

Turkmenistan: Attack on the Home of Prominent Turkmen Human Rights Defender Farid Tuxhatullin's Mother

Statement by the Civic Solidarity Platform's Turkmenistan Civic Solidarity Group¹

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According to multiple sources, on the night of 28 to 29 October, the home of 76-year-old Khalida Izbastinova, mother of Farid Tuxhatullin, prominent Turkmen human rights defender, chair of the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights and editor of the Chronicles of Turkmenistan website, who lives in exile, was attacked in Dashoguz in northern Turkmenistan. The windows of her apartment were broken; fortunately, she was not harmed. The police called to the scene documented the fact that several bricks and stones were found inside the apartment.² On the eve of the incident, in the evening of 28 October, Khalida Izbastinova's telephone was disconnected, and she still cannot be reached.

We, members of the Turkmenistan Civic Solidarity Group, believe this attack to be directly connected to Farid Tuxhatullin and his organization's human rights and journalistic activities as an act of retaliation by the Turkmen authorities for his coverage of events in one of the world's most repressive countries and an attempt to silence him.

Civic activists and journalists in Turkmenistan are continuously subjected to physical and psychological violence. This year alone, civic activist Natalya Shabunts³ and Soltan Achilova, journalist with Radio Azatlyk, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Turkmen service, have been repeatedly attacked.⁴ The authorities practice hostage-taking and collective punishment as repression and intimidation tactics, targeting not only journalists and activists, but also their families. In February 2017, Radio Azatlyk correspondent Khudayberdy Allashov and his mother Kurbantach Arazmedova were convicted of possessing chewing tobacco, handed each a three-year suspended prison sentence and eventually released, having spent 2.5 months behind bars.⁵ Allashov's wife Edzhesh was beaten by police officers in front of her children, and Allashov was

¹ The Turkmenistan Civil Solidarity Group includes nongovernmental human rights organizations from Europe, the United States, and Turkmenistan and is part of the Civic Solidarity Platform, a broad international network.

² Stones Thrown at the apartment of Chronicles of Turkmenistan editor's mother. Chronicles of Turkmenistan, 2 November 2017, <https://www.hronikatm.com/2017/11/>.

³ Human Rights Defender Natalya Shabunts Assaulted in Ashgabat. Radio Azatlyk, 22 August 2017, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/28690010.html>. Human Rights Defender Natalya Shabunts from Ashgabat Reports Facing Pressure Again. Radio Azatlyk, 24 August 2017, <https://eng.azathabar.com/a/28694892.html>

⁴ Soltan Achilova Assaulted again in Ashgabat. Radio Azatlyk, 31 July 2017, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/28651072.html>.

⁵ RFE/RL Correspondent in Turkmenistan Receives Death Threats. Radio Azatlyk, 1 July 2017, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/28652993.html>. Radio Azatlyk Correspondent in Turkmenistan Soltan Achilova Suffers Repeat Attack. Radio Azatlyk, 28 July 2017, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/28645287.html>

⁵ Radio Azatlyk Correspondent Khudayberdy Allashov and His Mother Released. Radio Azatlyk, 22 February 2017, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/khudayberdy-allashov-free/28324557.html>

tortured in custody.⁶ Thousands of Turkmen citizens are illegally banned from exiting the country solely due to being related to people perceived as disloyal⁷ or having disappeared in Turkmen prisons. The Turkmen authorities also systematically attack and threaten Turkmen public figures who have been able to leave the country, as well as their relatives inside in Turkmenistan.⁸

For many years, the Turkmen authorities have engaged in a pattern of intimidation, threats and violence against civic activists and journalists and their relatives. The latest attack on Khalida Izbastinova confirms once again that the authorities are prepared to use brutal force to silence the few sources of independent information on the situation in Turkmenistan, one of the world's most closed countries.

We express our solidarity with the Tukhbatullin family and with everyone who has suffered at the hands of the Turkmen authorities.

We voice our strong protest and demand that the authorities of Turkmenistan stop their shameful and unlawful pressure on civic activists and journalists through persecution of their relatives and friends.

We urge the OSCE participating states, political bodies and institutions to make a prompt and meaningful assessment of the Turkmen authorities' practices and to make it clear that persecution of civic activists and journalists is incompatible with the country's OSCE commitments. In particular, we urge the OSCE to point out to Turkmenistan that collective persecution is unacceptable and to condemn this shameful and unlawful practice.

⁶ Radio Azatlyk Correspondent Khudayberdy Allashov in Detention for 13 days. Radio Azatlyk, 16 December 2016, <https://rus.azathabar.com/a/28180200.html>.

⁷ The Iron Doors of Dictatorship: Systematic Violations of the Right to Freedom of Movement in Turkmenistan. Report by "Prove They Are Alive!" international campaign, September 2016, <http://provetheyarealive.org/the-iron-doors-of-dictatorship-systematic-violations-of-the-right-to-freedom-of-movement-in-turkmenistan/>

⁸ Turkmen Special Services Increasing Pressure on Dissidents Abroad. Prove They Are Alive! campaign statement, 19 April 2016, <http://provetheyarealive.org/turkmen-special-services-increasing-pressure-on-dissidents-abroad/>. Turkmenistan: Dissident's Brothers Dies After Beating. Human Rights Watch, 17 October 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/17/turkmenistan-dissidents-brother-dies-after-beating>. Turkmenistan: Activist at Serious Risk of Harm. A joint statement by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, 13 October 2010, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/10/13/turkmenistan-activist-serious-risk-harm> and <https://amnesty.org.ru/node/1574/>.