# URGENT ACTION

## HEALTH OF PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE AT RISK

**Azimjan Askarov has been jailed for almost 10 years on fabricated charges in retaliation for his human rights work. He will turn 69 in May and suffers from cardiac and respiratory conditions that have gravely deteriorated in prison. His life is at serious risk, amid the spread of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic in Kyrgyzstan and he must be released.**

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

***Mr Sooronbay Jeenbekov***
***President of Kyrgyzstan***
*Presidential administration*
*205 Chuy Prospect*
*Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*
*Email: pisma@mail.gov.kg, oip@adm.gov.kg*
*https://www.facebook.com/PresidentKyrgyzRepublic/*
*Twitter: @kyrgyzpresident*

*Dear President,*

*I am writing to you concerning human rights defender **Azimjan Askarov**, who has spent almost ten years in prison after being unjustly sentenced to life imprisonment in September 2010 for his alleged role in the June 2010 interethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan. Amnesty International believes the charges against him were fabricated in retaliation for his human rights work and that the investigation and trial were marred by fair trial violations. Azimjan Askarov's credible allegations that he was tortured in pre-trial detention have never been properly investigated.*

*Azimjan Askarov will turn 69 in May and his health has seriously deteriorated after years in prison. He suffers from cardiac and respiratory problems, and has not been receiving adequate medical care, which in the context of the deadly spread of COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan puts his life at increased risk.*

*In 2016 the UN Human Rights Committee called on your Government to immediately release Azimjan Askarov and for his conviction to be quashed. This call has been reiterated by the European Union and many others on numerous occasions.*

***In the light of the above I urge you to:***
- ***Ensure that Azimjan Askarov is immediately and unconditionally released, as he is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned solely for defending human rights;***
- ***Pending his release, ensure that Azimjan Askarov and all others imprisoned and detained in Kyrgyzstan have access to adequate medical care they require and to the same healthcare standards that are available in the community, including when it comes to testing, prevention and treatment of COVID-19.***

*Yours sincerely,*

# ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The prosecution and conviction of Kyrgyzstani human rights defender Azimjan Askarov, an ethnic Uzbek, followed ethnic clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, which resulted in the deaths of 470 people. During these events, Azimjan Askrarov was documenting human rights violations. The criminal proceedings against him that followed targeted him for his human rights work. In a report published in December 2010 (see here: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR58/022/2010/en/) Amnesty International noted that the disproportionate number of Uzbeks facing charges relative to Kyrgyz was striking. This was particularly surprising as the majority of victims of crimes committed during the June violence were ethnic Uzbeks.

The trial of Azimjan Askarov and his seven co-defendants accused of the murder of an ethnic Kyrgyz police officer during violence in Bazar-Korgan exposed the failure of the authorities to guarantee fair trial rights in line with Kyrgyzstan's international human rights commitments. The trial took place between 2 and 15 September 2010 in Nooken and was marred by repeated acts of violence against Azimjan Askarov's family and his lawyers, both inside and outside the courtroom. Reportedly, court officials and the judge, only sporadically intervened to stop the violence and restore order.

Reports of torture or other ill-treatment in the aftermath of the June 2010 violence were widespread. Suspects were beaten by law enforcement officers in the street during apprehension, during transfer to detention centres, during initial interrogation, or in pre-charge detention facilities. Azimjan Askarov alleged that he was subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in police custody in Bazar-Korgan and Jalal-Abad shortly after his arrest. His allegations of torture, and those of others, have never been effectively investigated.

In September 2010, Azimjan Askarov was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. He was found guilty of participating in mass disturbances, inciting ethnic hatred, and complicity in the murder of a police officer who had been killed during the unrest. Azimjan Askarov's credible allegations that he was tortured in pre-trial detention have never been properly investigated.

The United Nations Human Rights Committee concluded in March 2016 that Azimjan Askarov had been arbitrarily detained, held in inhumane conditions, tortured and otherwise ill-treated without redress, and was not given a fair trial. The Committee called on Kyrgyzstan to take appropriate steps to immediately release Azimjan Askarov and quash his conviction. Although the decision prompted a judicial review of his case in January 2017, the court upheld the verdict.

The European Union External Action Service called on Kyrgyzstan to "fully implement" the Committee's ruling in an April 2016 statement. More recently, in January 2019, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU-Kyrgyzstan comprehensive agreement calling for Azimjan Askarov's immediate release and full rehabilitation, and for Kyrgyzstan to quash his conviction and provide him with reparation. These calls have been consistently ignored by Kyrgyzstan.

**PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** Kyrgyz or Russian.
You can also write in your own language.

**PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 2 September 2020
Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

**NAME AND PREFFERED PRONOUN: Azimjan Askarov** (he/him)

**And copies to:**

His Excellency Mr Edil Baisalov
Embassy of The Kyrgyz Republic
Ascot House 119 Crawford Street W1U 6BJ
020 3865 1994
mail@kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk
www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk