, control, intimidation, and arbitrary suspension of, or interference with, the work of civil society groups, the media, human rights defenders, and opposition political parties. Ill-treatment of detainees and serious procedural violations of their rights as well as harsh treatment of human rights defenders and political opponents is widespread. In 2003, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture characterised torture as "systematic" in Uzbekistan.

The situation for human rights defenders and independent journalists has continued to deteriorate as the authorities further restricted their freedom of speech, assembly and movement in 2008. At least 15 human rights defenders, as well as 4 family-members of a human rights defender, continue to serve long prison terms in cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions, having been convicted after unfair trials. Several of them were reportedly tortured or otherwise ill-treated in detention. Those human rights defenders and journalists not forced into exile and not in detention are routinely monitored by uniformed or plain-clothes law enforcement officers. Human rights defenders are regularly called in for questioning to their local police stations, placed under house arrest or otherwise prevented from attending meetings with foreign diplomats or delegations, or from taking part in peaceful demonstrations. Human rights defenders and journalists continue to report being threatened by members of the security services for carrying out legitimate activities and several have reported being beaten by law enforcement officers or people they suspected of working for the security services. Relatives of human rights defenders also report being threatened and harassed by security forces; some have also been detained and jailed in order to put pressure on human rights defenders. It is in this context that Front Line calls for the release of those named below:

1. **Norboi Kholzhigitov** - Chairperson of the Ishtikhan district branch of the HRSU, arrested 4 June 2005, sentenced on 18 October to 10-years imprisonment by the Samarkand District Criminal Court.
2. **Sattor Izraev** – member of the Ishtikhan district branch of the HRSU, arrested 4 June 2005, sentenced on 18 October to 6-years imprisonment by the Samarkand District Criminal Court.

3. **Khabibulla Akpulatov** - member of the Ishtikan district branch of the HRSU, arrested 4 June 2005, sentenced on 18 October to 6-years imprisonment by the Samarkand district criminal court.
4. **Nasim Isakov** – member of the Jizak regional branch of the HRSU, arrested 27 October 2005, sentenced on 20 December 2006 to 8-years imprisonment by the Jizak City Court and currently detained in the colony UYa 64/3 prison in Tashkent.
5. **Azam Formonov** – Chairperson of the Cyrdarya regional branch of the HRSU, sentenced on 15 June 2006 to 9-years imprisonment by the Yangier City Court. Currently detained in colony Uya 64/71 near Zhaslyk, Republic of Karakalpakstan.
6. **Alisher Karamatov** – Chairperson of the Mirzaabad district branch of HRSU in the Syrdarya region, sentenced on 15 June 2006 to 9-years imprisonment by the Yangier City Court and currently detained in the colony Uya 64/49 prison in Karshi, Kashkadarya.
7. **Jamshid Karimov** – independent journalist, member of the HRSU, correspondent for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and nephew of President Islam Karimov. Sentenced on 22 September 2006 to 3-years confinement in a psychiatric hospital by the Jizak City Court. He is reportedly undergoing “treatment” despite doctors and medical commissioners failing to give an official diagnosis and allegedly admitting that there is nothing wrong with his mental health.
8. **Rasulev Yuldash** – member of the Kashkadarya regional branch of the HRSU, arrested in April 2007 and sentenced in October 2007 to 10-years imprisonment.
9. **Zafar Rakhimov** – member of the Kashkadarya regional branch of the HRSU, arrested in Karchi in April 2007 and sentenced in October 2007 to 6-years imprisonment.
10. **Abdurasul Abdunazarov** – head of the Angren district branch of “Ezgulik”. Arrested in July 2005 and sentenced to 6-years imprisonment by the Angren City Court.
11. **Mamaradjab Nazarov** - head of the Zarbdor district branch of “Ezgulik”. Arrested in June 2006 and sentenced to 5-years imprisonment by the Jizak City Court.
12. **Mukhitdinov Dilmurod** – head of the Markhamat district branch of “Ezgulik”. Arrested in July 2005 and sentenced on 12 January 2006 to 5-years imprisonment by the Chirchik City Court.
13. **Yusuf Juma** - prominent writer, human rights defender and pro-democracy activist in Uzbekistan. He was arrested with his son Bobur in Tashkent Region on 22 December 2007. On 15 April 2008, Yusuf Juma was charged with assault and “insulting and resisting representatives of the government”. Yusuf Juma was sentenced to 5-years imprisonment.
14. **Mashrab Juma**, son of dissident writer Yusuf Juma. He was arrested on 4 December 2007. Mashrab was sentenced to 3-years imprisonment on falsified charges of stabbing a man. On 17 March Bukhara Region’s Jondor District court extended his prison term from three to four years after hearing an appeal on his case.
15. **Salijon Abdurahmanov** – founding member and leading journalist with Uznews.net, member of the Real Union of Journalists of Uzbekistan, and member of the Committee to Protect Individuals Rights in Karakalpakstan. He has also worked for Radio Liberty and the IWPR and has spoken out against human rights violations and restrictions on freedom of expression in Uzbekistan. He was arrested on 7 June 2008 after drugs were planted in his car.
16. **17,18,19 Abdulahat Madmarov, Abdullah Madmarov, Habidulla Madmarov and Abdusamad Madmarov**, respectively two sons and two nephews of prominent human rights defender and winner of the 2006 Front Line Award for human rights defenders at risk, **Ahmadjan Madmarov**. Ahmadjan Madmarov is the regional Chairperson of the Independent Human Rights Organisation of Uzbekistan, NOPCHU. His sons and nephews were arrested, detained and ill-treated in order to persecute Ahmadjan Madmarov for his human rights activities, promoting and defending religious freedoms.

The HRSU and Front Line are gravely concerned by the ongoing persecution of human rights defenders in Uzbekistan. Human rights defenders are active on a wide range of civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights such as; women's rights, minority rights, religious rights, child rights and anti-trafficking. Continuous threats and acts of harassment are major obstacles toward the establishment of an environment conducive to human rights activities in the country and seriously hinder the work of human rights defenders. Torture, preventive or arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, involuntary confinement in psychiatric wards, and the use of excessive force are used

by law enforcement officials to prevent human rights defenders from carrying out their legitimate and peaceful work in defence of human rights. The severity of the repression has contributed to a number of human rights defenders being forced to go into exile.

Limited progress has been made with regard to the treatment of HRDs in Uzbekistan. Some human rights defenders have received amnesties, including Saidjahon Zainabidinov (Chairperson, Apelliatsia), Umida Niyazova (Journalist), and Ihtiyor Hamraev (member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan [HRSU] and son of human rights defender Bakhtiyor Hamraev). Front Line has welcomed the release of imprisoned human rights defenders over the course of 2007 and 2008, but remains concerned that the releases were conditional and original sentences still stand. Whilst in prison, human rights defenders are routinely placed in solitary confinement, denied adequate medical care and attention, and denied visits from family members.

Front Line calls upon the Irish Government to urge the authorities in Uzbekistan to prioritise the protection of human rights defenders and in doing so, to:

1. Immediately release all of the aforementioned human rights defenders who remain in detention as it is believed that they have been jailed solely on account of their human rights activities;
2. Conduct an independent inquiry into the threats, ill-treatment, torture and all forms of intimidation and harassment directed towards all human rights defenders in Uzbekistan, with a view to identifying those responsible, publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice;
3. Ensure that all detained human rights defenders have access to regular family and lawyer visits, as well as, adequate medical attention where necessary;
4. Guarantee the physical and psychological integrity of all human rights defenders whilst in prison and ensure that they are not tortured or ill-treated, as is their right under Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
5. Take measures to legitimise the work of human rights defenders and organisations, including through legal registration;
6. Immediately cease the practice of enforced psychiatric hospitalisation of human rights defenders;
7. Ensure that all human rights defenders in Uzbekistan are free to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals or restrictions.

The Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) has been active since 2 February 1992. They have 600 members and branches in 11 regions of Uzbekistan and in the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan. Over the years, 25 HRSU members have been unlawfully convicted and imprisoned.

Front Line, the international foundation for the protection of human rights defenders, has the specific aim of protecting defenders of human rights and of providing them with "round-the-clock" practical support so that they can continue their legitimate work in protecting the rights of others. Front Line supports the promotion of an environment where human rights defenders are able to carry out their activities without any intimidation, harassment or fear of reprisals due to their human rights work.

Abduljalil Boymatov, Deputy Chairperson, Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan.
Mary Lawlor, Director, Front Line.

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