

URGENT ACTION

REPORT FINDS NO TORTURE DESPITE VISIBLE BRUISES

The trial of journalist, Bobomurod Abdullayev began on 7 March. During the hearing, he removed his shirt to show bruises on his body that he alleges were sustained under torture. On 15 March, the judge announced that the forensic medical examination he had ordered into the journalist's torture allegations found no evidence of torture.

On 7 March, the trial of Uzbekistani journalist, **Bobomurod Abdullayev** and three co-defendants began before Tashkent City Court. The hearing was open to the public. During the hearing, Bobomurod Abdullayev's lawyer submitted a motion to the judge to initiate an investigation into allegations that his client was tortured in detention to force him to 'confess'. Bobomurod Abdullayev removed his shirt in the courtroom to show bruises on his body that he alleges were sustained under torture. The judge accepted the defence's motion and ordered a forensic medical examination, quoting the President's November 2017 decree on the inadmissibility of evidence extracted under torture. The trial resumed at very short notice on 15 March. Bobomurod Abdullayev maintained his innocence and kept insisting that he was tortured, but the judge announced that the forensic medical examination he had ordered into the allegations did not find any evidence of the torture and Bobomurod Abdullayev's "confession" was admitted as evidence. Observers expressed concern that the examination was not thorough and independent, and failed to take into consideration all of the information provided by the defence.

Four more hearings have since taken place – all have been open to the public and the judge has allowed the defendants to testify at length. On 25 March, Bobomurod Abdullayev was allowed to testify for 90 minutes. He gave more evidence of torture, including of threats of sexual violence against his wife and elderly mother, and of attempts by the National Security Service to foment a coup and blame it on Muhammad Salih, the exiled leader of the banned opposition party, Erk. Bobomurod Abdullayev also admitted to writing under the pseudonym "Usman Khaknazarov", but explained that it was a 'generic' pseudonym also used by others to publish critical articles. He denied, however, passing information to Muhammad Salih or writing articles calling for the overthrow of the Uzbekistani regime.

Please write immediately in Uzbek, Russian, English or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Bobomurod Abdullayev;
- Expressing concern that Bobomurod Abdullayev's "confession" was admitted as evidence, despite the fact that the first forensic medical examination in connection with his allegations of torture was not thorough and independent;
- Pending his release, urging the authorities to ensure that Bobomurod Abdullayev is protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and to ensure that he has all legal safeguards in detention - including regular and access to, and opportunity to speak confidentially with, a lawyer of his choice and his family.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 18 MAY 2018 TO:

Chairman of the State Security Service

Ihtior Abdullaev
9 Matbuotchilar Street
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Salutation: Dear Chairman

Prosecutor General

Otabek Murodov
Prosecutor General's Office
ul. Gulyamova 66
Tashkent 700047 Uzbekistan
Fax: +998 71 133 3917
Email: prokuratura@lawyer.uz
Salutation: Dear Prosecutor General

And copies to:

Director
Akmal Saidov
The National Human Rights Centre
Ul. Mustakillik maidoni 5/3
Tashkent 100029 Uzbekistan
Fax: +998 71 239 13 56
Email: info@nhrc.uz

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR ALISHER KURMANOV, Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 41 Holland Park W11 3RP, 020 7229 7679, Fax 020 7229 7029, info@uzbekembassy.org, www.uzbekembassy.org

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the third update of UA 232/17. Further information: www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur62/7872/2018/en/

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bobomurod Abdullayev is an independent journalist and sports commentator. He was detained by State Security Service (SNB, subsequently renamed) officers in Tashkent on 27 September 2017 for allegedly attempting to overthrow the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan. SNB officers accused him of writing articles calling for violent regime change under the pseudonym “Usman Khaknazarov” at the behest of Muhammad Salih, the exiled leader of the banned Erk political opposition party. Bobomurod Abdullayev admitted in March 2018 that he had used this particular pseudonym to publish critical articles, but that he was not the author of materials calling for violence. The pseudonym has been used by others to publish critical materials anonymously. One of the co-defendants of Bobomurod Abdullayev has also been accused of posting articles signed as “Usman Khaknazarov”.

Muhammad Salih went into exile in the early 1990s after the authorities started a campaign against opposition political parties in Uzbekistan. Hundreds of opposition activists, their relatives and associates were arbitrarily detained in subsequent waves of arrests. In 1999 Muhammad Salih was convicted of organising a terrorist attack in Tashkent and sentenced to 15 years in prison *in absentia*. Three of his brothers, including journalist Muhammad Bekzhanov, and many associates and Erk party supporters were detained, tortured to confess to fabricated charges and sentenced to long prison terms, often served in inhumane prison conditions. Muhammad Salih lives in exile in Istanbul, Turkey. He set up the Popular Movement of Uzbekistan (Narodnoe Dvizhenie Uzbekistana in Russian, NDU) to unite exiled opposition groups in 2011.

Since his apprehension Bobomurod Abdullayev has been held at one of the most notorious detention centres in the country, where torture is commonplace. Amnesty International’s research shows that prisoners in the SNB detention centre are tortured, including in interrogation rooms, punishment cells, toilets and shower rooms, and in purpose-built torture rooms with padded rubber walls and sound-proofing. SNB officers have warned his family not to contact human rights organizations or the media, and only allowed him limited and supervised access to a lawyer of his choice ten weeks after he was detained. On 26 December 2017, the SNB accused his lawyer of misrepresenting the case to the public and forced Bobomurod Abdullayev to dismiss him in favour of a state-appointed one. On 10 January, Bobomurod Abdullayev told his family during a brief visit that plain-clothes SNB officers had assaulted him in the street close to his home on 27 September and had put a hood over his head, tied his hands behind his back, beaten and kicked him and forced him into a waiting car.

In March 2018, a Presidential Decree changed the name of the National Security Service (SNB) to the State Security Service (known as SGB by its Russian acronym), amended some of its functions and transferred some SNB units to the Prosecutor General’s Office. The former SNB headquarters in Tashkent were closed and staff moved to new SGB central offices.

Further information on UA: 232/17 Index: EUR 62/8175/2018 Issue Date: 6 April 2018