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Russian Federation: Moscow court orders deportation of human rights journalist Khudoberdi Nurmatov (aka Ali Feruz) to Uzbekistan

On 1 August 2017, the Basmany court of Moscow ordered the deportation of human rights journalist Khudoberdi Nurmatov (known by the pen name Ali Feruz) to Uzbekistan after he was charged with allegedly violating emigration rules. The defender is currently detained in a special temporary detention facility for foreign citizens, pending appeal. As an openly gay man and a human rights journalist, Khudoberdi Nurmatov could face incarceration and torture if deported to Uzbekistan.

Khudoberdi Nurmatov, who writes under the pseudonym of Ali Feruz, is a human rights defender and journalist working for the Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta. He has reported extensively on violations of human rights in Central Asia and has also covered the conditions of work migrants, asylum seekers, vulnerable groups as well as the LGBT community in the Russian Federation. He has previously worked with Amnesty International and collaborated with various human rights groups in the region. Khudoberdi Nurmatov was born in Russia but moved to Uzbekistan at the age of 17, becoming an Uzbekistani national. He fled Uzbekistan in 2008 after being detained and tortured by security forces. The human rights defender eventually returned to Russia in 2011, and has been trying to gain refugee status since 2015.

On 1 August 2017, Khudoberdi Nurmatov was on his way to the Novaya Gazeta office when he was arrested by police and taken to the Basmany police station in Moscow. He was charged under section 3.1 of the Article 18.8 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation, related to “Violation by an alien of the rules of entry to the Russian Federation or of the regime of stay”. A few hours later, the Basmany court of Moscow ordered his deportation to Uzbekistan. After the ruling, Khudoberdi Nurmatov attempted to harm himself in the courthouse before being handcuffed and taken to a temporary detention facility for foreign nationals in Sakharovo, a Moscow suburb. The human rights defender reported to members of the Public Observation Commission that while being transferred to the detention centre, law enforcement officers verbally insulted him and hit with an electric baton on his hand and his leg. As an openly gay man and a human rights journalist, Khudoberdi Nurmatov could face incarceration and torture if deported to Uzbekistan, where homosexuality is criminalised. Khudoberdi Nurmatov’s lawyers intend to appeal the decision and to lodge a request to the European Court on Human Rights in order to suspend the expulsion.

On 16 March 2017, Khudoberdi Nurmatov was arrested near his house in Moscow for “residing in an irregular manner” in Russia. The human rights defender lost his Uzbek passport in 2012, however his current application for asylum gave him the legal basis for his presence in the country. Khudoberdi Nurmatov was brought to the Presnia police station where he spent 12 hours in detention without charges being laid against him. During his detention, the human rights defender was questioned by the police, Federal Security Service officers and other individuals believed to

have been representatives of Uzbek security services. He was questioned about his journalistic work and the reasons for his application for asylum in Russia.

Front Line Defenders condemns the Basmany court's order to deport human rights defender Khudoberdi Nurmatov to Uzbekistan, which it believes is connected to his peaceful and legitimate work for human rights in the Russian Federation.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Russia to:

1. Overturn the decision to deport, and immediately release human rights defender Khudoberdi Nurmatov as Front Line Defenders believes that he has been targeted solely as a result of his legitimate human rights work;
2. Ensure that the treatment of Khudoberdi Nurmatov, while in detention, adheres to the conditions set out in the 'Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment', adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Russia and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.