

January 25, 2012

Honorable Catherine Ashton
High Representative for Foreign Affairs
and Security Policy
Berlaymont, Rue de la Loi
1046 Brussels Belgium

Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20520

High Representative Ashton, Secretary Clinton:

We are writing to express our concern regarding the continued incarceration of Azimjon Askarov. Independent observers unanimously agree that Mr. Askarov's trial and appeals were marred by serious procedural violations of the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic. During the trial his lawyers were subject to physical attack and threats in the courtroom in the presence of the judge and police, which made it impossible for them to effectively question witnesses.

While in pre-trial detention, Mr. Askarov, an elderly man, was himself the victim of torture. He was humiliated, beaten, and kicked until blood came from his mouth. He was denied access to a lawyer and was repeatedly interrogated as the police attempted to coerce him into testifying against other leaders of the Uzbek community. The police threatened to rape his wife and daughter in front of him.

A renowned U.S. medical expert recently examined Mr. Askarov and concluded that he has suffered severe and lasting physical injuries as a result of his arrest and incarceration. His injuries support his account of torture while in police custody. Mr. Askarov needs immediate medical help for persistent visual loss, traumatic brain injury, and spinal injury. In addition, he requires immediate evaluation for chest pain and shortness of breath, symptoms which are strongly suggestive of coronary artery disease and could be life threatening without immediate treatment. Despite his ill health, Mr. Askarov has announced his intention to embark on a hunger strike in protest at his unjust treatment.

During his many years of work as a human rights defender, Mr. Askarov made a significant contribution to efforts to improve the rule of law in the Kyrgyz Republic and to protect the rights of many individual citizens of the Republic. He is the recipient of numerous international awards for his human rights work. Based on the significant flaws in the handling of his case, his contributions to the Kyrgyz Republic, and his ill health we strongly believe that the Kyrgyz authorities should release him from prison so that he may seek the medical treatment he urgently requires. We have written directly

to President Atambayev, but we also want to urge you to press him personally to grant Azimjon Askarov an immediate pardon on humanitarian grounds, or to ensure his release from prison in any other way acceptable under the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Sincerely,



Albanian Helsinki Committee

Helsinki Committee of Armenia

Armenian Helsinki Committee



Article 19



Belarusian Helsinki Committee



Belarusian Human Rights House



Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

CATENA

CATENA, (Turkmenistan)



CBM EU Liaison Office

Centre for Civil Liberties

Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

CRUDE ACCOUNTABILITY

Crude Accountability



Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights (Russia)



EUCAM



Eurasian Transition Group



FIDH

The Foreign Policy Centre 

The Foreign Policy Centre



The Foreign Policy Initiative

Freedom Files



Freedom Files (Russia)

Freedom House



Frontline Defenders



Georgian Young Lawyers' Association



Golos Svobody (Kyrgyzstan)



Helsinki Citizen's Assembly (Armenia)



Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia



Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland)



Human Rights Centre (Azerbaijan)



Human Rights House Foundation (Norway)



Human Rights Monitoring Institute (Lithuania)



Human Rights Watch



Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan)



International Crisis Group



International Partnership for Human Rights (Belgium)



International Republican Institute



Jefferson Institute



Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights
and Rule of Law



Legal Policy Research Centre (Kazakhstan)



Moscow Helsinki Group



Netherlands Helsinki Committee



Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Nota Bene

Nota Bene (Tajikistan)



OMCT



Open Society Foundations

Partner Group Precedent

Partner Group Precedent (Kyrgyzstan)



People in Need (Czech Republic)



Physicians for Human Rights



Promo LEX Association (Moldova)



Protection International



Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union



UNITED for Intercultural Action



World Movement for Democracy



Youth Human Rights Movement