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UZBEKISTAN: Seven Muslims amnestied, but ailing Muslim prisoner waits for operation

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

Relatives of imprisoned Muslim prisoner of conscience Mehrinisso Hamdamova are to ask the authorities to allow her to have an urgent operation on an apparent myoma outside the women's prison where she is being held. Her "stomach is swollen, and she loses consciousness often", they told Forum 18 News Service. Officials refused to discuss her case with Forum 18. Meanwhile, seven of Uzbekistan's many imprisoned Muslims who read the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi were freed under amnesty in February and March. The seven were among three groups of Muslims given long prison sentences in Bukhara in 2009-10.

Seven Muslims who read the works of the late Turkish theologian Said Nursi were freed under amnesty in late February and early March, Muslims who asked not to be identified told Forum 18 News Service. The released prisoners are not allowed any contact with each other or with outsiders, they added. Meanwhile, relatives of Muslim prisoner of conscience Mehrinisso Hamdamova are hoping the prison authorities will allow her to be transferred to a hospital for urgently-needed surgery. Her relatives and friends have expressed growing concern about her health.

A Tajik citizen imprisoned after Uzbek border guards found the Koran on his mobile phone is expecting to be amnestied but has not yet been. Three other Tajik citizens transiting Uzbekistan were held – two for a month - after Muslim recordings were found on electronic devices (see F18News 25 March 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1942).

Apparent tumour

Hamdamova is being held in a camp for female prisoners in Zangiota District, just north of the capital Tashkent. Aged 46, she appears to need an urgent operation on an apparent myoma. It is unclear how reliable the diagnosis is. A myoma is a tumour associated with uterine cancer which can be painful and is normally treated by being removed (see F18News 18 February 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930).

Hamdamova was arrested in November 2009, apparently to punish her for teaching Islam in a mosque in Karshi [Qarshi]. She was sentenced to seven years in jail in April 2010. Also imprisoned at the same time were her sister Zulhumor and another female relative. The trial was conducted with many violations of published law, as often happens in Uzbekistan (see F18News 26 April 2010 http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1436).

"Loses consciousness often"

Hamdamova's "stomach is swollen, and she loses consciousness often", a relative who asked not to be identified for fear of state reprisals told Forum 18 on 20 March. The prison authorities planned to perform surgery on her in February within the Zangiota prison, but she refused. "She is afraid she could die during an operation by prison doctors," the relative said, "or that after an operation she would still be placed in the prison and might die from internal bleeding there."

Relatives are intending to write to the prison authorities after the Novruz spring festival holidays to request permission to take Hamdamova for an operation to a hospital outside the prison. They are hoping to receive permission so that they can proceed with her operation as soon as possible in early April.

"Medicines are passed to Mehrinisso in the meantime from her relatives through the prison authorities to alleviate her pain," the relative told Forum 18.

An international organisation had sent 800 US Dollars (1,800,000 Uzbek Soms, 4,800 Norwegian Kroner or 580 Euros) from abroad for Hamdamova's operation, the relative added. However, relatives were unable to receive the money so far from Hamkor Bank (where the money was sent), because they took only a copy of the passport. "The bank demanded the original of the passport." The relatives are intending to take their passport to the bank after the Novruz holidays to receive the money.

By contrast, her imprisoned sister Zulhumor Hamdamova – who is 53 and has four children – has received medicine and her health has improved, relatives told Forum 18. In January she told visiting relatives that she was suffering from goitre. This is an abnormal swelling that causes a lump to form in the throat, in some cases affecting breathing and swallowing (see F18News 18 February 2014 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1930).

The Hamdamova sisters' prison address is:

Uzbekistan

Tashkent Region

Zangiota tumani

Uchr. 64/1

Hamdamova Mehrinisso Imomovna

or

Hamdamova Zulhumor Imomovna

No visit

Amid rising concern over Mehrinisso Hamdamova's health, Tashkent-based human rights defender Surat Ikramov wrote on 3 February to Abdukarim Shodiyev, Head of the Department of Execution of Punishments, which oversees prisons. Ikramov asked him to grant permission to visit Hamdamova and other prisoners of conscience to check their health. Ikramov has received no response to his written request, he told Forum 18 on 20 March.

Officials at the Department of Execution of Punishments in Tashkent on 20 March refused to answer Forum 18's questions on Mehrinisso Hamdamova or put it through to Shodiyev or any other official. The official who answered the phone in Shodiyev's office, who refused to give his name, asked numerous detailed questions about Forum 18 as well as about Hamdamova. When Forum 18 stopped the official and asked whether he would put Forum 18 through to any official, he responded: "You will receive an answer by post."

Told that Ikramov had received no response to his request to Department Head Shodiyev more than six weeks earlier to be allowed to visit Hamdamova, the official responded: "You can wait." He declined to talk to Forum 18 further.

Seven Nursi prisoners amnestied

Meanwhile seven Muslim Nursi readers were freed from prison in late February and early March. They were freed under a presidential prisoner amnesty declared in December 2013. Following their release, the authorities banned the seven men from associating freely with each other or with outsiders, a Muslim lamented to Forum 18.

Four of the seven had been sentenced in Bukhara in April 2009. They are Muzaffar Allayorov, Shuhrat Karimov, Salohiddin Kosimov and Yadgar Juraev. The other three had been sentenced in Bukhara in 2010 as part of the third group of local Nursi readers sentenced to long prison terms. They are Abdukakhkhor Alimov, Mirshod Kakhkharov and Mirzo Allayorov (Muzaffar's brother).

Three of the April 2009 group of Nursi readers - Alisher Jumaev, Bobomurod Sanoev and Jamshid Ramazonov – had been released under amnesty in spring 2012 (see F18News 4 July 2012 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1717).

Three Bukhara trials in 2009-10 of Muslim readers of Nursi's works

Three Nursi-related trials took place in Bukhara in 2009-10. During the first, nine Muslims were sentenced in April 2009 to prison terms of up to nine years. Their appeals were rejected in June 2009 (see F18News 4 June 2009 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1306).

A second group of nine Muslims were sentenced in Bukhara in June 2010 to prison terms of up to eight years (see F18News 8 July 2010 http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1465).

A third group of nine or ten Muslims was sentenced in Bukhara shortly after June 2010. They included: Akmal Abdullayev, Rustam Sharipov, Umid Juraev, and an elderly man named Abdullo Rasulov. (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 can be found at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=1351.

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