



July 11 2016

Bundeskanzleramt  
Bundeskanzlerin  
Angela Merkel  
Willy-Brandt-Straße 1  
10557 Berlin, Germany

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

In connection with your meeting with the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Mr. Almazbek Atambayev during your visit to Kyrgyzstan on 13-14 July 2016, our organizations, members of the the Civic Solidarity Platform, a network of human rights groups from across the OSCE region, request that you raise and take action on the case of human rights defender Azimzhan Askarov, who has been unjustly imprisoned since July 2010.

Specifically, we call upon you to urge Mr. Atambayev to uphold Kyrgyzstan's human rights commitments and immediately release Mr Askarov and quash his conviction, in line with an April 2016 ruling of the UN Human Rights Committee.

We are also concerned about reports from May of this year that authorities in Jalalabad Province are moving to confiscate Askarov's home, where members of his family still reside.

Mr. Askarov was arrested in his home town Bazar-Korgan in the South of Kyrgyzstan during the violence that broke out in this region in June 2010. He was sentenced to life prison for the murder of a police man and has remained in prison since. Askarov is well known for his investigations into police torture and human rights violations in the South of Kyrgyzstan, and local human rights defenders believe that he was sentenced in retaliation for his reporting, in particular for documenting the lack of action taken by police to stop violence and looting during the clashes.

None of Askarov's co-defendants implicated him at the scene of the crime, and an investigation by the government of Kyrgyzstan's own Human Rights Ombudsman found that there was no evidence linking Askarov to the crimes and that the charges against him were politically-motivated.

In April 2016, the UN Human Rights Committee considered a complaint from Mr. Askarov and found evidence that he had been "subjected to acts of torture" and that Kyrgyzstan had "failed to carry out a prompt and effective investigation" into these allegations. Furthermore, the Committee stated that the conditions in which Askarov was held were "inhumane", that he was "unable to get proper treatment for serious medical conditions", that he and his lawyer "were unable to meet in private" and that "information necessary for his defence were withheld". The Committee also noted that

relatives of the deceased on several occasions attacked Askarov's lawyer, "while the police and local prosecutors failed to intervene."

Consequently, the Committee called on Kyrgyzstan to "immediately release the author; quash the author's conviction and, if necessary, conduct a new trial, in accordance with the principles of fair hearings, presumption of innocence and other procedural safeguards".

Following the decision of the UN Human Rights Committee, the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan will re-examine the case of Azimzhan Askarov on 11 July in Bishkek – that is, two days prior to your planned arrival to the country.

Against this background, these Civic Solidarity Platform member organizations ask that you raise the case of Mr. Azimzhan Askarov during your visit, in particular with President Atambayev. We welcome your visit, which demonstrates Germany's commitment to Kyrgyzstan as a state, and urge you to use this opportunity to highlight the importance that Germany attaches to Kyrgyzstan's observance of its international human rights commitments, which would also reinforce the UN human rights institutions, by demonstrating countries' adherence to their judgments.

Signed:

Analytical Center for Interethnic Cooperation and Consultations (Georgia)

Article 19 (United Kingdom)

Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House

Centre for Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Serbia)

Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)

Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan

Humanrights.ch (Switzerland)

Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)

Human Rights Movement "Bir Duino" (Kyrgyzstan)

International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)

Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law

Kharkiv Regional Foundation "Public Alternative" (Ukraine)

Netherlands Helsinki Committee

Moscow Helsinki Group

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Public Association "Dignity" (Kazakhstan)

Public Foundation "Golos Svobody" (Kyrgyzstan)

Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)