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UZBEKISTAN: Judge refuses to explain rejecting 8 Muslims' appeals

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

Judge Khamid Bobokulov of Kashkadarya Regional Court refused to explain why on 30 April he rejected the appeal by eight Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi against their lengthy prison sentences. The men were jailed after discussing their faith at a meal hosted by a provocateur. On 22 May, an apparently secret police-produced video on television claimed it "exposed a Jihadist religious extremist movement". Prison officials mocked Khasan Abdirakhimov for his faith, saying he could only perform namaz sitting down. The duty officer at Zarafshon Prison refused to respond.

Judge Khamid Bobokulov of Kashkadarya Regional Court – who on 30 April rejected the appeal by eight Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi against their lengthy prison sentences – refused to explain why he did so. "Well, I cannot answer you right now," he said when reached by Forum 18. In May, the prison authorities transferred the eight – who included four prisoners of conscience who had already served earlier jail terms – to various prisons to serve their sentences.

The eight now-jailed Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi had all attended a meal in June 2024 to discuss their faith at the home of a man known to have worked with the regime to entrap others. Police officers - some armed with machine guns - were dressed in military camouflage and used violence when they arrested the eight in their homes later that day (see below).

Four of the eight - Laziz Vokhidov, who received a 10-year, 6 month special regime sentence; Khasan Abdirakhimov, who received an 8 year, 3 month labour camp sentence; Gaybullo Jalilov, who received an 8-year strict regime sentence; and Khayrullo Tursunov, who received an 8-year strict regime sentence – had previously served jail terms for exercising freedom of religion or belief (see below).

On 22 May, three weeks after the appeal hearing, a Tashkent-based television channel broadcast a video, apparently produced by the State Security Service (SSS) secret police, claiming that the SSS secret police alongside the local police "exposed a Jihadist religious extremist movement". The following day, the SSS published the same video on its Telegram channel (see below).

Muslims who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals complained to Forum 18 that the video "was most likely prepared by the SSS secret police and provided to the TV channel". One Muslim commented that "It is obvious that the authorities wanted to blackmail them and justify their arrests and punishment." The TV channel refused to answer Forum 18's questions (see below).

One of the eight Muslims, Khasan Abdirakhimov, was transferred to Prison No. 12 in Zarafshon in Navoi Region in May. Prison officials mocked him for his faith, relatives complained to Forum 18. They told him that if he wants to perform the namaz, "he can only do it sitting in a chair". (Prescribed movements during the namaz are obligatory for Muslims able to perform them.) They also took away his Koran (see below).

The duty officer at Zarafshon Prison (who did not give his name) refused to answer why prison staff mocked Abdirakhimov. The duty officer also refused to put Forum 18 through to the Governor of the prison, Farkhod Kobilov, or any other officials (see below).

Muslim Prisoner of conscience Alimardon Sultonov's mother Rakhima Masharipova, was able to visit him in Navoi Prison No. 4 in May. During the visit, he complained to her that the prison authorities were apparently trying to manipulate him to escape prison so they could punish him further, Masharipova told Forum 18. Prison officers "showed me a sum of money in cash and clean clothes and told me that I should take the money and clothes because the next day they will release me from prison", she quoted him as saying (see below).

Masharipova intended to complain to prison Governor Ravshan Shernazarov, but he did not arrive for a meeting he agreed to. (He put the phone down when Forum 18 called him.) She then complained to Special Prosecutor Alisher Raupov, who oversees cases dealing with inmates in the regional prisons. He claimed that her complaint against the actions of the prison officers "could not be corroborated, and the Prosecutor's Office did not find wrongdoing in the actions of the prison officers". The Prosecutor's Office would not speak to Forum 18 (see below).

Court hands eight Karshi Muslims long jail terms in December 2024

The eight now-jailed Muslim prisoners of conscience from Karshi were all invited to an 18 June 2024 meal (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2953) at the home of Dilshod Nabiyeu. He worked for the regime in Shakhrisabz and Kitob Districts of Kashkadarya Region, local Muslims who wished to remain anonymous for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18. They stated that he arranged meals for Muslims at which he acted as an agent provocateur. He apparently encouraged Muslims to make illegal statements recorded by hidden cameras and microphones installed by the regime.

The regime has in other cases used informers and agent provocateurs (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699) to jail groups of Muslim men who met informally to pray and discuss their faith. These cases have also involved – like this case - torture of the accused and false charges of terrorism.

Police arrested all eight Muslims (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2953) in their homes on 18 June 2024 immediately after Nabiyeu's meal. Police officers - some armed with machine guns - were dressed in military camouflage and used violence, human rights defender Yelena Uralyeva, who chairs the Human Rights Alliance, told Forum 18 in January 2025.

On 18 December 2024, Karshi Criminal Court jailed the eight Muslim men – four of them former prisoners of conscience – for between six and 10 and a half years (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2953) for meeting together to discuss Islam.

Four former prisoners of conscience were among the eight now-current prisoners of conscience:

- Laziz Samievich Vokhidov (born 30 May 1977), 10 years and 6 months in a special regime prison;
- Khasan Doniyorovich Abdirakhimov (born 18 October 1981), 8 years and 3 months in a labour camp;
- Gaybullo Khairullaevich Jalilov (born 24 August 1964), 8 years in a strict regime prison; and
- Khayrullo Turdievich Tursunov (born 4 April 1975), 8 years in a strict regime prison.

The four other Muslim prisoners of conscience are:

- Anvar Zubaidullaevich Abdullayev (born 25 February 1972), 8 years in a strict regime prison;
- Sardor Shadyevich Jurayev (born 2 February 1986), 8 years in a labour camp;
- Khasan Abdirakhimov's brother Jamshid Doniyorovich Abdirakhimov (born 4 July 1983), 7 years in a labour camp; and
- Umar Salimovich Khalimov (born 11 October 1977), 6 years in a labour camp.

Prisoner of conscience Vokhidov was convicted under:

- Criminal Code Article 159 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699) ("Attempts to change the constitutional order"), Part 3 ("committed repeatedly or by a dangerous recidivist");
- Criminal Code Article 244-1 ("Production or storage with the purpose of 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 production, storage with the purpose of distribution or demonstration of attributes or symbols of religious-extremist terrorist organisations"), Part 3, Point (d) ("using the mass media or telecommunication networks, as well as the world wide web"); and
- Criminal Code Article 244-2 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2699), Part 1 ("Creation, leadership or participation in religious extremist, separatist, fundamentalist or other banned organisations").

Prisoner of conscience Jurayev was convicted under Criminal Code Article 159, Part 3, and Criminal Code Article 244-2, Part 1.

The other six prisoners of conscience were all convicted under Criminal Code Article 244-2, Part 1.

The sentences are counted as beginning on 19 June 2024, one day after the eight prisoners of conscience were arrested.

Police threatened the men's families that if they appealed the jail terms would be increased. The eight men did appeal to Kashkadarya Regional Court.

Kashkadarya Court upholds lengthy sentences against eight prisoners of conscience

Judge Khamid Bobokulov of Kashkadarya Regional Court began hearing the appeal by the eight prisoners of conscience from Karshi on 2 February 2025, according to court records. On 30 April, he rejected the appeal and upheld their lengthy prison sentences.

Forum 18 asked Judge Bobokulov on 26 June why he upheld the decision handing lengthy prison terms to the eight Muslims, whose only fault was to gather in homes to discuss their faith and pray together. He refused to answer. "Well, I cannot answer you right now," he replied. "I will call you back a little later." However, he did not call back and each time Forum 18 tried to reach him, he did not answer his phone.

The eight Muslims transferred to various prisons

With the rejection of the eight men's appeals on 30 April, the verdicts entered legal force. The prison authorities transferred the men in May to various prisons to serve their sentences.

Khasan Abdirakhimov was sent to Zarafshon Prison No. 12 and his brother Jamshid to Kyzylteppa Prison No. 5 both in Navoi Region, relatives told Forum 18.

Umar Khalimov was sent to Prison No. 7 in Tashkent Region.

Khayrullo Tursunov was transferred to strict regime Prison No. 17, known as Qorovulbozor prison, in Bukhara Region, relatives told Forum 18. Laziz Vokhidov, Gaybullo Jalilov, and Anvar Abdullayev have also been transferred to the same prison, they believe.

(Also held in Prison No. 17 (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2986) is prisoner of conscience Fariduddin Abduvokhidov. He was jailed for being among a large group of Muslims who had met in Tashkent to discuss their faith.)

Jamshid Suvanov, Governor of the Qorovulbozor prison, wrote to Tursunov's family, indicating that Tursunov arrived there on 15 May.

Suvanov notified the family that in accordance with the law, Tursunov has the right to receive six parcels, four short-term (two-hour) visits and four long-term visits (up to two days' stay in the prison) per year, and send and receive letters without limitation.

After serving half their sentence, convicts are allowed to receive 6 parcels each weighing no more than 10 kilograms per year. They may also be sent a limited range of food products.

It is not known where the prison authorities sent Sardor Jurayev to serve his sentence.

Known current prison addresses:

Uzbekistan

200900 Bukhara viloyati

Qorovulbozor tumoni

Istiklol kuchasi 1

17 sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

Tursunov Xayrullo Turdievich

and Vokhidov Laziz Samievich

and Jalilov Gaybullo Khairullaevich

and Abdullayev Anvar Zubaidullaevich

Uzbekistan

Navoi viloyati

Kyzylteppa tumani

5-sonli Jazoni ijro etish bulimi (JIEB)

Abdiraximov Jamshid Doniyorovich

Uzbekistan

Navoi viloyati

Ichki ishlar boshqarmasi

Zarafshan shaxri

Sharq ko'chasi, uy No. 1

Jinoyati Ijro Etish Bo'limi

12-sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

Abdiraximov Xasan Doniyorovich

Uzbekistan

Tashkent viloyati

Bostanlik tumani

Tavaksay qishloq'i

7-sonli Jinoyati Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

Xalimov Umar Salimovich

Prison staff mock Abdirakhimov for his faith

Officials at Zarafshon Prison No. 12 mocked Khasan Abdirakhimov, relatives complained to Forum 18. They told him that if he wants to perform the namaz, "he can only do it sitting in a chair". (Prescribed movements during the namaz are obligatory for Muslims able to perform them.) "They also took away his Koran so he could not read it," relatives added.

Abdirakhimov informed his family that the prison officials "on purpose sent gay men to talk to him and entice him into an illicit relationship. He felt insulted by this."

The duty officer at Zarafshon Prison (who did not give his name) on 25 June refused to answer why prison staff mocked Abdirakhimov. The duty officer also refused to put Forum 18 through to the Governor of the prison, Farkhod Kobilov, or any other officials.

Video on TV to "blackmail" eight Muslims and "justify their arrests and punishments"

On 22 May, Tashkent-based private television channel Sevimli TV broadcast a video (seen by Forum 18) where an unknown narrator gave a false account of the events that led to the arrests of the eight men in 2024 and their trial. The following day, the State Security Service (SSS) secret police published the same video on its Telegram channel.

The video shows the arrests of the eight men by the SSS secret police, during which their faces were not shown. At a segment of the video their portraits of were shown with eyes blocked out. Two of the eight men, believed to be Tursunov and Jurayev, also with eyes blocked out were shown speaking privately to a camera filmed by the secret police where the voices were muffled. The two men said to the camera that they are "sorry to have joined the meetings" where they "met in groups to discuss Islam".

The unknown narrator in the voice-over claims that the Kashkadarya regional division of the SSS secret police alongside the local police "exposed a Jihadist religious extremist movement". The narrator then, without giving Laziz Vokhidov's name or his photo but giving his date of birth and details of his previous conviction, claims that he "formed an illegal religious community by involving 7 citizens born between 1964 and 1986, residents of Karshi city and Karshi district".

The narrator says that the eight men "held meetings in their private homes", and falsely accuses them of having "discussed the

details of establishing a caliphate [Islamic-ruled state]".

"They also tried to instil extremist ideas in the minds of other citizens by distributing audio and video materials about jihad, hijra, and caliphate of ideological preachers of international terrorist organisations through social networks, in order to expand their ranks," the narrator continues.

The narrator without giving names then targets four members of the group. "Four of the members, although they had previously spent a certain part of their lives behind bars for crimes they had committed, did not draw the right conclusions from their mistakes."

The video ends saying that Karshi Criminal Court "found these individuals guilty under Criminal Code Articles 159, 244-1 and 244-2, and sentenced them to imprisonment for terms ranging from 6 to 10 years and 6 months".

Video "most likely prepared by the SSS secret police"

Muslims who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals complained to Forum 18 in early June that the video "was most likely prepared by the SSS secret police and provided to the TV channel". One Muslim commented that "It is obvious that the authorities wanted to blackmail them and justify their arrests and punishment."

Two of the eight men speaking in the video "did not admit in front of the camera that they are extremists or that they wanted to establish an Islamic caliphate", Muslims told Forum 18. "The video was fabricated to convince the public that these men indeed were religious extremists."

An official of the reception at Sevimli TV channel on 25 June (who did not give his name) refused to answer why the channel broadcast a video attacking and blackmailing the eight Muslims, and who Forum 18 could talk to. He then put the phone down. Further calls to the TV went unanswered between 25 and 26 June.

Sultonov manipulated to escape prison?

On 27 May 2022, a court in Karakalpakstan jailed trauma surgeon Alimardon Islamovich Sultonov (born 26 October 1983), a devout Muslim known for discussing Muslim freedom of religion and belief issues, for seven years in a labour camp (https://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2745) "for criticising President Mirziyoyev, state-appointed imams .." The regime used both torture and two regime-appointed "parliamentarians" to try to get him to admit "guilt".

Prisoner of conscience Sultonov's mother Rakhima Masharipova, was able to visit him in Navoi Prison No. 4 on 6 May and stay with him there. During the visit, he complained to her of the actions of the prison authorities. He believes they tried to manipulate him to escape prison, Masharipova told Forum 18 on 18 June.

"For almost one day, between 4 and 5 April, I was kept in an isolated room in the prison building, where I was manipulated to write a statement about my alleged pardon and release from prison," Sultonov told his mother. The prison officers "showed me a sum of money in cash and clean clothes and told me that I should take the money and clothes because the next day they will release me from prison."

Sultonov punished for refusing to write statement

The officers told Sultonov to write a statement in return that he had been pardoned, which is why he will leave the prison.

However, six times the officers took the statements he wrote, tore them up after reading "because each time I wrote in the statement that this request came from the prison authorities and they required me to write a statement. Each time they asked me to rewrite the statement without saying that he was asked to write a statement," Masharipova quoted her son as telling her.

When Sultonov finally refused to write a statement the officers took him to a "special quarantine zone within the prison, where he could not see anyone except the officers on duty. He was kept there for 19 days between 4 and 24 April," Masharipova complained to Forum 18.

Officials refused to properly investigate prison officers' actions and punish them

Masharipova saw that Sultonov was "depressed and one eye seemed to have shrunk in size". She decided to meet prison Governor Ravshan Shernazarov to complain to him about the actions of the prison officers. "When the visit time ended the next day on 7 May, I left the prison building and after having received our cell phones back called Governor Shernazarov."

Governor Shernazarov falsely promised her that he would meet her just outside the prison entrance one hour later, but he did not do so. "I waited for him between 10 am and 5 pm that day and he did not come out. I called him back several times but he did not answer the phone again."

Shernazarov on 24 June introduced himself to Forum 18 but when asked about Sultonov's case he put the phone down. Called back several times between 24 and 26 June he put the phone down as soon as he heard Forum 18's name.

Masharipova then took the issue to the special Prosecutor of Navoi Region, who oversees cases dealing with inmates in the regional prisons. "I handed a complaint to Special Prosecutor Alisher Raupov on 7 May."

On 21 May, Masharipova received an answer from Prosecutor Raupov. He claimed that her complaint against the actions of the prison officers "could not be corroborated, and the Prosecutor's Office did not find wrongdoing in the actions of the prison officers".

The Special Prosecutor's duty official (who did not give his name) refused to put Forum 18 through to Prosecutor Raupov or any other officials. "Please, send your questions in writing," he told Forum 18 on 26 June.

Why did officers offer Sultonov money, suggest he should leave prison?

Masharipova told Forum 18 that her family, including Sultonov himself, believe that the authorities "arranged" this incident to stage his escape from prison. "Most likely they would arrest him on the street if he agreed and left the prison building. Then they would charge him with the serious crime of escaping prison."

"Why, if this was a true release from prison, was my son not given any official papers or a Court decision saying that for such and such reasons he was being released?" Masharipova asked Forum 18. "Neither he nor we were notified in advance about a possible release, and the officers came to him that evening suddenly."

Masharipova asked: "What do they want to do with my son? Do they want him to spend the rest of his life in prison?"

Sultonov's current prison address:

Uzbekistan

Navoi shakhar

Navoi kuchasi 5

4 sonli Jazoni Ijro Etish Koloniyasi

Sultonov Alimardon Islamovich

(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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