

Ms.Margaret Sekaggya  
Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders

**Re: Imprisoned human rights defenders in Uzbekistan**

December 12<sup>th</sup> 2008

Dear Ms. Sekaggya,

In support of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), and in solidarity with all human rights defenders in Uzbekistan, Front Line urges the United Nations to call on the Uzbek authorities to immediately release 14 human rights defenders, as well as 4 family-members of human rights defenders, 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 in 2008 as the authorities further restrict their freedom of speech, assembly and movement. At least 14 human rights defenders, as well as 4 family-members of a human rights defenders, 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, and from taking part in peaceful demonstrations. Human rights defenders and journalists continue to report threats 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 been detained and jailed in order to put pressure on human rights defenders. It is in this context that Front Line and the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan call for the release of those named below:

1. Norboi Kholzhigitov - Chairperson of the Ishtikhan district branch of the HRSU, arrested on 4 June 2005, sentenced on 18 October to 10-years imprisonment by the Samarkand District Criminal Court.
2. Sattor Izraev – member of the Ishtikan district branch of the HRSU, arrested on 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 on 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 on 27 October 2005, sentenced on 20 December 2006 to 8-years imprisonment by the Jizak City Court and is currently detained in colony 64/3 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. He is currently detained in colony 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. He is currently detained in colony 64/49 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. He was 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. Yuldash Rasulev - 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. He was arrested in Karshi in April 2007 and sentenced in October 2007 to 6-years imprisonment.
10. Abdurasul Khudoynazarov - head of the Angren district branch of “Ezgulik”, arrested in July 2005 and sentenced to 6-years imprisonment by the Angren City Court.
11. Yusuf Juma - prominent writer, human rights defender and pro-democracy activist in Uzbekistan. He was arrested in the 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.

12. 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.
13. Salijon Abdurahmanov - founding member and leading journalist with Uznews.net, member of the Real Union of Journalists of Uzbekistan, and a 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. On 10 October 2008 Karakalpakstan's Tahtakupir District court sentenced Salijon Abdurahmanov to 10 years in jail, finding him guilty of drug dealing.
14. Agzam Turgunov - head of the Mazlum Human Rights Organisation and director of the Tashkent section of the Erk Party, was detained in Karakalpakstan on 11 July 2008. Agzam Turgunov was jailed on October 23 2008 along with Hamza Salayev, a resident of Mangit, for 10 years by Karakalpakstan's Mangit town court without solid evidence proving the case of extortion against them.
15. - 18 The family members of Ahmadjan Madmarov - regional Chairperson of the Independent Human Rights Organisation of Uzbekistan, NOPCHU. His sons and nephews, Abdulhat Madmarov, Abdullah Madmarov, Habidulla Madmarov and Abdusamad Madmarov, were arrested, detained and ill-treated to persecute him for his human rights activities. He is the winner of the 2006 Front Line Award for human rights defenders at risk.

Limited progress has been made with regard to the treatment of human rights defenders over the course of 2007 and 2008. Some human rights defenders have received amnesties, including Saidjahon Zainabitdinov (Chairperson, Apelliatsia), Umida Niyazova (Journalist) and Ihtiyor Hamraev (member of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and son of human rights defender Bakhtiyor Hamraev), Dilmurod Muhitdinov (member of the human rights organisation Ezgulik in the Andijan region), Mamarajab Nazarov (head of Ezgulik in the Zarbdor District of Jizak Region).

Mutabar Tadjibaeva, head of the human rights organisation, The Burning Hearts Club, and the winner of the 2008 Martin Ennals Award and the French Human Rights Award 2008, has been released for "health reasons". Front Line and HRSU have welcomed the release of imprisoned human rights defenders, but remain concerned that the releases were conditional and the 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.

The HRSU and Front Line are gravely concerned by the ongoing persecution of human rights defenders in Uzbekistan. 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.

Front Line and the HRSU call upon the Organisation of the United Nations 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 legitimate 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 visits by family and lawyers, 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.

Abdujalil Boymatov, Deputy Chairperson, Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan.

*The Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU) has been active since 2 February 1992. The HRSU have 600 members and branches in 11 regions of Uzbekistan and in the autonomous republic of Karakalpakstan. Over the years, 28 HRSU members have been unlawfully convicted and imprisoned.*

*Mary Lawlor*

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Mary Lawlor,  
Director,  
Front Line

*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.*