

URGENT ACTION

AZIMJAN ASKAROV DIED IN PRISON

Azimjan Askarov, a human rights defender and artist, died on 25 July in prison in Kyrgyzstan after showing symptoms of COVID-19. Azimjan Askarov spent ten years jailed on fabricated charges in retaliation for his human rights work.

NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUESTED. MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO SENT APPEALS.

A prisoner of conscience, tenacious human rights defender and talented artist, Azimjan Askarov died in prison on 25 July at the age of 69. He spent ten years in prison after being sentenced to life imprisonment in September 2010 for his purported role in the June 2010 inter-ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan. Amnesty International believes that the charges against him were fabricated to prevent him from carrying out his human rights work. The investigation and trial were marred by fair trial violations and Azimjan Askarov's credible allegations that he was tortured in pre-trial detention were never properly investigated.

Amnesty International and other human rights organizations have continuously campaigned for Azimjan Askarov's release since he was arrested on 25 June 2010. Despite tireless efforts by the international community, that included both public campaigning and quiet advocacy, the Kyrgyzstani authorities have time and time again failed to make use of opportunities presented to them to make right a terrible injustice.

In March 2016, the UN Human Rights Committee called on the government of Kyrgyzstan to immediately release Azimjan Askarov and quash his conviction. It concluded that Azimjan Askarov had been arbitrarily detained, held in inhumane conditions, tortured and otherwise ill-treated without redress, and not given a fair trial. Although the decision prompted a judicial review of his case, in January 2017, the Bishkek court upheld the conviction and the sentence.

On 18 March 2019, Azimjan Askarov was transferred from temporary detention facility SIZO-1 in Bishkek to Prison Colony No. 19 in the Chuy region. According to reports, following the transfer he was placed in solitary confinement as punishment for his protest against the restrictions on family visits. Since then, Amnesty International received numerous reports about his consistently deteriorating ill-health after years in prison. He suffered from cardiac and respiratory problems and had not been receiving adequate medical care. In the context of the deadly spread of COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan, not only was his life at increased risk, but in practical terms he was facing a death sentence.

A few days before Azimjan Askarov's death, his lawyer was allowed to visit him and reported that the human rights defender was no longer able to walk unaided and was brought to the meeting by two guards. He had lost weight, was coughing and was so breathless that it was difficult for him to talk. He was eating very little and had been given glucose injections. He had been ill for well over a week. At the insistence of the lawyer, on 24 July Azimjan Askarov was transferred to a prison hospital in Colony No. 47. The official cause of his death on 25 July was "double pneumonia".

The authorities must thoroughly and impartially investigate the cause of Azimjan Askarov's death and share this information with the family and his lawyer. Those who failed to provide due medical attention must be held accountable for their wrongdoing. The conviction of Azimjan Askarov was a miscarriage of justice and his family must be given the opportunity to clear his name.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Azimjan Askarov (he/him),

THIS IS THE SECOND AND FINAL OUTPUT FOR UA 61/20.

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur58/2195/2020/en/>