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UZBEKISTAN: Courts hand two prisoners of conscience extra jail terms

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

On 5 May, shortly before his five-year jail term ended, a Bukhara Region court jailed Muslim prisoner of conscience Tulkun Astanov for 3 years, 2 months in a strict-regime labour camp. Prison officers claimed he disobeyed orders by refusing morning exercises. The 54-year-old jailed for defending Muslims' rights, repeatedly tortured for praying in prison, suffered his third stroke in prison. A Navoi court handed Fariduddin Abduvokhidov a further one-year term in April. Courts jailed him for 11 years in 2020, 10 years in 2023 and 10 years in March 2025.

Courts have handed two more Muslim prisoners of conscience already jailed for exercising freedom of religion or belief further jail terms. As the five-year jail term handed to Tulkun Astanov in 2020 neared completion, prison officers brought a new criminal case. They claimed he had disobeyed orders by refusing to go to morning exercises. On 5 May, a court in Bukhara Region jailed Astanov for a further 3 years and two months in a strict-regime labour camp. The 54-year-old has been repeatedly tortured in prison for praying the namaz and suffered his third stroke while in prison.

A Tashkent court punished Astanov in November 2020 for defending the rights of other Muslims. The authorities "deliberately fabricated a new case, so Tulkun will remain in prison", Astanov's relatives complained to Forum 18 (see below).

"Defendant Astanov was previously sentenced to imprisonment for committing a serious crime, and while serving his sentence, he systematically violated the requirements of the procedure for serving the sentence and was subjected to a disciplinary measure in the form of solitary confinement", Judge Kosym Kholov of Kogon District Court notes in his decision (see below).

Both Astanov and his state-appointed lawyer Husnora Jumayeva independently filed appeals to Bukhara Regional Court, which began hearings on 5 June (see below).

Kogon District Deputy Prosecutor Mukhamadali Kenjayev – who led the prosecution case at the trial – adamantly defended the Court decision. Astanov "violated the prison rules several times", he insisted to Forum 18. But he refused to answer detailed questions on the case. "Well, I did not really investigate the case, I found the details of the case during the hearing since I was asked to represent the prosecution in court" (see below).

The head of Prison No. 1 in Kogon in Bukhara Region sent Astanov to a disciplinary unit for 6 days in February 2024, and to solitary confinement for 16 days in August 2024 (see below).

In early April, a court that convened in Navoi Police detention prison handed then 30-year-old Muslim prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Abduvokhidov a further one-year prison term. He told his father that while he was held there, police had opened a new case against him allegedly for propagating religion to other prisoners who were there with him (see below).

Abduvokhidov's father said his son "could not tell me the exact details of the hearing, the name of the Court or Judge since he was depressed and did not pay attention to the details". Abduvokhidov was "just shocked" that, having been given an extra ten-year sentence in March, he was being prosecuted again (see below).

Forum 18 has been unable to find out what charges Abduvokhidov faced. Navoi City Criminal Court refused to give Forum 18 any information on the case. Colonel Zohidjon Kayumov, Chief of the Criminal Investigations Division of Navoi Regional Police, refused to answer any of Forum 18's questions (see below).

Abduvokhidov "thinks that they gave more punishment because he refused to write statements against other individuals the police had arrested. He does not know them and did not remember their names," his father told Forum 18 (see below).

Tashkent Police arrested Abduvokhidov in January 2020 among a large group of Muslims who had met to discuss their faith. In November 2020, a Tashkent court handed him an 11-year jail term. In December 2023, a Tashkent Region court handed

Abduvokhidov a further 10-year term. In March 2025, Navoi City Criminal Court handed him a further 10-year term (see below).

Astanov: Jailed in 2020, tortured

On 27 November 2020, Tashkent's Uchteppa District Criminal Court jailed prisoner of conscience Tulkun Tashmuradovich Astanov (born 25 April 1971) for five years (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2631) for defending Muslims' freedom of religion and belief.

In 2021, officials of Bukhara Region Prison No. 1 repeatedly tortured Astanov, in June for praying the namaz (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2673) (Muslim daily prayer), and in October also (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2688). As a result his health seriously deteriorated.

The regime tries to stop its Muslim prisoners from praying the namaz (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699), and frequently tortures those who do meet other Muslims for prayer. If prison authorities detect groups of Muslims praying together, they will be put in punishment cells for several days, Muslims who Forum 18 has talked to from October 2024 onwards have stated. Prison authorities may not detect or punish individual prisoners praying the namaz alone.

Against legally-binding international human rights obligations, no-one has ever been held to account (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699) for the torture of prisoners of conscience such as Astanov. In July 2021, Governor Farrukh Ismatov of Bukhara Region Prison No. 1 refused to explain to Forum 18 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2673) why no-one has been arrested and put on criminal trial for torturing Astanov or other prisoners.

Astanov: Prison officers initiate new criminal case

Officers of Prison No. 1 in Kogon in Bukhara Region, where Tulkun Astanov was serving his five-year sentence, initiated a criminal case against him, according to the subsequent court decision. The case was opened under Criminal Code Article 221, Part 2, clause b ("Disobeying the lawful requirements of the administration of a penal institution"). The court decision does not identify the Police Investigator who worked on the case. Kogon District Prosecutor's Office prepared the case for court.

Prison officers alleged that Astanov "systematically violated the order of serving his sentence and was sentenced to 6 days in a disciplinary unit based on the decision of the head of Prison No. 1 dated 13 February 2024, and 16 days in solitary confinement based on the decision of the head of the prison dated 15 August 2024," according to the subsequent court decision.

On 26 November 2024, when Firuz Sadullayev, Senior Inspector of the prison's educational department, ordered Astanov to go to the morning physical education class, he refused to do so, the decision claims. Astanov allegedly "shouted at the prison officers to draw the attention of other convicts". Thus he did "not obey the legal requirements of the prison administration to comply with the prison's internal regulations, and grossly violated the procedure".

Astanov rejected the accusations.

Astanov: Authorities "fabricated" a new case "so Tulkun will remain in prison"

The authorities "deliberately fabricated a new case, so Tulkun will remain in prison", Astanov's relatives complained to Forum 18.

Astanov's "heart is beating fast", relatives told Forum 18. They noted that he had had two strokes before going to prison and one more while in prison. "In February 2023, Tulkun was transferred to a medical unit of Prison No. 1 for twenty days after he had that stroke. He may feel dizzy and weak at times, and so maybe he did not attend the morning physical exercises."

Relatives added that they do "not know what really went on inside the prison, since we have not had the chance to discuss those details with the family".

Relatives complained that Astanov "instead of being given treatment in the prison many times was harassed by the prison officers and tortured. Prison officials should not be putting extra physical burdens on him."

Astanov: Prisoner of conscience given three more years in strict-regime labour camp

On 5 May, Judge Kosym Kholov, Chair of Kogon District Court in Bukhara Region, found prisoner of conscience Tulkun Astanov guilty under Criminal Code Article 221, Part 2, clause b ("Disobeying the lawful requirements of the administration of a penal institution"). The Judge handed down a sentence of 3 years and two months' imprisonment in a strict-regime labour camp, according to the decision (seen by Forum 18).

Astanov's new prison sentence will be counted from 24 February 2025. His release is expected in April 2028.

The case was brought to court by Kogon District Prosecutor's Office, represented at the trial by the District Deputy Prosecutor Mukhamadali Kenjayev.

The court decision notes that Astanov did "not admit his guilt at all, and stated that he did not commit crimes".

Firuz Sadullayev, Senior Inspector of Prison No. 1's educational department, testified in court against Astanov. Also testifying against him were two other officers of the prison – Jurat Kholov (not related to Judge Kholov) and Azamat Mamadaminov.

"Defendant Astanov was previously sentenced to imprisonment for committing a serious crime, and while serving his sentence, he systematically violated the requirements of the procedure for serving the sentence and was subjected to a disciplinary measure in the form of solitary confinement", Judge Kholov notes in his decision.

"The court, in determining the type and amount of punishment for Defendant Astanov, in accordance with the principles of humanity and justice .. considering his difficult family situation as a mitigating circumstance .. recognises that there are no aggravating circumstances in his actions," Judge Kholov added.

Judge Kholov concluded: "The court found it necessary to impose a total term of imprisonment of 3 years and 2 months, by partially adding the remaining [from his previous sentence] 9 months and 2 days of imprisonment, to serve the imposed sentence in a strict regime prison."

Astanov was due to be released from prison in February 2026, according to Judge Kholov's decision. However, his relatives who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals, told Forum 18 on 10 June that this is not correct and that Astanov was "supposed to be released in November 2025" as the original court decision was given in November 2020.

Judge Kholov indicated that parties dissatisfied with the sentence have the right to appeal to Bukhara Regional Court within ten days from the date of the convict's receipt of a copy of the sentence. The Judge also noted the parties' right to file a further cassational complaint after the sentence enters into legal force.

Astanov: "I did not really investigate the case", says prosecutor

"Astanov indeed has ailments and is physically weak and unfit for sports exercises," the state-appointed defence lawyer in the case, Husnora Jumayeva, told Forum 18 on 23 June. "We showed the Court that he had written a request to the Chief of Prison No. 1 to free him from the exercises, which was received by him, and Astanov has a document confirming that."

However, the Court told Astanov that it "cannot accept it as evidence in his defence since the prison authorities did not make an appropriate official decision".

Prosecutor Kenjayev adamantly defended the Court decision. Astanov "violated the prison rules several times", he insisted to Forum 18 on 19 June. Forum 18 asked:

- why Astanov, who is known for having been imprisoned for defending the religious freedom of Muslims, and who has severe health conditions, instead of being released from prison or given medical treatment, was tortured several times;

- and why now for his alleged refusal to go to the physical exercises, was given more jail time.

Prosecutor Kenjayev could not answer. "Well, I did not really investigate the case, I found the details of the case during the hearing since I was asked to represent the prosecution in court."

Forum 18 also asked Prosecutor Kenjayev:

- why he did not investigate the case before it reached the Court;

- why neither he nor the Court asked Astanov during the trial why he did not attend the physical exercises;

- and why he did not ask the Court to be lenient to Astanov since he has severe physical conditions.

Prosecutor Kenjayev again would not answer. He referred Forum 18 to the Police Investigator, whose name he did not give.

Told that Forum 18 could not find the Police Investigator's name in the Court decision, and asked if he could refer it to the Officer, Kenjayev asked it to call back the next day, on 20 June. However, repeated calls to Kogon Prosecutor's Office on 20 June went unanswered.

Astanov: Bukhara Regional Court hearing appeal

Both Tulkun Astanov and his lawyer Husnora Jumayeva independently filed appeals to Bukhara Regional Court against the Kogon Court decision within the allowed ten days after Astanov received a copy of it, she told Forum 18.

Bukhara Regional Court assigned the appeal to Judge Nozimjon Jurayev. Hearings took place on 5, 9, 17 and 23 June, according to court records.

Astanov: Held in detention prison in Kogon

Astanov was transferred to and was due to be kept at the detention Prison No. 4 in Kogon in Bukhara Region until the appeal is heard and the decision enters into force, Lawyer Jumayeva told Forum 18. He is then likely to be transferred to a strict-regime labour camp to serve his new sentence.

Astanov's current prison address:

Buxoro viloyati

Kogon tumani

Ichki Ishlar Bulimi JIEB

4-sonli jozoni ijro etish koloniyasi

Astanov Tulkun Tashmuradovich

Uzbekistan

Abdovokhidov: Sentence after sentence

Prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Bakhodir o'g'li Abdovokhidov (born 14 June 1994) was serving an 11-year jail term handed down in November 2020 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2640). Tashkent Police had arrested him in January 2020 among a large group of Muslims who had met to discuss their faith.

In December 2023, a Tashkent Region court handed Abdovokhidov a further 10-year term (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2933).

On 17 March 2025, after seven hearings, Navoi City Criminal Court handed Abdovokhidov a 10-year prison term (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2973). The court convicted him under Criminal Code Article 244-1, Part 2 ("Distribution of materials that contain ideas of religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism, calls for pogroms or violent expulsion of citizens, or aimed at creating a panic among the population, as well as distribution or demonstration of attributes or symbols of religious-extremist terrorist organisations") as well as Article 244-2, Part 1 ("Creation, leadership or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist or other banned organisations").

Abdovokhidov: Extra one-year prison term weeks after he was given ten-year sentence

Within weeks of his latest conviction, prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Abdovokhidov faced further criminal charges. While he was at Navoi Police detention prison, Police opened a new case against him in early April allegedly for propagating religion to other prisoners who were there with him, he told his father in early June.

In early April, at a trial held in the building of Navoi Police detention prison, a Navoi Court gave Abdovokhidov a further one-year prison term. Abdovokhidov was present in the hearing.

Forum 18 has been unable to find out what charges he faced. Navoi City Criminal Court refused to give Forum 18 any information on the case on 25 June.

The new sentence brought his total sentence to eleven years' imprisonment, his father Bakhodir Muratov complained to Forum 18 on 19 June.

Muratov said that Abdovokhidov "could not tell me the exact details of the hearing, the name of the Court or Judge since he was depressed and did not pay attention to the details". Abdovokhidov was "just shocked" that, having just been given a ten-year sentence, he was being prosecuted again.

On 10 April, following the new conviction, the prison authorities transferred Abduvokhidov back (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2973) to Bukhara Region's special-regime Prison No. 17 (popularly known as Qorovulbozor prison).

Muratov told Forum 18 that he found out about the new sentence when he stayed with his son in Bukhara Prison No. 17 on a 48-hour visit between 3 and 5 June.

Forum 18 on 23 June asked Colonel Zohidjon Kayumov, Chief of the Criminal Investigations Division of Navoi Regional Police,

- why Navoi Police opened a new case against prisoner of conscience Abduvokhidov while in the police detention prison;
- and why he was prosecuted twice within one month.

Colonel Kayumov at first wished to refer Forum 18 to the Investigator who interrogated Abduvokhidov in the detention prison. He then changed his mind and asked it to call back in one hour. Called back the same day, Kayumov did not answer his phone.

Muratov explained to Forum 18 that Abduvokhidov "thinks that they gave more punishment because he refused to write statements against other individuals the police had arrested. He does not know them and did not remember their names."

Abduvokhidov's current prison address:

200900 Bukhara viloyati

Qorovulbozor tumoni

Istiklol kuchasi 1

17 sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

Abduvokhidov Fariduddin Bakhodir o'g'li

Uzbekistan

Abduvokhidov: Lawyer refuses to give details of cases

Khondamir Kulboyev, the state-appointed defence lawyer for Fariduddin Abduvokhidov, who was present when Navoi City Criminal Court gave the previous verdict on 17 March, refused to give details of that or the new case.

"I can tell you that I was present when the ten-year sentence was given on 17 March, but I was not Abduvokhidov's lawyer in the new case," he told Forum 18 on 18 June. Asked which Court or Judge heard the latest case, he responded: "I cannot give you details of any of those cases since I have signed papers with the state not to disclose information to third parties."

Kulboyev claimed the Court has sent decisions in both cases to Abduvokhidov's parents. They deny this. "We did not know about any of the cases in advance and were not notified by the authorities," his mother and father told Forum 18 on 19 June. "We also have not received copies of the decisions from the 17 March trial or the April case."

Abduvokhidov has chosen not to appeal. "We do not believe that it will change anything, which is why we will not appeal against the decisions," his father Bakhodir Muratov told Forum 18. "Fariduddin also does not want us to spend money or our energy on this." (END)

More reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Uzbekistan (<https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=33>)

For background information, see Forum 18's Uzbekistan religious freedom survey (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699)

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1351)

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

Forum 18
Postboks 6603
Rodeløkka
N-0502 Oslo
NORWAY