FORUM 18 NEWS SERVICE, Oslo, Norway
https://www.forum18.org/
The right to believe, to worship and witness
The right to change one's belief or religion
The right to join together and express one's belief

4 June 2015

UZBEKISTAN: Tortured till he lost consciousness

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18 (https://www.forum18.org)

Officers at Karmana District Police Station, among them Feruz Ruziyev, tortured Murot Turdiyev until he lost consciousness, while another fellow-Protestant was threatened with rape, Protestants complained to Forum 18 News Service. The two were among four Protestant men stopped at a traffic checkpoint. "The Police knows his car, and the licence plate, and seemingly they were informed about their arrival in town, and were waiting for them there," one Protestant told Forum 18. When Forum 18 asked why he had beaten Turdiyev, Officer Ruziyev immediately put the phone down. Gofur Namozov, Chief of Karmana Criminal Police, adamantly denied to Forum 18 that any of the four had been beaten and tortured. "We only questioned them about the many visas and foreign stamps in their passports," he claimed. Administrative cases against the four appear to have been handed to court. Meanwhile police and other officials went almost daily in May to the Karshi home of Guljahon Kuzebayeva, banging on the gates of the yard "like hooligans" and trying to climb over the wall. She has been in hiding since July 2014 to evade arrest for her religious activity.

In early May, police in Navoi Region of central Uzbekistan stopped four Protestants from various Churches who were travelling together by car from Samarkand to Navoi. "We understood that the police was informed of their arrival in town, and were waiting for them there," a fellow Protestant from the capital Tashkent, who wished to remain unnamed for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 News Service on 15 May. Officers at Karmana District Police Station then interrogated the four men, torturing one until he lost consciousness and threatening to rape another. The Criminal Police are believed to have already handed administrative cases against the four to court, the Protestant added.

The driver of the car, Murot Turdiyev, is under constant close police surveillance and his car has often been stopped. Like other individuals prominent in religious communities or punished earlier for exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief, his name appears to be listed in the Preventative Registry. When they detained Turdiyev and his friends, officers specifically asked if they were listed in the Registry at their home addresses.

A very wide range of state agencies, from courts to health care and nature protection agencies, can put people on this Register, which was formalised in 2014. This subjects them to a variety of police "preventative measures" for one year or more. These measures can include someone being fired from their job and there are many possibilities for officials to arbitrarily keep people on the Register for many years (see F18News 4 July 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1974).

Meanwhile in south-eastern Kashkadarya Region, the Criminal Police repeatedly visited the home in Karshi throughout May of Protestant Guljahon Kuzebayeva, banging on the gates of the yard and trying to climb over the wall. She has been in hiding since July 2014 fearing possible police brutality and arrest for allegedly talking to family members about her Christian faith. Officers appear to be trying to open a case against her and have issued a summons to the police, a local Protestant who asked not to be named for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 25 May (see below).

The use of physical violence and torture, or threats of this, by the authorities is widespread in Uzbekistan. Most victims are, for extremely good reasons, unwilling to publicly discuss their experiences and women are often particularly targeted by male officials (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862).

Cases prepared?

Karmana District Police is believed to have prepared cases under Administrative Code Article 194 ("Failure to carry out the lawful demands of a police officer") against Turdiyev and his three companions, Anvar Rajapov, Khurshid Boymuradov and Khudoyor Mahammadiyev, members of various Protestant Churches from across Uzbekistan. Officers told the four the case was being opened because they refused to write statements explaining the purpose of their travel in the region as well as their religious activity, the Tashkent-based Protestant told Forum 18.

Punishments under Article 194 consist of fines of up to three times the minimum monthly wage or (for repeat offences within one year) a prison term of up to 15 days.

Turdiyev, Rajapov and Mahammadiyev have earlier been punished under the Administrative Code for exercising the right to

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2015

freedom of religion or belief. Turdiyev has also faced criminal prosecution. In November 2013, Andijan Regional Criminal Court overturned a fine on Turdiyev for "illegal" storage of religious literature handed down the previous month. The National Security Service (NSS) secret police had earlier tried to pressure him into becoming an informer (see F18News 18 December 2013 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1908).

"Constitution and laws are for Tashkent, here in Navoi we have our own laws"

Trouble began for the four Protestants on the morning of 8 May, when they were stopped while crossing from Samarkand Region to Navoi Region. The four were travelling in the car driven by Turdiyev. The police "know Turdiyev vaery well as he was persecuted by the police and other authorities in the past, and fined several times before", the Tashkent Protestant complained to Forum 18. "The police know his car and licence plate, and seemingly they were informed about all four Protestants' arrival in town, and were waiting for them."

The Traffic Police Sergeant who stopped their car in Karmana District produced no identification document or search warrant. He asked the four to produce their identification documents and the registration certificate of the car. He then made the men get out of the car and inspected the car's passenger compartment and the boot. "When he realised he could find no fault with the brothers, he asked them to show the inside of their bags and pockets," the Protestant complained. When Turdiyev asked for two witnesses for the search, the Sergeant became "agitated and began shouting, and said that he does not need any witnesses".

Another police officer in plain clothes then came running. He too did not present his identification documents, but examined the Protestants' passports. Seeing stamps of foreign countries in them, he began questioning the men about who they were, why they travelled abroad, and what activity they were involved in. "Later we found out that this was Lieutenant Farrukh Khujakulov of Karmana Criminal Police."

To the Protestants' demands that the Sergeant tell them why he stopped them and that he show them the Traffic Police's warrant, Lieutenant Khujakulov responded: "I don't work for the Traffic Police. I am a police dog handler." Asked on what grounds a police dog handler stopped their car, and told that he had violated their constitutional rights, he shouted at them: "The Constitution and laws are for Tashkent, here in Navoi we have our own laws."

Then the two police officers again searched the car with a help of a dog, and inspected their mobile phones. When they could find no fault, Lieutenant Khujakulov demanded that the four men write statements about their travels abroad, the purpose of their visits, who they met, and what they discussed. When the Protestants refused to do so, he threatened to open a case against them for disobeying a police officer's order.

After keeping the four at the Traffic Police checkpoint for three and half hours, until 1 pm, Lieutenant Khujakulov called for a police car and took them to Karmana District Police Station.

"Violation of honour and dignity, intrusion into their private lives"

Once at the Police Station, officers interrogated the Protestants, torturing at least two of them. Interrogation was led by Khujakulov and a colleague from the Criminal Police, Feruz Ruziyev, as well as Olim Kunakov, a Crime Prevention Inspector from the District Police.

The officers "dragged the brothers into various offices in the Police Station, where officers illegally demanded that they say whether or not they were convicted before, whether they use drugs, whether they are on a special police register where they live, the lifestyle of their family members and other relatives, what they live on, where and why they travel abroad, and whether or not they have any disease."

"This is a violation of their honour and dignity, as well as intrusion into their private lives," the Protestant complained to Forum 18.

Traffic Police stopped Turdiyev's car on 8 May to "see if he had a TV monitor in his car, which he did", Gofur Namozov, Chief of Karmana Criminal Police, claimed to Forum 18 on 3 June. "According to the new order, cars cannot have TV monitors in the passenger compartment." Asked why the four Protestants were taken to the Police Station, he replied: "Because they refused to sign the police report."

Protestants denied to Forum 18 that Turdiyev's car has a TV monitor.

Torture

When Turdiyev asked why he and his fellow-believers were stopped, Officer Ruziyev punched him in his abdomen and two officers who did not give their names began strangling him. "He lost consciousness and those beasts in uniforms instead of calling for doctors just gave him some drops of valerian [heart medicine]," a Protestant from Tashkent told Forum 18.

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2015

When Boymurodov, another of the four Protestants, was brought into an office where five unknown officers were present he told them that he is physically handicapped, and also suffers from asthma. "All five officers began smoking, because of which Boymurodov choked and asked them to take him out for fresh air." The officers "threatened that they can rape him".

Officer Ruziyev introduced himself on 3 June, but immediately put the phone down when Forum 18 asked about the case and why he had beaten Turdiyev. Subsequent calls on the same day went unanswered.

Namozov adamantly denied that any of the four had been beaten and tortured. "We only questioned them about the many visas and foreign stamps in their passports," he claimed. Asked why the police do this to someone inside the country, Namozov told Forum 18: "We also have specialists who can investigate such issues." Asked why individuals who travelled abroad must be questioned about their travels time and again, he responded: "It is our duty."

The use of physical violence and torture, or threats of this, by the authorities is widespread in Uzbekistan (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862).

Passports returned, but did police open case?

The Protestants refused to sign any police reports or write statements. Officers finally released the four on the evening of 8 May after almost ten hours' detention. However, the police retained their passports, and asked them to come back for them the next morning, 9 May.

However, the next day the passports were not returned, and the four were told that they will be held responsible under the Administrative Code for "not writing statements". Police returned the passports "only after about a week", the Protestant told Forum 18. They said they believe that the Karmana Police have prepared administrative cases against the four and may already have handed them to court.

Though Police Chief Namozov claimed to Forum 18 that "We did not open any case," Inspector Kunakov who participated in the interrogation told Forum 18 that "investigation of the case is going on," but refused to give any details of the case.

Police resume search for Protestant in hiding

Police in Karshi in Kashkadarya Region resumed their search for a local Protestant Kuzebayeva. Between 7 and 23 May officers harassed her relatives and neighbour.

Kuzebayeva went into hiding in July 2014 following a raid on her home and faces possible prosecution for allegedly talking to family members about her Christian faith. "She fears police brutality during interrogation and also possible short-term jailing," fellow Protestants told Forum 18 in April 2015 (see F18News 14 April 2015 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2055).

Every day between 7 and 16 May - at different times of the morning and evening - Karshi Criminal Police Officer Abdukhalil Buriyev came to her home, local Protestants told Forum 18 on condition of anonymity. He asked her relatives where she was, and demanded that she present herself at Karshi Police Station. However he refused to give the reasons for summoning Kuzebayeva or present an official summons.

On the afternoon of 16 May, Buriyev again came to Kuzebayeva's home, accompanied by Karshi Police Department's Police Inspectors, Ilhom Jabborov and Olim Rakhmonov. The officers again refused to present an official summons.

Officials "acted like hooligans"

Two days later, 18 May, seven people - including Karshi Police inspectors Fahriddin Jurayev, Dilmurod Boboyev as well as the Chair of the local Mahalla Committee (residential administration), Hanifa Panayeva - arrived in two cars outside Kuzebayeva's home. Accompanying them were four women who did not identify themselves.

The officials and the four women "acted like hooligans," Protestants complained to Forum 18. "They banged on the metallic gates to the yard of her home with their hands and kicked with their feet, yelled Kuzebayeva's name, and demanded that she open the door." The four women "shouted and named Kuzebayeva with all kinds of uncensored curse words." Police "tried to climb over the wall and enter the yard, but could not."

Then the officials gained access to the yard of Kuzebayeva's neighbor by pretending to be checking her gas and electricity meters. The police climbed over the wall between the two homes into Kuzebayeva's yard. "When they realised that someone from Kuzebayeva's home was filming their illegal intrusion, the Officers climbed back over the wall and hid behind it." From behind the wall the Officers "yelled that they will detain Kuzebayeva at any cost, get her to the Police Station, and find anything to accuse her of." They then left.

Copyright Forum18 News Service 2015

Officer Buriyev claimed that "a complaint from citizens was filed to the police against Kuzebayeva," he told Forum 18 on 3 June. "The police just want to question her about the complaint." He adamantly denied that he or his police colleagues disturbed Kuzebayeva or her relatives. "This is all lies."

Officer Buriyev then asked Forum 18: "Why won't she come and see for herself what the complaint is about?" Told that she fears that she may be beaten or tortured in other ways, he brushed this off. "In Uzbekistan the Police never acts like that." Asked whether he also denies the film of the police officer climbing over the wall of Kuzebayeva's house and the swearing addressed to her, Buriyev immediately put the phone down. Subsequent calls to him on the same day went unanswered.

Women are often particularly targeted by male officials with violence, torture and threats (see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862).

Official summons after 16 days' harassment

On 23 May - "only after 16 days of harassing Kuzebayeva's relatives and her neighbour" - Officers Buriyev and Boboyev finally brought an official summons for Kuzebayeva, Protestants complained to Forum 18. She was ordered to appear before Karshi Police one hour later, "at 2 pm the same day". The officers "again shouted and demanded" that Kuzebayeva "open the door but then pushed the summons in the door" and left. (END)

For a personal commentary by a Muslim scholar, advocating religious freedom for all as the best antidote to Islamic religious extremism in Uzbekistan, see http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=338.

For more background, see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1862.

Full reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Uzbekistan can be found at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?query=&religion=all&country=33.

A compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments is at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1351.

Follow us on Twitter @Forum_18 (http://twitter.com/forum_18)

Follow us on Facebook @Forum18NewsService (http://www.facebook.com/Forum18NewsService)

All Forum 18 text may be referred to, quoted from, or republished in full, if Forum 18 is credited as the source.

All photographs that are not Forum 18's copyright are attributed to the copyright owner. If you reuse any photographs from Forum 18's website, you must seek permission for any reuse from the copyright owner or abide by the copyright terms the copyright owner has chosen.

© Forum 18 News Service. All rights reserved. ISSN 1504-2855.

If you need to contact F18News, please email us at:
f18news @ editor.forum18.org

Forum 18
Postboks 6603
Rodeløkka
N-0502 Oslo
NORWAY