

11 August 2005

UZBEKISTAN: Forum 18 reporter detained at Tashkent airport

By John Kinahan, Forum 18

Igor Rotar, Forum 18 News Service's Central Asia Correspondent, was this morning (11 August) detained by the Uzbek authorities on arrival at Tashkent Airport. He is still being held by the Uzbek authorities, who are forcibly preventing him from communicating with anyone. Reliable sources indicate that the detention was ordered "for political reasons at the highest levels" and that the detention was carried out by the Immigration Service and Border Guards, on the instructions of the National Security Service secret police. The Uzbek authorities are refusing to comment on the case, but the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and other international diplomats are following Igor Rotar's continuing detention closely.

Igor Rotar, Forum 18's Central Asia Correspondent, was this morning (11 August) detained by Uzbek authorities as he arrived at Tashkent Airport from Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan at 10.25 local time. Now, over 11 hours later, Igor Rotar is still being held by Uzbek authorities, who are currently forcibly preventing him from communicating with anyone. He was initially asked to buy his own deportation ticket.

One observer, who saw Igor from a distance some two hours after his detention began, described him as being at that time physically unhurt but shaken and disturbed.

The Uzbek authorities are refusing to make any comment on the detention, but reliable sources have indicated that the detention was ordered "for political reasons at the highest levels" and that the detention was carried out by the Immigration Service and Border Guards, on the instructions of the National Security Service secret police.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and other international diplomats are following Igor Rotar's detention closely. He is a Russian citizen and the Russian Embassy in Tashkent are aware of the case.

The Uzbek authorities have been attempting to stifle independent media outlets, as in the case of their harassment of the Western non-governmental organisation Internews.

Igor Rotar has earned widespread praise for his consistently informed reporting of the religious freedom situation in Uzbekistan. You can view his most recent article, of 10 August, at http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=626

(END)

For a personal commentary by a Muslim scholar, advocating religious freedom for all faiths 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=546

For an outline of the repression immediately following the Andijan uprising, see F18News 23 May http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=567 and for an outline of what is known about Akramia and the uprising see 16 June http://www.forum18.org/Archive.php?article_id=586

A printer-friendly map of Uzbekistan is available at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=asia&Rootmap=uzbeki>

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

Forum 18
Postboks 6603
Rodeløkka
N-0502 Oslo
NORWAY